

The appearance and significance of Rastafari cultural aspects in South Africa

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Abstract

This article explores the presence and importance of Rastafari cultural features in South Africa. These cultural aspects include symbols and language that have become popular in South Africa from 1997 when the movement was formalised.¹ The symbols include religious signifiers employed in Rastafarianism such as the colours of Marcus Garvey, which are displayed in the attires worn by both Rastafarians and non-Rastafarians. While practices of symbolic investment include the growing of dreadlocks, and the use of “ganja” (marijuana) as a sacrament – these practices are frequently distilled into visual signifiers such as equating dreadlocked person with a lion and a “ganja” sign that appears on T-shirts and car stickers. Rastafarians have also coined a new language (“iry talk or dread language”) as their means of communication. In the wake of the democratic transition in 1994, both the language and symbols of the Rastafarian movement have gained increasing popularity in South Africa. By analysing specific examples of symbolic practice and visual signification within a historical framework, the article explores the meanings of Rastafarian language and symbolism for post-apartheid South Africa. While Rastafarian symbols have been adopted by various people for different reasons, their language has become popular among people outside the movement.

Keywords: Dreadlocks; “Iry talk”; Haile Selassie; Symbols; “Babylon”; “Zion”; South Africa; Marcus Garvey; Rastafari; Language.

Introduction

The emergence of the Rastafarian movement during the 1930s in the Caribbean was a direct result of, and response to slavery, a malevolent practice that endeavoured to destroy attempts by slaves to forge their own cultural

¹ This article compliments my contribution on the Rastafari in *New Contree* in December 2012, which looked at the introduction of the movement in South Africa and its development after 1994.

identity.² Comparably it can be argued that the suppression of African culture during colonial and apartheid periods contributed to the emergence of the movement in South Africa. The formalisation of Rastafarianism in South Africa, and its emerging popularity after the end of apartheid are the result of a number of factors that I consider in this article. These may be related to the process of constructing either new or alternative forms of identity. In considering this contention, I trace the origin of Rastafarian cultural identity in Jamaica and subsequently in South Africa, and show that even though Rastafarian symbols and language were meant to challenge oppression, their appearance in South Africa has taken a form of a fashion statement.

The creation of Rastafarian cultural features is largely dependent on the establishment of symbolic practices and signs. These symbols include religious codes such as the veneration of Haile Selassie, Star of David and the Ankh dreadlocks, Rastafarian colours and “ganja”. Rastafarians can also be recognised by their language.³ Both Rastafarian symbols and language have become popularised in South Africa to the extent that it has become difficult for lay-people to distinguish between Rastafarians and non-Rastafarians. This article explores the specific meaning of Rastafarian language and symbolism within the post-apartheid South Africa taking into account the typologies of signs and the historical specifics of these signs in cultural motion.

The emergence of Rastafarian cultural identity

Rastafarian cultural identity arose within what social scientists have described as the cultural sphere of American plantations, a socio-historical context of bondage characterised by the lack of democratic institutions in which individuals or groups could express or resist unpopular beliefs.⁴ Similarly, in South Africa, the social and historical context in which Rastafarian cultural identity arose was also characterised by the lack of democratic institutions that provided space for individuals or groups (particularly of colour) to express their own beliefs and exercise political agency.

2 A Kebede and JD Knottnerus, “Beyond the pales of Babylon: The ideational components and Social Psychological foundations of Rastafari”, *Sociological Perspective*, 41(3), 1998, p. 9.

3 GE Simpson, “Religion and justice: Some reflections on the Rastafari Movement”, *Phylon*, 46(4), 1985, pp. 286-291. Rastafari differentiate between living in Zion (living good life) and living in “Babylon” (bad life). For full explanation of the concepts Zion and “Babylon”, see p. 100 of this article.

4 A Kebede and JD Knottnerus, “Beyond the pales of Babylon...”, *Sociological Perspective*, 41(3), 1998, p. 6.

During the periods of the Atlantic Slave Trade (16th-19th century), slaves were taken from various parts of Africa and found themselves in a foreign land (America), amongst numerous peoples of different cultural origins, without any common cultural identity. Attempts by the British authorities to make British subjects out of these dislocated slaves were frustrated by the Maroons⁵ – a term used to describe resistant African-American slaves – who established autonomous communities and organised themselves along African tribal patterns.⁶ When the British took over Jamaica in the middle of the seventeenth century, most slaves escaped to the mountains, where other fugitives frequently joined them. They continuously harassed the planters by stealing, trading with slaves, and incited them to run away. Haiti had its own Maroons as early as 1620 who were responsible for the uprisings of 1679, 1691 and 1704.⁷ In Brazil, Maroons established an African state called the Republic of Palmares.⁸ In South Africa, they (Maroons) organised a maroon community at Cape Hangklip and a chain of free slave contacts linking it with those still in bondage in Cape Town.⁹

According to Rastafarian ideology, black people in Jamaica were not only physically uprooted from their original homeland but were also alienated from their true identity; hence their culture became a blend of African, Colonial (British) and native (Caribbean) cultures. Black Jamaicans took from these cultures what they felt was relevant to their course, and created a new cultural identity.¹⁰ Rastafarian identity is thus understood as evolving out of cultural resistance to the lack of political freedom — “in opposition to an imposed slave identity”. Mason describes the lack of identity or slave identity as having emanated from the belief by slavers that slaves:¹¹

Owe their lives to the masters. On their own, they belonged to no legitimate social order. They had been stripped of all rights and all claims of birth and family and were connected to society only through their masters. Rightless,

5 R Price, “Maroons: Rebel slaves in the Americas” (available at http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/maroon/educational_guide/23.htm, as accessed on 23 May 2013). The word Maroon is derived from Spanish *cimarrón*. *Cimarrón* originally referred to domestic cattle that had taken to the hills in Hispaniola, and soon after it was applied to American Indian slaves who had escaped from the Spaniards as well. By the end of the 1530s, the word had taken on strong connotations of being “ferce,” “wild” and “unbroken,” and was used primarily to refer to African-American runaways.

6 R Price, “Maroons: Rebel slaves in the Americas” . . . Maroons were found in most slave societies such as Jamaica, Haiti, Brazil, and South Africa, where they were active in organising resistance against slavery.

7 JH Franklin, and AA Moss, *From slavery to freedom: A history of Negro Americans* (New York, 1988), p. 45.

8 JH Franklin, and AA Moss, *From slavery to freedom. . .*, p. 51.

9 R Elphick, and H Giliomee, *The shaping of South African society, 1652-1840* (Cape Town, 1990), p. 160.

10 R Elphick, and H Giliomee, *The shaping of South African society. . .*, p. 10.

11 JE Mason, *Social death and resurrection: Slavery and emancipation in South Africa* (Charlottesville, 2003), p. 7.

kinless, and utterly marginalised, they were the most degraded members of slave-owning society.

Mason goes on to say that, this marginalisation constituted a social death as opposed to a physical death. However, slaves did not see their condition as permanent, which is why they refused to accept it. Similarly, the cultural identity of Africans in South Africa emerged out of opposition to colonial and apartheid cultures. In order for colonialism and apartheid to be successful, it was important to destroy or distort traditional African identities by promoting new symbols and a new language of oppression.¹² While some black South Africans have succumbed, Rastafarians resisted, recasting the intrusive European forms in their own terms.¹³ Rastafarians in South Africa such as Mr B. Bunny, a Rastafarian Priest assert that colonialism and apartheid was successful not only in dividing black South Africans along ethnic lines, but also in destroying and distorting African cultural identities.¹⁴ Consequently, the history of Rastafari in South Africa is one of struggle, and one that echoes the cry of many South Africans during apartheid to end apartheid, putting an end to artificially constructed ethnic, race and class distinctions. This mirrored the situation of class and race inequality elsewhere in the world.¹⁵

Modern South Africa is built upon a long history of symbolic struggle, a bitter contest of integrity and consciousness. Colonialism and apartheid sought to impose a particular way of seeing and being, to colonize their consciousness, with the signs and practices, the axioms and aesthetics, of an alien culture. Rastafari identity in the form of symbols and language in South Africa is therefore constructed and used in protest and defiance not only against the apartheid system but also the prevailing order.

Rastafari symbolism

Clifford Geertz discusses at length the general role and function of symbols and ideological systems:¹⁶

12 JE Mason, *Social death and resurrection...*, p. 8.

13 L Olivier, "Racial oppression and the political language of Rastafari in Stellenbosch", *South African Review of Sociology*, 41(2), 2010, pp. 23-31.

14 MH Chawane, *The rememory of black oppression: Forging of the Rasta identity with specific reference to the township of Daveyton, 1994 to the present* (PhD, University Witwatersrand, 2008), p. 158.

15 P Bain, "The experience of Rastafari children in South Africa as members of minority group with particular reference to communities in the former western Cape Province" (MA, Rhodes University, 2003), p. 45.

16 C Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures* (New York, 2000), p. 250.

Symbol systems, man-created, shared, conventional, ordered, and indeed learned, provide human beings with a meaningful framework for orientating themselves to one another, to the world around them, and to themselves.

First, Rastafarians created a symbolic system in which they made otherwise inconceivable social situations such as their enslavement, oppression and lack of place in the world meaningful in order to act persistently within them. This symbolic system provides a context within which they operate in their worlds and organize social interaction, by which individuals are able to socially, politically and economically construct a collective identity. Some of these symbols are rooted in the glorification of Africa (Ethiopia or “Zion”)¹⁷ as a promised land and the refusal to participate in the Babylonian system.¹⁸ Symbolic practices within this system include the growing of dreadlocks, the wearing of the symbolic colours of red, green and yellow; and the smoking of marijuana as a means of reinforcing their identity fairly aggressively against dominant society.¹⁹ Notably symbolic colours relate to the symbolic order of signification, by convention. These common external symbols are the most discernible and controversial (particularly dreadlocks and use of marijuana) characteristics of Rastafari. There are also other specific and recognisable identity markers related to Rastafari, which include religious symbols, the use of Biblical texts and spoken language.²⁰

Religious symbolism

An outstanding characteristic of this movement is the religious or biblical symbolism at the heart of its belief system. Most Rastafarian symbols are given a biblical origin, and as a result they become sacred. Biblically, Rastafarians identify themselves with ancient Ethiopia, an East African country that claims three thousand years of independence.²¹ The symbolic significance conferred on Ethiopia is based on an interpretation of various Bible verses, of which Psalms 68:31 is often cited: “Princes come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God”.²²

17 Ethiopia is sometimes used to refer to entire African continent. It also refers to as *Zion* (or heaven as Rastafarians calls it), implying that they will one day they will return to this land.

18 C Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures...*, p. 250.

19 P Bain, “The experience of Rastafari children in South Africa...” (MA, Rhodes University, 2003), p. 54.

20 P Bain, “The experience of Rastafari children in South Africa...” (MA, Rhodes University, 2003), p. 36.

21 GE Simpson, “Religion and justice: Some reflections on the Rastafari movement”, *Phylon*, 46(4), 1985, pp. 286-291.

22 GE Simpson, “Religion and justice...”, *Phylon*, 46(4), 1985, pp. 286-291.

The Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia (1930 to 1974) is the central symbolic figure of Rastafarian ideology. In 1930, Ethiopian Ras Tafari Makonnen (Ras meaning “Duke” and Tafari being Selassie’s family name) was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia under the name “Haile Selassie I” which translates to *The Power of the Trinity*. This lineage gave him the titles *Lord of Lords, King of Kings, and Conquering Lion of Judah*.²³ Haile Selassie was reported to be the 225th restorer of the Solomonic Dynasty and to represent one of the oldest thrones on earth, more than three thousand years old.²⁴ His coronation not only signified black political power in an era of early Black Nationalism, but it also “began” the Rastafarian movement in earnest as some Jamaicans regarded him as the promised Messiah as preached by Leonard Howell, Archibald Dunkley and Joseph Hibbert,²⁵ and as “prophesied” by Marcus Garvey.²⁶ Onto Haile Selassie, the Rastafarians grafted the symbolic ideology of God as black, God as living and in Africa, the divinity of the black race, Africa as a divine homeland and place of salvation, and finally communal self-sufficiency.²⁷ This began a liberation theology amongst Rastafarians, which is common amongst the enslaved and oppressed.

There is a connection between Rastafari, Judaism, Ethiopia and Israel that can be traced back to ancient times. Rastafarians always equate their suffering during slavery with that of the Jews in ancient Egypt under Pharaoh. They believe that most enslaved Jamaicans were taken from Ethiopia. This connection is further reinforced by many religious authorities and the Israel government who consider the Beta (Falasha) Jews of Ethiopia as bona fide Jews. For many Jamaicans, the Black Diaspora is a continuation of the Jewish Diaspora.²⁸ The Rastafarians idea of “Zion” is taken from the Jewish concept of the “Promised Land” to which Moses was leading them. Like Jews, Rastafarians’ allegiance is to King Solomon who is believed to have given

23 B Chevannes, “Introducing the native religions of Jamaica”, B Chevannes (ed.), *Rastafari and other African-Caribbean worldviews* (The Hague, 1998), p. 9.

24 P Napti, “Jamaicans of Ethiopian origin and the Rastafarian faith” (available at affellem/napti.html, as accessed on 23 September 2003). The Chinese throne is considered to be also the one of the oldest in history.

25 A Mains, “Rasta lesson: Archibald Dunkley, Joseph Hibbert, Robert Hinds” (available at <http://ashermains.blogspot.com/2008/05/rasta-lessons-dreadlocks.html>, as accessed on 18 April 2003). The three men, together with Robert Hinds were prominent early Rastafari leaders. All four began preaching independently of each other in the slums of West Kingston, Jamaica where they discovered each other and a movement was born.

26 B Chevannes, “Introducing the native religions of Jamaica...”, B Chevannes (ed.), *Rastafari and other African-Caribbean worldviews...*, p. 10; A Mains, “Rasta lessons: Dreadlocks” (available at <http://ashermains.blogspot.com/2008/05/rasta-lessons-dreadlocks.html>, as accessed on 23 September 2013), p. 16.

27 AA Benard, “The material roots of Rastafarian marijuana symbolism”, *History and Anthropology*, 18(1), 2007, pp. 89-99.

28 DT Siwek, “Zion Riddims” (available at http://0web21.epnet.com.raulib.rau.ac.za/citation.asp?tb=1&_ug=sid+3700D3A5%2D89E, as accessed on 18 January 2006).

a son (*Menelik I*), prince and heir to the spoils of Judah to the Queen of Sheba. The relationship between Rastafari and Judaism was reinforced with the coronation of Selassie in 1930. This relationship was further cemented by one of his majestic titles that revered him as the *Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah*.

Image 1: The Lion



Source: Personal collection (MH Chawane), 17 March 2002.

The lion and the lamb (Image 1) are other important symbols amongst Rastafari adherents. According to them, the lamb symbolises the Lamb of God and the lion, the “Lion of Judah” (or Selassie himself), which are both mentioned in the Bible.²⁹ Other religious symbols include the Ankh (Image 2) and the Star of David (Image 3). Rastafarians share the use of the Star of David with the Jewish religion, which appears on a lot of reggae CD covers. The use of which is based on the belief that Haile Selassie was descendent from King David.³⁰ The ankh also known as key of life, the key of the Nile or “*crux ansata*” (Latin meaning “cross with a handle”), is an ancient Egyptian

29 P Bain, “The experience of Rastafari children in South Africa...” (MA, Rhodes University, 2003), p. 36. The lion also represents both Africa (as one of the “big five”) and Haile Selassie (who is referred to as the “conquering lion of Judah”).

30 Anon., “Rastafarianism and Judaism, parallelisms and differences” (available at <http://star-of-david.blogspot.com/2006/06/rastafarians.html>, as accessed on 19 April 2013). The Star of David is a six-pointed star also known as Magen David or Shield of David.

hieroglyphic character employed in ancient Egypt as a symbol of life, which remains in use as a Christian cross (“*crux ansata*”). Rastafarians regard the ankh as an original cross and a powerful symbol that was first created by Africans in ancient Kemet (land of blacks) renamed Egypt by the Greeks.³¹

Image 2: The Ankh



Source: C Beyer, “Ankh - Ancient symbol of life”, 17 September 2013.

Image 3: The Star of David



Source: P Bain, “The experience of Rastafari children in South Africa...” (MA, Rhodes University, 2003), 17 September 2013.

³¹ C Beyer, “Ankh - Ancient symbol of life” (available at <http://altreligion.about.com/od/symbols/p/Ankh.htm>, as accessed on 19 April 2013).

Babylon and Zion

The underlying militancy of Rastafarianism is revealed in the concept of “Babylon” used as an opposite of Zion. “Babylon” is construed as predominantly white, mainstream society of the middle to upper classes, which are viewed as being privileged at the expense of poor black people. The word is derived from the activities of the infamous king of the biblical “Babylon” who, according to Rastafarians, inspired the Persian, Greek, Roman, British and American oppressive regimes.³² The term was initially used to refer to slave masters, and the initial aim of Rastafarianism was to destroy all slavers. Its meaning was later extended (after slavery was abolished) to include the values associated with the upper tier of society, the established churches, the official media, the colonial system, the legal system, the police, political leaders, and the mafia. The word has also come to refer to a place where evil things, according to their judgement, take place such as brothels and “shebeens” or to any person doing “bad things”.³³ The term “Babylon” is further used by some to mean specifically the white “polytricksters”³⁴ that have been oppressing the black race for centuries through political, economic and physical slavery.³⁵ Rome, ‘the headquarters of the church-state coalition which has exercised dominion over mankind for the last two millennia symbolises the continuation of Babylon’s power in the Rastafarian view.’³⁶

Notions of “Babylon” are used in dialectical opposition to notions of Zion (Africa), considered the authentic and holy motherland, referred to as the “Garden of Eden”, and the “cradle of all mankind”.³⁷ Zion is perceived as the place, where all gather who haven’t accepted the wrong teachings of “Babylon”. It’s the point of intersection where Judaism and Christianity meet. Zion, according to Rastafari, is God’s kingdom on earth.³⁸ Within the South African context, “Babylon” is represented by the government, alcohol use,

32 JA Johnson-Hill, “Rastafari as a resource for social ethics in South Africa”, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 9, 1996, pp. 3-39.

33 A Kebede and JD Knottnerus, “Beyond the pales of Babylon...”, *Sociological Perspective*, 41(3), 1998, p. 8.

34 MH Chawane, “The rememory of black oppression: Forging of the Rasta identity with specific reference to the township of Daveyton, 1994 to the present” (PhD thesis, University Witwatersrand, 2008), p. 187. Some Rastafarians prefer and insist to be called by their Rastafarian names as is the case with *Jah Power* and *Jah Youth*. The word “politrickster” is derived from the word “politricks” which is used by Rastafarians to refer to politics. Accordingly, politics are seen as tricks by politicians to mislead people into voting for them.

35 P Bain, “The experience of Rastafari children in South Africa...”, p. 54.

36 GE Simpson, “Religion and justice...”, *Phylon*, 46(4), 1985, pp. 286-291.

37 L Olivier, “Racial oppression and the political language of Rastafari in Stellenbosch”, *South African Review of Sociology*, 41(2), 2010, pp. 23-31.

38 Rastaforever (available at <http://rastaforever.tripod.com/rastafari/>, as accessed on 19 March 2013). This assertion is based on the belief by Rastafarians there is no heaven up in the sky that it is here on earth.

drugs, prostitution and crime.³⁹

Dreadlocks

Dreadlocks⁴⁰ are one of the most visible marks of Rastafarians. The question of whether Rastafarians copied their dreadlocks from the Mau-Mau warriors or other religious groupings is still a subject of speculation. The reason for the speculation is that dreadlock dates back from biblical times to the present and appear in cultures worldwide, including those of Maori warriors, the Turkana of Kenya, Sadhus and Sadhvis of Hindu mystics in India.⁴¹ It is believed that the first Rasta dreadlocks were copied from Kenya in the 1940s, when during the independence struggle the feared Mau-Mau freedom fighters grew their dreaded locks while hiding in the mountains.⁴² However, there are several groups within nearly every major religion that have at times worn their hair in this fashion, which means that for Rastafarians dreadlocks are a symbolic religious practice. In addition to the Nazarites of Judaism and the Sadhus of Hinduism, there are the Dervishes of Islam and the Coptic Monks of Christianity, among others who also practice this hairstyle.⁴³ The very earliest Christians may also have worn this hairstyle; particularly noteworthy are descriptions of James the Just, “brother of Jesus” and first Bishop of Jerusalem, who wore them to his ankles.⁴⁴ They are also believed to have been worn by African chiefs some 6 000 years ago. Rastafarians emulate the Hebrew tribe in the way they wear a crown of their hair.⁴⁵ Rastafarians claim that their dreadlocks originated from the same source as the Nazarite Vows that note

39 MH Chawane, “The rememory of black oppression...”, p. 200. The government is blamed for legalizing same sex marriages while at the same time not recognizing their movement.

40 A Kebede and JD Knottnerus, “Beyond the pales of Babylon...”, *Sociological Perspective*, 41(3), 1998, p. 8. Dreadlocks are thick matted thatch of hair that are allowed to grow down the shoulders in ringlets and plaits like East African warriors.

41 D Johnson, “She’s grown dreadlocks: The fiction of Angela Johnson”, *Word Literature Today*, September-December 2004, p. 75.

42 Anon., “Dread-locked hair” (available at <http://www.geocities.com/coolpoete/dreadlocks.htm>, as accessed on 31 October 2002).

43 DT Siwek, “Zion Riddims” (available at http://0web21.epnet.com.raulib.rau.ac.za/citation.asp?tb=1&_ug=sid+3700D3A5%2D89E, as accessed on 18 January 2006), pp. 1-6.

44 A Mains, “Rasta lessons: Dreadlocks” (available at <http://ashermain.blogspot.com/2008/05/rasta-lessons-dreadlocks.html>, as accessed on 23 September 2013).

45 Anon., “Dread-locked hair...”, 31 September 2002.

that “in accord with God, the Nazarite grows out their hair and makes sure ‘no razor comes upon his head’, as it says in Numbers 6:1”.⁴⁶

The most important purpose of dreadlocks for Rastafarians is aligned to the notion of divinity dwelling within them – symbolising a more spiritual self-declaration. Another purpose is that they visibly demarcate in-group and out-group distinctions, thereby acting as part of their external appearance representing the boundary of group membership. Dreadlocks also reflect the defiance of Rastafarians against the values of the dominant order (“Babylon”).⁴⁷ Long hair and long beards are not compatible with work in a factory setting and set Rastafarians apart from industrial workers. Explaining the importance of dreadlocks, Johnson-Hill says that they evoke a troublesome and complicated relationship between Rastafari and “Babylon” and are intended to invoke sentiments of Black Nationalism.⁴⁸ According to Gondwe, they symbolise Rastafarian roots, contrasting the straight, blonde look of the white man and the dominant western (white) establishment, and has as a result come to symbolise rebellion against the system and “Babylon’s” standards of beauty.⁴⁹

Rastafarians do not cut their hair but allow it to grow naturally into long locks that are symbolic of a lion’s curls. They view the lion as a perfect African symbol of freedom, power and independence. Dreadlocks have also come to symbolise the “Lion of Judah”. The lion is sometimes depicted with a human face sporting dreadlocks and a beard in the manner of Haile Selassie himself.⁵⁰ Hair became sacralised through the biblical story of Samson and was incorporated into Rastafarian ideology in the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁵¹ According to the Bible, Samson was a Nazarite who had “seven locks”. Rastafarians point out that these “seven locks” could only have been dreadlocks, as it is unlikely that seven strands of hair were meant. In Rastafarian ideology, to cut one’s dreadlocks would be to cut off one’s strength, a notion

46 DT Siwek, “Zion Riddims” (available at http://0web21.epnet.com.raulib.rau.ac.za/citation.asp?tb=1&_ug=sid+3700D3A5%2D89E, as accessed on 18 January 2006), pp. 1-6; Anon., “Dread-locked hair” (available at <http://www.geocities.com/coolpoete/dreadlocks.htm>, as accessed on 31 October 2002).

47 MH Chawane, “The rememory of black oppression...”, p. 168.

48 JA Johnson-Hill, “Rastafari as a resource for social ethics...”, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 9, 1996, pp. 3-39.

49 T Gondwe, “Positivibration: The story of Rastafari in Design Indaba Magazine”, *Independent on line*, 12 February 2002, p. 10.

50 T Gondwe, “Positivibration...”, *Independent on line*, 12 February 2002, p. 14.

51 EB Edmonds, *Rastafari: From outcasts to culture bearers* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 32.

in keeping with the biblical tale of Samson.⁵² Rastafari interpret this as they should not shave, cut their beards or hair, or cut their flesh in any way. Those who cut their hair or any part of their body are treated with disdain because they are perceived as having abandoned “their faith and culture by running to the barber, so they [could] go searching within the society of slave drivers for a factory job”. Thus the growing of dreadlocks is another symbolic challenge to the “ills” of “Babylon”.⁵³

In South Africa today, dreadlocks also mean big business because they have been commercialised in a manner that makes it difficult to distinguish between Rastafarians and those who wear them as a fashion statement. In Gondwe’s view, “Dreadlocks are now considered fashionable, by celebrities, school children, teachers, and ordinary people in the street, both in and out of context”.⁵⁴ This is supported by Emma Conlin who says that they have become an increasingly popular hairstyle of choice for male and female, young and old South Africans, a hairstyle that cut across gender and age lines. The implication of this is that they have become big business with almost every hair stylist in the cities and townships doing them.⁵⁵ As big business, dreadlocks have attracted the attention of criminals who target dreadlocked people for their hair to support the ever-growing demand for human hair extensions by hairdressers. The extent of commercialisation is such that you find in the press media advertisements such as *Dreadlock Theft – Do You Need Hair Insurance?* – a full set of natural, human dreadlocks are valued at anything between R200 and R2500. Women’s dreadlocks are reported to be the most vulnerable in this trade, perhaps because they are easier to overpower.⁵⁶

This commercialisation is viewed as unacceptable amongst Rastafarians. One Rastafari elder put it that the infiltration of their ranks by “false dreads” who give the movement a bad name now makes it impossible to identify the

52 S Kitzinger, “The Rastafarian brethren of Jamaica”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 9(1), 1966, pp. 33-39; EB Edmonds, “Rastafari...”, pp. 32, 34. Rastafarians believe dreadlocks to be supported by Leviticus 21:5 (which states: “They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in the flesh”) and, the Nazarite Vow in Numbers 6:5-6. “All the days of the vow of his separation there shall be no razor come upon his head until the days be fulfilled in which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy and shall let the locks of the hair of his grow” (Numerology 6:5). Also to be found in Leviticus 19:26 & 27 is the prescription that “Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of their beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you”.

53 J Power, interview, MH Chawane, 7 January 2003.

54 T Gondwe, “Positivibration...”, *Independent on line*, 12 February 2002, p. 14.

55 Anon., *Dreadlock theft – Do you need hair insurance?* (available at <http://consultancyafricablog.com/2013/02/15/dreadlock-theft-do-you-need-hair-insurance/>), as accessed on 18 March 2013).

56 Anon., *Dreadlock-theft...*, as accessed on 18 March 2013.

true Rasta only by appearance.⁵⁷ Members of the Rastafari movement are not happy with this commercialisation. Sister Anjelica explained:⁵⁸

Dreadlocks are not supposed to be fashion. Look at them - they are dreadful, they look dreadful, and are supposed to put dread into the heart of the sinner.

The implication of the above quote is that dreadlocks have lost their meaning of instilling fear in the subjects of “Babylon”. Though Rastafarians are opposed to this commercialisation, it helped in softening the attitude of those who have always opposed them. Because dreadlocks have become an acceptable hairstyle, many Rasta children can now attend school with dreadlocks and employers have to respect the religious principles of their employees.⁵⁹

The colours of Marcus Garvey

A further most important symbol that differentiates Rastafarians from the rest of society is their adoption and wearing of the colours Marcus Garvey used for the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) flag. These are black, green and red. With permission from Garvey, they added the colour yellow or gold.⁶⁰ According to Garvey, black symbolises the skin colour of the black man, green represents nature, and red stands for the blood of black people that has flowed in oppression, while yellow, according to Rastafarians, stands for wealth.⁶¹ Different people interpret these colours differently, for example, for some the colour red stands for the church triumph, that is, the church of Rastafarians.⁶² It symbolises the blood that martyrs have shed. Red also represents fire and the fierceness, judgement and wrath of The Almighty against “Babylon”.⁶³ Yellow represents the wealth of the homeland (Africa). Green represents the beauty and vegetation of “Ithiopia”, the Promised Land. Sometimes black is used to represent the colour of Africans, from whom

57 H Hamilton, Nyabinghi elders explain principles of their faith (available at <http://web.syr.edu/affellem/nyah.html>, 14 January 2003).

58 P Bain, “The experience of Rastafari children...”, p. 38.

59 P Bain, “The experience of Rastafari children...”, p. 45.

60 T Gondwe, “Positivibration...”, *Independent on line*, 12 February 2002, p. 46.

61 T Gondwe, “Positivibration...”, *Independent on line*, 12 February 2002, p. 47.

62 B Bunny, interview, MH Chawane, 29 January 2013.

63 Y Afari, *Overstanding Rastafari: Jamaica's gift to the world* (Senya-cum, 2007), p. 96. Yarus Afari is a world renowned Jamaican poet, author, philosopher and reggae artist and an international reggae/Rastafari ambassador.

98% of the Jamaicans are descended.⁶⁴ These colours recur on just about all Rastafarian accessories — hats, head wraps, scarves, wristbands, banners, earrings, beadwork, drums and other musical instruments.⁶⁵ For Yasus Afari the colour black represents nothing and everything, the totality of all that is, was, and is to be. Black for him also represent strength and endurance, it represents Africa and the power to overcome hardship, struggles and even extinction.⁶⁶ Sometimes the colours are reversed for commercial reproduction but originally red should always appear at the bottom when combined with the other two (that is they should appear as green, yellow and red).⁶⁷

There are remarkable similarities between the colours of the South African flag (and that of the African National Congress in particular) and those of the Rastafarians. Like the Rastafarian the South African flag contains the colours black, yellow, green and red with similar meaning and symbolism.⁶⁸ In the South African flag, the green colour represents the natural environment and vegetation of the country, while the yellow represents the natural resources, particularly gold.⁶⁹ According to the KwaZulu-Natal Premier Sibusiso Ndebele, the colour red represents the violence that led to freedom and as such stands for blood.⁷⁰ The black colour in both flags represents black Africans. The colours green, black and yellow as found in the flag of the African National Congress bears similar meaning.⁷¹

The Rastafarian colour combination features in fashion items that appeal across cultures, especially with the hip-hop generation.⁷² These colours have also come to be worn by people who wear African traditional attire. These people often wear Rastafarian beads or necklaces with their traditional African attire. Women sometimes wear Rastafarian turbans on their heads to complement their African attire. This is strong evidence that the colours have

64 Anon., *Rastafarian religion* (available at <http://www.aspects.net/~nick/religion.htm>, as accessed on 17 June 2013).

65 T Gondwe, "Positivibration...", *Independent on line*, 12 February 2002, pp. 46-47.

66 Y Afari, *Overstanding Rastafari...*, pp. 96-97.

67 T Gondwe, "Positivibration...", *Independent on line*, 12 February 2002, pp. 46-47.

68 Anon., "Colours of the South African flag" (available at http://msunduzi.gov.za/dedi134.cpt2.host-h.net/site/user_data/files/colours_of_the_south_african_flag.pdf, as accessed on 14 June 2013).

69 Anon., "What do the colours of the South African Flag represent?" (available at http://www.southafrica.org.za/south-africa-general-faq_p3.html, as accessed on 18 September 2013).

70 Official speech by the KwaZulu-Natal Premier Sibusiso Ndebele, Pietermaritzburg, 2008 (available at http://www.kzneducation.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=6_alaNihNFU%3D&tabid=88, as accessed on 18 September 2013).

71 Anon., *What do the colours of the South African Flag represent?* (available at http://www.southafrica.org.za/south-africa-general-faq_p3.html, as accessed on 14 June 2002).

72 T Gondwe, "Positivibration...", *Independent on line*, 12 February 2002, p. 14.

been commercialised. Commercial items bearing the colours are sold in open markets, small shops inside and outside some shopping centres. These items are mostly sold by vendors in the street. Non-Rastafarians also buy and wear Rastafarian hats, caps, belts, snickers, and T-shirts as fashionable items.⁷³

Ganja (Marijuana)

One of the most important cultural aspects of Rastafari that permeated South Africa is the use and smoking of “ganja” (known as dagga in South Africa) for sacramental purposes.⁷⁴ Rastafarians in South Africa, like those of Jamaica and elsewhere in the world have also created an oral tradition around the use and smoking of “ganja”. One of these myths comes from portions of psalms in the Bible and from Ethiopian tales that goes back to Solomon’s time as the king. One of these suggests that “ganja” plants sprang out of Solomon’s grave after he was buried. This myth is repeated during a unique mode of discourse known as “reasoning or session”⁷⁵ that took place during congregation when defending the stance that “ganja” should be legalised.⁷⁶ By sacralising it, they both explain and reject the existing social and political order that they perceive as responsible for their oppression and poverty.⁷⁷

73 J Youth, interview, MH Chawane, 18 July 2003. Some of the people who wear these colours do so unaware that they have a symbolic meaning for Rastafarians.

74 B Chevannes, “Introducing the Native Religions...”, p. 31; *Marijuana and Religion* (available at http://www.religionfacts.com/rastafari/marijuana_and_religion.htm, as accessed on 4 June 2013). Rastafarians also use “ganja” for medical reasons. They believe marijuana to be a panacea to treat such varied illnesses as “dysentery, sunstroke, phlegmatic tempers, indigestion, lack of appetite, lispings, and muddled intellect, among others”. Ancient Chinese medical texts from 100 A.D. also recommend the use of “ganja” for medical purposes. Its use for similar purposes however, dates back to the second millennium B.C. and still continues today. In the past, ancient Chinese belief systems, the Scythian people group of Central Asia, ancient Germanic paganism, and Hinduism, all used marijuana for religious reasons.

75 Anon., “To mark the centenary of the birth of Tafari , the son given unto Ian’I on 23rd 1892”, *Jabug*, 2, 1992, p. 9. Reasoning is the democratic process of verbal engagement on philosophical matters in order to reach a conclusion on a specific matter.

76 *Pace Magazine*, July 1995. Other basis for its general use is Biblically substantiated by the following texts: Genesis 1:11 “And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so”. Genesis 3:18 “... thou shalt eat the herb of the field”. Proverbs 15:17 “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith”. Psalms 104:14 “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man”. The book of Revelations 22 “We must eat the fruit of the tree that bears fruit 12 times a year”.

77 AA Benard, “The material roots of Rastafarian...”, *History and Anthropology*, 18(1), 2007, pp. 89-99; Anon., “To mark the centenary of the birth of Tafari...”, *Jabug*, 2, 1992, p. 9. Apart from its sacramental value, “ganja” is thus for Rastafarians an important barrier that separates them from “Babylon”. As stated in the *Jabug* “by means of the holy herb which The Creator give man for meat, HIM servant separates himself from ‘Babylon’ midst. Man purify man temple by burning this divine *Isbence* within”.

Image 4 is a popular representation of marijuana in Rastafarai visual culture.⁷⁸ As a symbol, Rastafarians use “ganja” to challenge the prevailing order of things. The “ganja” symbol has also been commercialised as it can be found in T-shirts and car stickers. The importance of “ganja” in South Africa can be seen in its stimulation of debate and confrontation between Rastafarians and the government about its legality. The debate and confrontation centres on the issue of classifying “ganja” as a drug and as such deemed illegal to use or possess.⁷⁹ Rastafarians demand that the government should legalise it, which is, according to them, a claim based on freedom of worship as enshrined in the South African Constitution.⁸⁰ Its use, they argue, should be recognised by the government as religious sacrament, and its criminalisation is seen to be against the spirit of the constitution.⁸¹

Rastafarian language and music

The adherents of Rastafari teachings believe that their original African languages were stolen from them when they were taken into captivity as part of the slave trade, and that English is an imposed colonial language.⁸² Their remedy for this situation has been the creation of a modified vocabulary

78 B Chevannes, “Marijuana and religion” (available at http://www.religionfacts.com/rastafari/marijuana_and_religion.htm, as accessed on 4 July 2013); AA Benard, “The material roots of Rastafarian...”, *History and Anthropology*, 18(1), 2007, pp. 89-99; Anon., “Religious and spiritual use of cannabis” (available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_and_spiritual_use_of_cannabis, as accessed on 4 June 2013). It was first mentioned in the Rig-Vedas of India 1000 years before the Common Era. Gaja, or “ganja” (as they call it then) was known to be a favourite drink of the god Indra (a Vedic god of war and rain). The Greek historian Herodotus (484-425 B.C.) mentioned that the Scythians (an ancient nomadic people group in the geographical proximity of modern-day Iran), whose religious beliefs included mythology and horse sacrifice, used marijuana in sacred ceremonies. Alfred Dunhill (1924) wrote that Africans have had a long tradition of smoking hemp in gourd pipes, asserting that by 1884 the King of the Baluka tribe of the Congo had established a hemp-smoking cult in place of fetish-worship. Ancient Germanic Paganism associated marijuana with the Norse love goddess, Freya who was believed to live in the plant’s flowers, so consuming them meant being filled with divinity.

79 E Goode, “Marijuana and the politics of reality”, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 10(2), June 1969, pp. 83-94. Like elsewhere in the world where “ganja” is illegal, its criminalisation is based on medical, psychological and legal arguments. Medically, it is believed to, increases heart rate, increases risk of chronic cough, bronchitis and cancer of the lungs. Psychologically, it is argued that it causes psychotic episodes, impairs memory and learning skills, sleep impairment; that it can lead to addiction and may increase risk of anxiety, depression, and amotivational syndrome. Legally, the legalization of “ganja” is opposed because it is thought to leads to the use of more dangerous drugs, because it causes crime, because it makes a person unsafe behind the wheel, because it creates an unwillingness to work which is the cause of crime.

80 J Power, interview, MH Chawane, 7 January 2003.

81 *Pace Magazine*, 1995. The South African constitution under Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights stipulates that “everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion”.

82 MH Chawane, “The rememory of black oppression...”, p. 163.

and dialect, reflecting their desire to take forward language and to confront “Babylon”. Thus, the origin of Rastafarian language was the result of their unwillingness to adopt the language of their oppressor, and the meanings inherent in particular words or phrases. This resistance to the oppression embedded in language is accomplished by avoiding words and syllables seen as negative, such as “back”, and changing them to positive ones.

Rastafarian language, like most languages, can take many forms, from being used ritually, and symbolically, to being spoken.⁸³ Ritually, Rastafarians often use their language during certain contexts or situations to convey specific meaning. For example, they will say “Word, Sound and Power”⁸⁴ to bring peace between people who disagree on a certain topic. Symbolically, there are non-verbal signs Rastafarians use in their day to day communication. One common sign is instead of shaking hands, they will touch with clenched fists. This style of greeting has developed into the touching of a closed fist with the thumbs rubbing. The most recent style of greeting that is not yet copied by non-Rastafarians is that of making a sign of Africa.⁸⁵ As a spoken language, Rastafarian style of communication is known as “iry talk, lyric language, soul language, or dread talk”. Language is used as another boundary marker by Rastafarians to set them apart and reject “Babylon”. The vernacular of the Rastafarians is based on an alteration of the lexical structure of Jamaican Creole language.⁸⁶ The use of “I” instead of “me” stems from the days of slavery, and reflects the divine personhood of blacks who had been captives of “Babylon” and whose personhood had for so long been denied.⁸⁷

This manner of speaking in the first person is one of the most important innovations of Rastafarian linguistic syntax. The use of the phrase “I ‘n I” (meaning literally “I and I”, and referring to “me and you”) emphasises the importance of the first person (granting him/her equal first person status rather than the second or third person status of English personal nouns.⁸⁸ “I ‘n I” is an expression that totalises the concept of oneness, the oneness of two persons, suggesting that God is within all people, rendering a unity of being.

83 P Bain, “The experience of Rastafari children...”, p. 51.

84 B Chevannes, “New approach to Rastafari”, B Chevannes (ed.), *Rastafari and other African-Caribbean worldviews* (The Hague, 1989), pp. 20-41, p. 227. *Word, sound and power* is referred to trinity by Rastafarians the word is both sound and power because it is capable of quality, capable of being “sweet” and of thrilling the hearer. It is power because it can inspire responses such as fear, anger or submission

85 MH Chawane, “The rememory of black oppression...”, p. 164.

86 V Pollard, *Dread talk: The language of Rastafari* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1994), p. 23.

87 EB Edmonds, *Rastafari*, p. 33; A Kebede and JD Knottnerus, “Beyond the pales of Babylon...”, *Sociological Perspective*, 41(3), 1998, p. 510.

88 M Denis-Constant, “The choices of identity”, *Social Identities*, 1(1), 1995, pp. 1-12.

The phrase “I ‘n I” thus suggests that God is in all men; a notion supported by the use of this phrase to refer to “me and you” or “we”, “us” and “them”, suggesting that it can also be analysed as a collective word emphasising that the self is more than a single, individual self. This decentralising phrase also suggests that the self encompasses others as well. This holistic concept of “I” has come to be applied in many instances: when referring to Selassie the First, he is referred to as “Selassie I”, which implies that he is “one” with all Rastafarians.

The word “I” has also come to be used as a replacement for most of the initial letters of original English words. For example, the words vibration or creation have been changed to “iration” (depending on the context within which they are used), assemble to “issemble”, unity to “inity”, and praises to “ises”. The usage of “I” in this way is not applicable to specific words because everybody is free to use these linguistic amendments in a manner that he or she deems fit.⁸⁹ Words such as “Idren” (relating to children?), or “Bredren” (relating to men), and “Sistren” (relating to women) refer to the oneness of all Rastafarians regardless of gender and age and are used to describe one’s peers.⁹⁰ Rastafarians feel that some words are wrongly applied. Instead of using the words “international” and “understand” they prefer to use the words, “outernational” and “overstand”.⁹¹ Although the word international starts with an I, it is changed for the sake of meaning suggesting that once other nations are included together with one’s own nation; it should be nations coming from the outside, hence “out” instead of “in”. With regard to the word “overstand”, as proof that someone is following what is being said one has to stand over, above or in control of knowledge, and not under it, hence the use of the word “overstand” instead of understand.

Rastafarians have also examined the word/sound structure of Standard English for negative connotations in the spelling and pronunciation of certain words. For example, the word “sincere” includes the syllable sin, and is, therefore changed to “incerely” or “icerely”. The word “dedicate” emphasises a sound similar to that of the word “dead”, and is replaced with the positive word “livicate”. The word “appreciate” is changed to “apprecilove” because the intonation on the “ate” syllable resembles the sound of the word “hate”. In

89 MH Chawane, “The rememory of black oppression...”, p. 168.

90 Anon., *Important.ca major religions & spiritual beliefs home: Religion: Rastafari main page: Rastafari iyaric language, vocabulary* (available at http://www.important.ca/rastafari_dreadlocks.html), as accessed on 12 May 2014).

91 MH Chawane, *The rememory of black oppression...*, p. 164.

Rastafarian language, the pronoun “I” replaces the “me” of Standard English speech and takes on special significance. The new “I-words” represent a new perception of self as Man and as nothing less, as subject and not as object.⁹²

An important issue for all South Africans is the lack of a single language that can be used to express common meanings. “Iry talk” enables Rastafarians from different language groups to communicate with each other. The process of “reasoning” would be hampered if there were no common language. In the South African context, “iry talk” is sometimes used in conjunction with African languages to facilitate understanding, make a comment, or stress a certain point during reasoning. That said, African languages do not eclipse the employment of “iry talk” by Rastafarian practitioners. “Iry talk” remains an important philological tool in eroding ethnic and linguistic boundaries that would make communication difficult; while the application of African languages in conjunction with “iry talk” makes the use of an interpreter unnecessary. What makes “iry talk” understandable and easy to speak for Rastafarians and others who are not Rastafarians is that, unlike all other languages, there are no rules governing the usage, pronunciation or spelling of words.⁹³

Stressing the importance of a common language for South Africa, Manganyi argues that language can be an instrument of oppression. All languages in South Africa have been made “partisan” or have been linked to a particular ethnic group and, as a result, there is no common language to communicate a common meaning for all South Africans.⁹⁴

In our history, those amongst us blacks who became alienated from their Africanness did so partly because they became absorbed into a new language idiom – a new way of experiencing, thinking and doing. It is significant that the state of culture and identity in South Africa is such that there is no ‘language’ free of partisan interests to communicate the new meanings that await South Africa in the future.

Several Rastafarian words have migrated into mainstream English usage in South Africa, or even widespread global usage. The term “dreadlocks”, for example, is used worldwide to denote the unique hairstyle which was popularised by the Rastafarians such as Bob Marley and other early Reggae musicians. Phrases from the Rastafarian language has become popular among the youth who have

92 GE Simpson, “Religion and justice...”, *Phylon*, 46(4), 1985, pp. 286-291.

93 MH Chawane, “The rememory of black oppression...”, p. 164.

94 NC Manganyi, *Looking through the keyhole: Dissenting essays on the black experience* (Johannesburg, 1981), p. 70.

incorporated it into their “township lingo”⁹⁵, without necessarily understanding the significance of syllabic symbolism. “Rastafarian lingo” has also becoming popular in a written form since the introduction of Short Message Services (SMS) where messages sent through cellular phones are shortened or sometimes written in a language that is meant to impress the reader with the “hipness” of the writer thereby pointing further to the migration of Rastafarian spiritual tenets into the banality of popular culture and fashion. Like the “iri talk”, the language used in SMS is not governed by rules. Most of these messages (whether with or without the knowledge of the sender) are written in Rastafarian language, for example “luv” (for “love”), “de” (“the”), “dread” (“bad”), or “cool” (for “fine”), “mo-faya” (“more fire” – used in appreciation).⁹⁶

Rastafarians also use physical signs (gestures) and expressions that are part of their daily interaction. These were initially meant to serve as a boundary separating them from society. One common sign is instead of shaking hands when greeting each other; they will touch with clenched fists.⁹⁷ The most recent style of greeting that is not yet copied by non-Rastafarians is that of making a sign of Africa (as can be seen in Image 5, a printed representation of this gesture on a T-Shirt).⁹⁸ The Black Fist, raised or clenched is another sign used to signify solidarity, power or resistance. It should be noted here that the symbol of a Black fist is broader than Rastafarianism. It has been used by blacks around the world as symbol of resistance and Black Power. In South Africa, it has been used during the struggle against apartheid where it a fist was raised together with the shout of “Amandla” (power).

Image 4: The “Ganja” sign



Source: Personal collection (MH Chawane), 15 September 2013.

95 Youths in the townships of South Africa have developed their own style of communication that is informal. This language can also be called street language.

96 These words have also become popular within advertising industries.

97 This style of greeting has become popular amongst the youth and has developed into the touching of a closed fist with the thumbs rubbing.

98 MH Chawane, “The rememory of black oppression...”, p. 165.

Of importance is that they have also come up with certain expressions that only Rastafarians can interpret, such as “yes I” (as for “yes I see” or “agreed”) and “Word Sound and Power” (known amongst Rastafarians as having the meaning of “making peace between two disagreeing members”). For Rastafarians, this phrase draws its meaning from the reference to both “sound” and “power”, notions equally capable of referencing qualities such as “being sweet” and “of thrilling the listener”. It is power because it can inspire responses such as fear, anger or submission.⁹⁹

The Rastafari language, which is often expressed through Reggae music¹⁰⁰ and dub poetry, a specialised mode of expression intended to reflect “the people’s voice” is a vehicle that “carries” and spreads the “iry” language to all corners of the world. It is mostly through listening to Reggae music that Rastafarians in South Africa came to learn the “iry talk”. Reggae music has the function of what Johnson-Hill calls “musica franca” for Rastafarians internationally, transcending ethnic, national and regional boundaries. It expresses the oppression of blacks in exile and their longing for home.¹⁰¹ Though “iry” language was/is used by Rastafarians to show resistance against oppression during apartheid and to challenge prevailing social and political order after apartheid, when used outside Rastafarian context, it loses its symbolic meaning as a language resistance.

According to Johnson-Hill the large-scale transfer of Rastafarianism from Jamaica to South Africa, as in other parts of the world, was caused largely by reggae music,¹⁰² which preached Garveyism and Ethiopianism, the bedrock of the Rastafarian movement. Of the early stages of the movement in Cape Town, Papa Sam (one of the Rastafarian elders) says that because there were not many Rastafarians or reading materials then, Reggae music was the main source of information.¹⁰³ Reggae music also became popular amongst freedom fighters (those involved in the struggle against apartheid), including those in exile and the township youth.¹⁰⁴ For freedom fighters in exile, Reggae

99 B Chevannes, “Introducing the native religions of Jamaica...”, B Chevannes (ed.), *Rastafari and other African-Caribbean worldviews...*, p. 227.

100 Reggae originated in Jamaica during the late 1960’s. It is music characterised by deep bass rhythms punctuated with heavy drumbeats.

101 JA Johnson-Hill, “Rastafari as a resource for social ethics...”, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 9, 1996, pp. 3-39.

102 JA Johnson-Hill, “Rastafari as a resource for social ethics...”, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 9, 1996, pp. 3-39. Reggae is characterised by deep bass rhythms punctuated with heavy drumbeats. Reggae music has the function of what is called *musica franca* for Rastafarians internationally, transcending ethnic, national and regional boundaries.

103 N Tolsi, “The rise and rise of the Rastafari”, *Mail & Guardian*, 14 September 2011.

104 JA Johnson-Hill, “Rastafari as a resource for Social Ethics...”, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 9, 1996, pp. 3-39.

music became a motivational factor while for township it became a symbol of resistance against apartheid.

The apartheid system led to the emergence of “protest” artists. Amongst these were the Jamaicans Peter Tosh and Bob Marley. South Africa saw the emergence of reggae during such as Carlos Jeje, Dr Victor and Lucky Dube to mention a few.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Many cultural aspects of Rastafarianism that are identified as acceptable in South Africa seem to have been largely borrowed from other cultures and organisations dating from ancient times. An example is religious symbolisms that are not original to Rastafarians but have been copied from other religious organisations. Though not clear where Rastafarians copied dreadlock, it is clear that their hairstyle was derived from other pre-existing cultures. Another aspect is that of their colours and meaning of these colours that are that are not unique to them.

From 1994, the cultural aspects of Rastafarianism have been adopted by the general populace of South Africa as a fashion statement and have become more popular especially amongst business people who are selling these items. Perhaps the most outstanding Rastafarian cultural features in South Africa are dreadlocks and their language. While dreadlocks are favoured hairstyle, the Rastafarian language and signs have been adopted and are used in daily communication and interaction. Thus, in a multicultural South Africa, Rastafarian symbols and language is playing a great role in creating a common cultural identity.

¹⁰⁵ Anon., “Lucky Dube biography” (available at <http://www.luckydube.net/biography.htm>, as accessed on 20 November 2012).