THE DESERT TROD

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF SELF AND OTHER IN RASTAFARI IN GUYANA

A THESIS

SUBMITTED ON THE SIXTH OF APRIL 2018

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

ERIN LIERL

APPROVED:

Myriam Huet, Ph.D.
Director

Grete Viddal, Ph.D.

John Clark, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the relationship between self and other within Rastafari culture in Guyana. Heirs of a tradition of resistance against the dichotomous, hierarchical approach to nature and humanity embodied by European colonialism, Rastas in Guyana have conceptualized the individual self as an integral aspect of a divine, universal whole comprising the natural world and its diverse, interdependent constituents. This has involved the transcendence of conceptual dichotomies between self and other, humanity and divinity, physical and spiritual worlds, and people of different gender and ethnic identities. The transcendence of these conceptual divisions has supported the development of socially nonviolent and ecologically sustainable communities tied to soil, charting a course for global communities seeking to mitigate social and environmental crises. The transcendence of conceptual dichotomy is symbolized in this thesis by the "desert trod"—the journey of the Israelites of the Old Testament from captivity to the promised land. I argue that by closing the conceptual distance between self and other, Rastas have moved toward a promised land defined by social nonviolence and ecological sustainability.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I. Presentation of the Problem

At the outset of my field research in July 2017, I met Ras Khafra,[1] General Secretary of the Guyana Rastafari Council (GRC), at a community center in Festival City, a suburb of Guyana's capital, Georgetown. The community center building was raised high above the wet earth, overlooking a field where cows and goats grazed. The soil of Festival City, like the rest of Georgetown and the surrounding coastal areas, was suspended in tenuous equilibrium with water that was never far from the surface. Houses, mostly of wood and/or cement, were often raised more than a meter above the ground, to accommodate rising water during rains and high tides. The streets of Georgetown were interspersed with canals, many filled with fish and blooming water lilies.

The landscape was significant to the unique social history of Guyana.[2] As Ras Khafra informed me, Festival City had been developed in 1972 for the first Carifesta, a showcase of Guyana's musical and artistic culture that had been instrumental in the development of Rastafari[3] culture in Guyana; it was perhaps here that the Nyabinghi[4] rhythm first reverberated on Guyanese soil. In addition, Ras Khafra informed me that like

[1] Many Rastas use names and titles other than their birth/legal names. These names can be chosen deliberately or evolve spontaneously; many are connected to the Bible and/or African sources. "Ras" is a title akin to "Prince" in the Ethiopian language of Amharic. Many Rastas associated with the Twelve Tribes of Israel use the prefix "Brother," while many women use "Sister" before their name.
[2] The name "British Guiana" was used from 1831-1966. Gaining its independence in 1966, the nation was named "Guyana." I use "Guyana" when referring to the nation's history as a whole, and "British Guiana" when referring to the colonial era.
[3] I use "Rastafari" and "Rasta" interchangeably to refer to the movement as a whole and its members.
[4] A rhythm central to Rastafari cultural practices.

the entire coastal strip, this land had been open Atlantic Ocean until African slaves had captured it through the construction of massive drainage and flood protection systems. In Guyana, Ras Khafra noted, not only did the slaves have to work the land, they also had to create it.

The idea of capturing land from the sea reminded me of how mangroves, which are crucial to Guyana's coastal ecology,[5] collect sediment in places where aquatic and terrestrial ecologies meet. Tolerant of both salinity and fresh water, mangroves are uniquely adapted to this liminal world. Clutching the soil with their roots, mangroves shield coastal land from erosion and shed organic matter, which is then broken down by bacteria, fungi, and algae, and added to the earth in which the mangroves are rooted. In this way, mangroves construct an ecosystem that supports diverse forms of life, including insects, crustaceans, fish, birds, and people.

Unlike mangroves, the African slaves who prepared Guyana's coastal strip for sugarcane production—shoveling an estimated 100 million tons of mud in the process—were forcibly displaced from their ancestral homelands and systematically subjected to physical and psychological torture, in many cases unto death. Their labor supported an industrialized agricultural system that treated the earth, women, and nonwhite people as objects to be exploited and discarded; their descendants have never been compensated for centuries of pain and suffering, unpaid labor, and genocide.

Responding to these conditions, enslaved, poor, and working-class people throughout Guyana's history envisioned and sought to establish communities defined by interdependence, mutuality, and the complementarity of diverse participants. Though

[5] Sarah E. Vaughn, "Disappearing Mangroves: The Epistemic Politics of Climate Adaptation in Guyana," *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (2017): 242–68, https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.2.07.

severed from their ancestral roots, mangrove-like, Guyanese people formed relationships with one another and with the diverse inhabitants of Guyana—including people of African, Indian, Amerindian, Chinese, and European descent—that constituted a world of its own. They constructed and re-constructed Guyana both physically and spiritually, enhancing the landscape not only with kokers[6] and dams, but with their imagination, care, and shared experience. As historian Juanita De Barros noted:

> First slaves and then free labourers built British Guiana, rescuing it from the sea and erecting the plantations from which its wealth was derived. They also constructed Georgetown's public spaces—its market buildings, parks, and streets—putting mortar to brick, fitting plank to plank…They were…places upon which meaning had been inscribed. Through use, tradition, and the weight of collective activity, these places became significant to the urban poor who congregated in them.[7]

Guyana's labored-upon landscape reflected both displacement from ancestral homelands and the fragile coherence of a new community. By the early 19th century, people in British Guiana used the Biblical story of the Israelites' journey to the promised land as a symbol of this new community and its common destiny.

The concept of the promised land captured the imaginations of people throughout the Caribbean region. Within Rastafari culture, the promised land came to symbolize ancestral homelands in Africa. In one of the earliest studies of Rastafari culture in Jamaica, the 1960 *Report on the Rastafari*, repatriation to Africa, and especially Ethiopia, was identified as a concrete aim of the Rastafari movement,[8] and many Rastas have since settled in Ethiopia and other African countries. Researchers have also interpreted the

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[6] Drainage systems
[7] Juanita De Barros, *Order and Place in a Colonial City: Patterns of Struggle and Resistance in Georgetown, British Guiana, 1889-1924* (Montreal & Kinston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 8.
[8] M. G. Smith, Roy Augier, and Rex Nettleford, "The Rastafari Movement In Kingston, Jamaica: Part I," *Caribbean Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1967): 17–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.1967.11828959.

concept of repatriation to Africa figuratively. Ethnographer Barry Chevannes pointed out that many Rastas in Jamaica were not willing or able to repatriate; he argued that some understood repatriation as "a theological, not a political, concept...a divine not a human act,"[9] indicating that the concept of the promised land alluded to more than a geographical territory.

Themes of reparations for slavery and repatriation to Africa were the focus of two of the four panels at a national Rastafari conference held at the University of Guyana on July 21, 2017. These interconnected themes often converged around issues of connectivity to land—both in terms of cultural and physical continuity with the ancestral lands of Africa and land ownership as the basis of autonomous economic development within Guyana. Eric Phillips, chair of the Guyana Reparations Committee,[10] asserted that African slaves had created 18% of Guyana's land, thus justifying African Guyanese people's claim to 18% of the national wealth. University of the West Indies doctoral student in Sociology, Duane Edwards (also known as Ras Ashkar), warned that reparations could be used in the service of the same development model that exploited the poor people of the Caribbean. Edwards also suggested that repatriation could signify an ideological, rather than a spatial movement. Finally, Brother Ruben, leader of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, encouraged Rastas to make a pilgrimage to Ethiopia, but stressed that individuals and groups might aspire to go and come between Africa and Guyana, rather than approaching repatriation as an unequivocal step. Similar feelings of hope and

[9] Barry Chevannes, "A New Approach to Rastafari," in *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews*, ed. Barry Chevannes (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 30.
[10] The Guyana Reparations Committee is Guyana's national branch of the Caricom Reparations Commission, a body intended to create and articulate a framework for reparations for slavery and genocide in the Caribbean region. See http://caricomreparations.org/.

certainty gave structure to these diverse approaches to repatriation and reparations, all of which pointed to an ideal of integration, healing, and continuity between past, present, and future. While economic reparations and systemic support for repatriation were desired, none of the approaches proposed above assumed that these long-overdue measures in themselves would fully address the legacies of forced displacement, genocide, and slavery.

Some Guyanese Rastas understood the promised land as a possibility within Guyana. In an interview, an elder named Jah Lion called Guyana a "God-given country for Rasta. Because it have everything that Rasta require."[11] Others spoke with pride of Guyana's diversity and natural beauty, and of the meaningful local communities they had participated in throughout their lives. Their relationship to the social and ecological landscape of Guyana reflected a legacy among Guyanese Rastas not only of pain and suffering, but also of affection, pride, and psychological connectedness to the Guyanese soil.

The complex legacy of both displacement from Africa and rootedness in the local soil was harmonized by some Rastas who conceptualized repatriation to Africa as a return, not to a spatial origin, but to the very realm of interdependence and connectivity that nourishes ecology and community. Speaking with me in Festival City, Ras Khafra referred to Guyana as a "stepping-stone" on the path to Ethiopia, in part because he saw Guyana's mainland geography as capable of supporting a permanent, sustainable community tied to soil. Making a connection between return to Africa and the integration of community and ecology, Ras Khafra said:

[11] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana, interview by Erin Lierl, July 13, 2017.

> People got to become more environmentally conscious…The present model of development is unsustainable. How people does live…We saying that it's either Rasta or death. They ain't got no other way. This how life set itself. Because nature has a way of correcting these imbalances. Because this is how we lived our lives. Before the whole process of enslavement, we were people who were in tune with nature, right? And everything was about nature. So then we had this whole interference from Europe, which threw the balance out of order…Because we're talking about a people…with a different social structure…A patriarchal people now come to where a matriarchal people… People who got kill fi eat come to where people who got plant to eat…Who we are is still who we were thousands of years ago…It's a re-dispensation, it's a new age. And you got become something different in order to function and to survive in this new age that is now upon the world…When you look at the developed world, you see a lot of people who ain't happy with that way of life—it ain't work for them—that are now going all over the place, seeking for something different…So we saying, Rastafari's the future, and it just how life set.[12]

Ras Khafra's comments suggested that return to Africa could also signify a return to a nature-centric, communitarian ethos associated with precolonial Africa. Applying his comments to a global community facing shared ecological and psychological threats, Ras Khafra connected Rastafari culture to a universal discourse on sustainable development and the rethinking of human societies.

In this sense, the promised land can be understood not as a geographical place, but as a way of relating to other beings and the natural world—one that reflects the ecological principles of interdependence, mutuality, and the complementarity of diverse ways of being. This aspect of Rastafari culture marks a departure from the dichotomous, hierarchical approach to humanity and nature associated with European colonial culture. Challenging conceptual barriers between self and other, humanity and nature, spiritual and physical worlds, and people of different gender and ethnic identities, Rastafari culture questions the very notion of the individual self associated with Cartesian philosophy. Instead, Rastafari culture focuses on "I and I"—a collective self that scholars

[12] Ras Khafra, Rastafari in Guyana, July 7, 2017.

have identified with the human community, nature, and divinity.[13] Rastafari culture emphasizes mutual selfhood, or universal subjectivity: the spiritual soil of existence. Rather than an inert, geographical location, this realm of spiritual, social, and ecological interconnectivity can itself be described as the promised land, not only for the Rastafari community, but for all communities.

Return to an ethos of ecological and social integration is critical at a time when anthropogenic ecological disruptions threaten the future of life on earth.[14] Multifaceted ecological problems have already led to violations of human rights, especially among people in poor nations—a trend that is projected to worsen.[15] Guyanese communities will be affected by these issues; home to biodiverse rainforests, wetlands, plains, and mountains, Guyana is nevertheless vulnerable to rising sea levels, species loss, and air, soil, and water pollution.[16] Even as ExxonMobil is setting out to develop Guyana's oil reserves,[17] global climate change has displaced people in low-lying coastal nations like Guyana; flooding in Guyana in 2005 cost nearly 60% of the country's GDP,[18] and floods continue to take a significant toll on homes and businesses each year.

To moderate these threats is possible, but it requires a total transformation of human societies, economies, cultures, and psychological and spiritual approaches.

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[13] Noel Leo Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology, History of African-American Religions* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 88-91; Hugh Hodges*, Soon Come: Jamaican Spirituality, Jamaican Poetics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 131; Dennis Forsythe, *Rastafari, for the Healing of the Nation* (Kingston, Jamaica: Zaika Publications, 1983), 85.
[14] Will Steffen et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet," *Science* 347, no. 6223 (February 13, 2015): 1259855, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1259855.
[15] "Climate Change and Human Rights" (Nairobi: United Nations Environmental Program, 2015), http://apps.unep.org/redirect.php?file=/publications/pmtdocuments/.
[16] Paulette Bynoe, "National Environmental Summary: Guyana" (United Nations Environmental Program, June 30, 2010), 6–8.
[17] "ExxonMobil to Proceed with Liza Oil Development in Guyana," *Pump Industry Analyst* 2017, no. 6 (2017): 13–13, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1359-6128(17)30235-5; Ron Bitto, "Oil Discoveries Likely to Bring Rapid Changes to Guyana," *World Oil*, 2017, 21.
[18] Bynoe, "National Environmental Summary: Guyana," 6.

Scientist and environmental activist Vandana Shiva summarized the required transformation in the phrase "Soil Not Oil."[19] Shiva explained that while the oil model is monolithic, mechanistic, and dependent on a central energy source—giving rise to hierarchical and monopolizing social structures—soil represents an organic multiplicity that incorporates diverse, self-organized energies. Shiva points to the soil's autopoetic, or internally-organized, quality—contrasting with allopoetic, or externally-imposed systems. Shiva noted:

> [If human kind is to survive, d]evelopment cannot be defined by the colonizer, by those imposing allopoetic systems on society for their own ends—profits and power. Development must be defined autopoetically, from within…Self-organizing, self-regulated autopoetic systems are diverse and multidimensional. They display structural and functional diversity. They can heal themselves and adapt to changing environmental conditions. Mechanically organized industrial systems are designed externally. They are structurally uniform and functionally one-dimensional. Mechanically organized systems do not heal or adapt; they break down under stress.[20]

Not only does soil provide a useful model for human systems, but according to Shiva, it sustains all life on earth.[21] Shiva's observations help to draw a connection between the symbolic promised land—understood in terms of connectivity and interdependence—and the reliable access to healthy, fertile soil upon which sustainable and nonviolent human communities are premised.

This thesis describes the journey of the Rastafari movement in Guyana toward a promised land defined by interdependence and connectedness to soil. I discuss how Rastas crossed conceptual boundaries between self and other, cultivating an

[19] Vandana Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis* (North Atlantic Books, 2015).
[20] Shiva, 15.
[21] Shiva, 6.

understanding of the self as an aspect of a divine, universal whole. I illustrate how this conceptual transcendence nourished the development of soil-based, interdependent communities. I also address challenges to the concept of universal selfhood within Rastafari culture, in the form of dichotomous approaches to gender and ethnicity. I argue that, associated with global trends of patriarchy and ethnic and political polarization, these conceptual dichotomies have limited the ability of the Rastafari movement to establish the kind of broad-based social connectivity long-term, land-based community development required. These challenges are not unique to Rastafari culture in Guyana but confront communities everywhere; understanding the ways in which such ideological divisions have restricted communities' access to land can help scholars and social groups more skillfully approach this challenge.

II. Background

Rastafari is a spiritual, social, and cultural movement that arose among largely poor, urban, African-descended people in Jamaica in the early 20th century. Rastafari derived some cultural elements from African Jamaican spiritual cultures including Kumina, the Native Baptist Churches, and Revivalism. It derived other elements from Ethiopianism, associated with organizations like the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian World Federation. Rastafari culture incorporated elements of pan-Africanism and emphases on self-help and repatriation to Africa articulated by Marcus Garvey in the early 20th century. Still other cultural elements were carried to Jamaica by indentured laborers from India. Through reggae music, Rastafari spread beyond Jamaica, reaching Guyana in the 1970s.

Although Rastafari should be understood as a spectrum of loosely associated and variously organized belief systems that has changed over time, its most prominent aspects can be described in terms of belief in the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, cultural orientation toward Africa, anti-colonial sentiment, and a desire for repatriation to Africa (sometimes understood figuratively). The most frequently cited practices of Rastafari include sacramental use of marijuana, ritual interpretation of the Bible and other sacred texts, ritual "reasoning" (discussion), the wearing of dreadlocks, a nature-centric, economically autonomous lifestyle, a vegan, unprocessed food diet, ceremonial drumming and chanting, and wordplay and lexical innovation as a means of challenging mainstream epistemology.

Situated in Northern South America, Guyana is part of the greater Caribbean cultural region known as the West Indies, and shares with other West Indian countries a history of Dutch and British colonial governance, African enslavement, and Indian indentured labor. According to the 2002 census,[22] people of African descent represented 30.20% of the population, while people of "East Indian" descent constituted 43.45%.[23] The "Mixed" population accounted for 16.73%; indigenous or "Amerindian" people 9.16%; Portuguese, Chinese, and White less than 1% each. Meanwhile, Christianity and Hinduism dominated the religious landscape; adherents of Rastafari numbered 4,005, or 0.5% of the national population of 751,223 (in 2012, the total was 746,955).[24] Among the

[22] These are the most recent figures I could find; the 2012 housing and population census did not account for ethnicity or religion. It is likely that these numbers underestimate the actual numbers of Rastafari adherents and sympathizers, many of whom may not have reported themselves as religious members for various reasons.
[23] Sonkarley Tiatun Beaie, ed., "The Republic of Guyana Population and Housing Census 2002 National Census Report" (Bureau of Statistics of Guyana, September 19, 2007), 28, http://www.statisticsguyana.gov.gy/download.php?file=22.
[24] Beaie, 33.

Rastas, 2,970 males and 1,035 females were counted—almost a 3:1 ratio. The ethnic composition of the Rastafari community was not documented, but my own observations in 2017 indicated that the vast majority of Rastas were of African and/or "Mixed" descent.

III. Relationship to Existing Scholarship

Many scholars have traced the development of Rastafari culture in Jamaica back to its roots in the experience of slavery and disenfranchisement throughout the colonial era. Most have situated Rastafari within a tradition of resistance to exploitation and marginalization that often centered on connection to land—through marronage, squatting, land purchase, and ideological orientation toward Africa.[25] Religious scholar Noel Leo Erskine observed that land was significant among rural African Jamaicans not only for economic and social reasons, but also for spiritual and symbolic reasons associated with African spirituality:

> The land belonged to the ancestors, and to have land on which to bury the dead was of first importance…Land was an ontological necessity for black Jamaica. In a profound sense, not to have land is not to be. Emancipation meant leaving the cottage provided by the master, the land to rear animals and grow a crop, and, most important, the space to bury the dead.[26]

Historian Veront M. Satchell described the proto-Rastafarian Native Baptist Free Church led by the Jamaican preacher Alexander Bedward in the early 20th century as a communitarian project that provided basic social services to its members.[27] Some

[25] Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*, 1st American ed. (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1987), 31–42; Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 17–30.
[26] Erskine, 19.
[27] Veront M. Satchell, "Early Stirrings of Black Nationalism in Colonial Jamaica: Alexander Bedward of

members of Bedward's church lived in "communal camps,"[28] collectively owned orchard fruits, and shared the proceeds of agricultural production. A common fund produced by their harvests met the needs of individual members as they arose.[29] This model was more socially nonviolent than the slave and wage labor systems, and it was more biologically diverse and ecologically sustainable than monocrop plantation agriculture. Historian Robert A. Hill likewise described the Pinnacle community led by the Jamaican preacher Leonard Howell in the mid-20th century as a collectivist, subsistence-based agricultural community. Although Howell was an authoritarian and sometimes violent leader, Pinnacle represented withdrawal from an exploitative economic system, achieved largely through connection with land and community.

The present research adds to this understanding of Rastafari culture by analyzing the colonial history of Guyana from the perspective of similarly collectivist, land-oriented social and spiritual resistance. A wealth of historical scholarship has focused on this kind of resistance in British Guiana, including the work of Alvin O. Thompson and Winston McGowan on slavery and of Rawles Farley and Barbara P. Josiah on the free village movement and economic cooperative movements respectively.[30] I aim to tie this existing research into conversations about the roots of Rastafari culture in Jamaica, while adding some new interpretations of primary sources from the colonial period.

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the Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church 1889-1921," *Journal of Caribbean History* 38, no. 1 (2004): 17.
[28] Satchell, 17.
[29] Satchell, 90.
[30] Alvin O. Thompson, "Symbolic Legacies of Slavery in Guyana," *NWIG - New West Indian Guide* 80, no. 3–4 (2006): 191–220, https://doi.org/10.1163/13822373-90002494; Winston McGowan, "The Demerara Revolt," in *Themes in African-Guyanese History*, by James G. Rose, David Granger, and Winston McGowan (Georgetown, Cooperative Republic of Guyana: Free Press, 1998), 107–40; Rawle Farley, "The Rise of the Village Settlements of British Guiana," *Caribbean Quarterly*, no. 3:2 (September 1953): 101–9; Barbara P. Josiah, "Creating Worlds: A Study of Mutuality and Financing among African Guyanese, 1800s-1950s," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 38, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 106–IX.

Whereas racial struggles in the post-emancipation era in Jamaica often centered on conflicts between the majority black population and the white elite, in British Guiana, tensions would also develop between Africans and the Indian indentured laborers who immigrated to British Guiana in large numbers after emancipation in 1838. I draw on historians Cheddi Jagan, Walter Rodney, Thomas J. Spinner, and Stephen G. Rabe, and ethnographer Judith Roback, who have emphasized trends of solidarity among African and Indian ethnic groups in British Guiana, and the permeable identities they developed.[31] This research thus forms a bridge between this recognition of intercultural connectivity in British Guiana and what is known about the contributions of Hinduism to the early Rastafari movement in Jamaica, as discussed by Laxmi and Ajai Mansingh as well as Robert Hill.[32] In this regard, the symbolism of the mangrove and has featured prominently in Caribbean literature, symbolizing for authors including literary scholar Edouard Glissant the cultural interdependence that characterizes Caribbean culture.[33]

Numerous scholars have discussed the transcendence of conceptual boundaries between self and other, humanity and God, and physical and spiritual worlds among Rastas in Guyana. Ethnographer Carole D. Yawney described the concept of "I and I" as the essence of that transcendence:

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[31] Cheddi Jagan, *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana's Freedom* (London: Joseph, 1966); Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), http://libproxy.tulane.edu:2048/login?url=http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.00302; Thomas J. Spinner, *A Political and Social History of Guyana, 1945-1983*, Westview Replica Edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984); Stephen G. Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Judith Roback, "The White-Robed Army: An Afro-Guyanese Religious Movement," *Anthropologica* 16, no. 2 (1974): 233–68, https://doi.org/10.2307/25604925.
[32] Laxmi Mansingh, *Home Away from Home: 150 Years of Indian Presence in Jamaica, 1845-1995* (Kingston, Jamaica: IRandle Publishers, 1999), 4; Robert A. Hill, *Dread History: Leonard P. Howell and Millenarian Visions in the Early Rastafarian Religion* (Chicago, IL : Kingston, Jamaica: Research Associates School Times Publications/Frontline Distribution Int'l ; Miguel Lorne Publishers, 2001), 43.
[33] Richard Price and Sally Price, "Shadowboxing in the Mangrove," *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (1997): 23–24, https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1997.12.1.3.

> The concept of I and I both reaffirms the identity of the individual as an individual, while at the same time stressing his union with other beings and the forces of life. This is a paradoxical concept that represents the simultaneous recognition and overcoming of the opposites embodied in I and you, self and other…[Rastas] ask:
>
> Who is you? There is no you. There is only I and I. I is you, I is God, God is I. God is you, but there is no you, because you is I. So I and I is God. It's the same God in all of I and I.
>
> The experience of the oneness of life, of the common origin of all creation, is a primordial understanding, which according to the brethren constitutes the source of their spiritual energies.[34]

Similarly, sociologist Dennis Forsythe described "I and I" as the union of the universal "Big I," and the individual "small I." The "Big I," according to Forsythe, was the "ever-living, immortal, or 'true' self that was never born and can never die…the critical all-seeing 'third eye' or third dimension of the universal mind."[35] Forsythe argued that the aim of Rastafari was to merge the small, individual self with the collective, universal self, that included all of nature: "'I and I' refers to 'me' in unison with my Creator/Nature/Jah."[36]

Scholars have noted the practical implications of this conceptual framework. For example, ethnographer John P. Homiak discussed the I-gelic order, a group of Rastas who camped on Wareika Hill in East Kingston in the 1960s, seeking "mystical alignment with nature, and, from this, empowerment with which to confront the dominant system."[37] According to Homiak, the I-gelic order developed a radically anti-consumerist

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[34] Carole Diane Yawney, "Lions in Babylon: The Rastafarians of Jamaica as a Visionary Movement" (McGill University (Canada), 1979), 219, https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.tulane.edu/docview/302988891/citation/6C0A33F71FEA4B7APQ/2.
[35] Dennis Forsythe, *Rastafari, for the Healing of the Nation* (Kingston, Jamaica: Zaika Publications, 1983), 85.
[36] Forsythe, 87.
[37] John P. Homiak, "Soundings on Rastafari Livity and Language," in *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews*, ed. Barry Chevannes (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 154.

lifestyle, embracing an I-tal (vegan, unprocessed) food diet, rejecting manufactured clothing and shoes, and even eschewing money altogether; as one member attested, Igelic group members would rather "fling [money] pon the ground"[38] than accept it, even as a gift. Many scholars have drawn connections between the nature-centric ethos of Rastafari and the cultivation of autonomy from an exploitative and unsustainable economic system.

Many scholars have discussed this paradigmatic shift in terms of an alternative spatial paradigm or a metaphysical journey. Religious scholar Raffaella Delle Donne suggested that in the spiritual geography of Rastafari, the collective self referred to as "I and I" is one and the same as the promised land often referred to in Rastafari culture as Zion.[39] The alternative geographies of Zion and Babylon appear in almost every work on Rastafari; Religious scholar Ennis B. Edmonds defined these realms in terms of relationships between beings:

> Any human activity that militates against harmonious relationships is a reflection of Babylonian values. Babylon is not a geographic locality or a specific social system. Babylon is any system of ideas and institutions that constitutes a culture in which people are oppressed and alienated…[40]

The present research likewise identifies connectivity between self and other as a meaning of the symbol of the promised land, while adding that connectivity to physical land—and ecology more broadly—is a necessary dimension of this connectivity.

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[38] Homiak, 146.
[39] Raffaella Delle Donne, "'A Place in Which to Feel at Home': An Exploration of the Rastafari as an Embodiment of an Alternative Spatial Paradigm," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 13, no. 1/2 (2000): 99–121.
[40] Ennis B. Edmonds, "Dread 'I' In-a-Babylon: Ideological Resistance and Cultural Revitalization," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 25.

Most scholars approach gender within Rastafari culture as an aspect of the complex historical context in which Rastafari culture arose. Imani M. Tafari-Ama argued:

> patriarchal emphases in Rastafari are due to the translation into the livity of practices and beliefs derived from Ancient Israel and Christianity. Furthermore, gender relations in the Jamaican society as a whole have historically been hierarchical and informed by the application of values that reinforce social stratification stereotypes of race, class, and gender.[41]

Similarly, Maureen Rowe noted that the status of women in the Rastafari movement has been dynamic over time and has been shaped by diverse factors both inside and outside of the Rastafari movement.[42] The present study adds to this discussion an explicit connection between the conceptual gender dichotomy within Rastafari culture and the alienation of the community from land. While I do not take the position that gender dichotomy in itself implies the oppression of one gender by the other, I identify the conceptual division between men and women as a persistent and profound ontological obstacle to the integration of self and other.

The issues of division between African and Indian groups that arose in Guyana's history have not yet been addressed in a focal way within the scholarship of Rastafari. However, these issues have defined Guyana's contemporary history and the scholarship thereof. Scholars of the black power movement during Guyana's independence era, including Nigel Westmaas, Michael O. West, and Kate Quinn, have pointed to the

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[41] Imani M. Tafari-Ama, "Rastawoman as Rebel: Case Studies in Jamaica," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 92.
[42] Maureen Rowe, "Gender and Family Relations in RastafarI: A Personal Perspective," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 72–88.

shortcomings of racial consciousness as a tool of social unification in a multiethnic postcolonial context.[43] Historian Alvin O. Thompson has addressed how African Guyanese identity based on the suffering of African slaves was turned into political capital during the Burnham era.[44] Historians Walter Rodney and Rupert Charles Lewis pointed to the need for more nuanced and factually grounded approaches to the complex issues of race and class within Guyana's history.[45]

Several scholars provided a useful foundation for the research of Rastafari culture in Guyana. Musicologist Vibert C. Cambridge shed light on the cultural policy of the government of Forbes Burnham and the People's National Congress (PNC) which, through the Carifesta musical and cultural arts festival in 1972, first brought large numbers of Guyanese people into direct contact with Jamaican Rastafari culture-bearers.[46] Cambridge also noted that by the late 1970s, reggae songs were used in Guyana to protest Burnham's rule.[47] Horace Campbell provided an overview of the political climate surrounding the Rastafari movement in Guyana in the 1970s and 1980s.[48] Historian Frank Jan Van Dijk noted the Guyanese government's negative view of the Rastafari movement in the late 1970s, and its use of violence against a Rastafari

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[43] Nigel Westmaas, "Resisting Orthodoxy: Notes on the Origins and Ideology of the Working People's Alliance," *Small Axe* 8, no. 1 (March 2004): 63–81; Michael O. West, "Seeing Darkly: Guyana, Black Power, and Walter Rodney's Expulsion from Jamaica," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 25 (2008): 93–104, https://doi.org/10.2979/SAX.2008.-.25.93; Kate Quinn, "'Sitting on a Volcano' Black Power in Burnham's Guyana," in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. Kate Quinn, UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), http://libproxy.tulane.edu:2048/login?url=https://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780813048611/.
[44] Thompson, "Symbolic Legacies of Slavery in Guyana."
[45] Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought* (Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 1998); Walter Rodney, "Contemporary Political Trends in the English-speaking Caribbean," *The Black Scholar* 7, no. 1 (1975): 15-21.
[46] Vibert C. Cambridge, *Musical Life in Guyana: History and Politics of Controlling Creativity* (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 197, https://muse.jhu.edu/book/40765.
[47] Cambridge, 211.
[48] Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance*, 171–73.

settlement in Mahdia in 1981.[49] Ethnographer Sarah Vaughn cited a Guyanese Rasta artist who stated that some Rasta groups, fleeing persecution, had moved into the interior of Guyana in the late 1980s and engaged in agricultural initiatives.[50] Finally, the historical overview of the Rastafari movement in Guyana by prominent Guyanese writer Ras Leon Saul provided a useful historical narrative comprising the movement as a whole.[51]

IV. Methods

This thesis makes use of historical and ethnographic sources. Chapter One uses secondary sources to reconstruct the historical dynamics relevant to the development of Rastafari culture in Guyana. I also make original use of primary sources, including the transcript of the trial of the English minister, John Smith, who was implicated in a slave uprising in the British Guianese province of Demerara in 1823. The trial transcript provides a unique glimpse into the perspectives of enslaved people in British Guiana, as they are quoted in what appears to be their own words. However, it should be noted that the transcription was made by humans and may include omissions and emphases according to the transcribers' biases. The testimony may also have been skewed by pressure from the prosecutors, the slaves' desire to defend Reverend Smith, and/or issues of self-protection.

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[49] Frank Jan Van Dijk, "Chanting Down Babylon Outernational: The Rise of Rastafari in Europe, the Caribbean, and the Pacific," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 192.

[50] Sarah E. Vaughn, "Between a Promise and a Trench: Citizenship, Vulnerability, and Climate Change in Guyana" (Columbia University, 2013), 279–86, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1367593897/abstract/62D27BFF1DB14D2DPQ/13.

[51] Ras Leon Saul, "First Rastas in British Guiana Were Garveyites," *Unite: News Magazine for National Development & Universal Consciousness*, n.d., 3rd edition.

Chapter One also uses primary sources from issues of *The Daily Chronicle* from 1938 which were available to me through the Latin American Library at Tulane University. I utilize a sermon on the nature of evil and an article about the renovation of a plantation as evidence of colonial attitudes toward nature. These sources represent the views of individual authors at one point in time and are not representative of the whole of colonial culture over the course of British Guianese history. However, they serve as "telling examples"[52] of the paradigm evidenced in the historical trends of slavery and monocultural sugarcane production, providing a backdrop for the development of collectivist and holistically integrated cultural responses. More contemporary primary sources are also cited in Chapter One, including the report on the assassination of Walter Rodney published by the Guyanese government in 2015.

In July 2017, I conducted ten semi-structured oral interviews with Rastafari community members in Georgetown, Guyana. These interviews addressed the mechanisms through which Rastafari culture spread to Guyana and the events that marked its development in the memories of participants. The semi-structured format allowed for the emergence of relevant themes; subsequent transcriptions of the recorded interviews and qualitative analysis of the transcriptions allowed me to identify the trends and insights I discuss below.

The interviews are limited in number and are not representative of the Rastafari community in Guyana as a whole. Although I sought to include equal numbers of male and female as well as young and old interviewees, I concluded my field work having conducted more interviews with male elders than with women and young people. To

[52] Lara Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (2006): 618.

some extent, this imbalance reflects the greater status of male elders within the Rastafari community, as Rastas who helped to facilitate the study were eager to introduce me to male elders who were considered historically important. The imbalance also reflects my own situated experience as a woman, a first-time field researcher, and an outsider to the movement and to Guyana, as I was hesitant to offend or to exert undue pressure on women with whom I had not yet established a relationship. At the same time, there was a degree of hesitation to participate on the part of some, though certainly not all, of the women I did approach; of the three women who participated in interviews, two opted not to be audio recorded; their statements are thus paraphrased from interview notes. In contrast, none of the seven men I interviewed objected to digital voice recordings—a difference that affects whose voice is heard, and how. In this regard, it is also important to note that all of the transcriptions represent an effort on my part to represent speech through the homogenizing medium of text; this thesis thus tries but only partially manages to convey the meaning of interviewees' statements, including their connotative and culturally embedded significance.

In 2017, there were three main organized Rastafari groups in Guyana: the Twelve Tribes of Israel, the Nyabinghi order, and the Guyana Rastafari Council. Each group had distinct characteristics; the GRC was conceived of as an umbrella organization intended to represent the Rastafari community collectively at national and international levels. The General Secretary of the GRC, Ras Khafra, and GRC President, Ras Simeon, kindly helped to facilitate this study, introducing me to interviewees and facilitating my participation in local events. For this reason, GRC members and associates are disproportionately represented as interviewees—though several interviewees had been

involved with the GRC as well as one or both of the other groups. In addition, my interviews mostly involved Rastas who lived in and around Georgetown; those living in remote areas may have expressed alternative views. Finally, most of the people I interviewed had not lived for long periods of time outside of Guyana. Rastas who have lived abroad may have significantly different views on issues central to this research.

In addition to interviews, I engaged in participant observation during the month of July 2017. I attended a national Rastafari conference at the University of Guyana July 20-21, in which members of the three main Rastafari organizations participated. I took notes by hand during the conference which have provided evidence for the chapters below. I also attended the celebration of the 125th birthday of Emperor Haile Selassie at the headquarters of the Nyabinghi order in Linden, about two hours South of Georgetown. I took notes by hand afterward, which have provided additional evidence.

V. Outline

Relying on primary and secondary historical sources, Chapter One introduces the historical dynamics that gave rise to the Rastafari movement in Guyana. I discuss the dichotomous, hierarchical approach within colonial society as one which divided humanity from nature, men from women, and white from nonwhite humanity; these epistemological divisions justified violence against nature and humanity at multiple levels. Chapter One addresses how these divisions were both challenged and reiterated by enslaved, poor, and working-class people in British Guiana. Through slave uprisings, the free village movement, and cooperative economic and social initiatives, resistance movements were premised on a collectivist ethos that transcended ethnic barriers and

connectivity with land and ecology. At the same time, ethnic and gender-based divisions were reiterated among the poor and working classes. After the prohibition of slavery in 1838, Indian indentured laborers were introduced to British Guiana in vast numbers, leading to a surplus of labor and poor working conditions for all. The tensions this created reinforced ethnic divisions between people of African and Indian descent. In the independence the interference of the United States government in Guyanese politics gave rise to ethnically polarized political parties, resulting in violence, poverty, and massive waves of emigration. Women played important roles in these multifaceted dynamics, but they continued to occupy a secondary status at every level of society, reflecting a conceptual gender dichotomy that limited the development of nonviolent and ecologically sustainable communities throughout Guyanese history.

Chapter Two uses ethnographic data to demonstrate how Rastafari culture in Guyana transcended conceptual and practical boundaries between self and other. Contrasting with the Europeanized Christianity from which Rastafari culture emerged, Rastas experienced God in themselves and in nature. Rastas' mystical and introspective experiences became linked with a collective project of African cultural reclamation, culminating in the concept of the divinity of Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie. The integration of self and other gave rise to communities that served as a social safety net, providing life-sustaining support and alternative education to marginalized people. Rastafari communities also envisioned and pursued community development aims rooted in soil.

Chapter Three discusses issues that have temporarily deferred the realization of the promised land among Rastafari communities in Guyana. Where aspects of the

movement coincided with a dichotomous conceptualization of self and other, they interfered with land-based community development aims. A dualistic understanding of gender limited the contributions of women to the movement, while ethnically divisive politics interfered with the movement's aims of acquiring and cultivating land. Nevertheless, Rastafari communities continued to redefine the movement and respond dynamically to these challenges.

CHAPTER ONE: ROOTS OF RASTAFARI IN THE LAND OF MANY WATERS

Relying on primary and secondary historical sources, this chapter introduces the dynamics that gave rise to the Rastafari movement in Guyana. The central argument of this chapter is that throughout Guyana's history, a dialectic between division and integration developed at the levels of nature, gender, and race. European colonial society drew sharp distinctions between self and other, viewing the natural world, women, and nonwhite people as essentially inferior. These conceptual divisions justified systemic violence against ecology, African and Indian people, and women. In response, poor and working-class people resisted conditions of forced labor and exploitation through collectivist movements premised on interdependence and oriented toward soil. At the same time, ethnic- and gender-based divisions were reiterated within these communities, as tensions developed between Indian and African ethnic groups and women were viewed as other than, and subordinate to, men.

The first section of this chapter discusses how the colonial approach to nature and humanity gave rise to social movements that both challenged and reiterated the colonial framework. Among the plantocracy of British Guiana, a dichotomous, hierarchical worldview placed the white, male self above nature, women, and nonwhite humanity. The latter categories were feared, demonized, and subjected to systemic violence. However, enslaved and indentured populations challenged their imputed inferiority and worked together across ethnic barriers toward communities defined by interdependence

and mutuality. At the same time, these movements reiterated the colonial orientation to male leadership; women's efforts to transcend their limited social roles mirrored the tension between poor and working-class people and the colonial elite.

The second section addresses how distinct ethnic identities defined British Guiana's two largest ethnic groups, Africans and East Indians, even as shared, local identities developed among the multiethnic population of Guyana. While transnational currents of pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism provided meaningful sources of unity within the African diaspora, the ethnic complexity of British Guiana challenged the role of ancestral origins as a relevant basis for shared identity. Dynamic local cultures emerged which were based on the shared experiences of African and Indian people in circumstances of colonization and economic exploitation. Rastafari culture would inherit the legacy of Africans and Indians who lived as neighbors and developed a shared spiritual culture rooted in the soil that united them.

In the third section, I discuss how such inter-ethnic solidarity was challenged anew. In the context of global conceptual dichotomy arising during the Cold War, the United States government interfered in Guyana's national politics, giving rise to ethnic violence and catastrophic misrule. The PNC government led by Forbes Burnham claimed legitimacy in terms of pan-Africanist and socialist principles but carried out human rights abuses against Indian and African people alike. These developments illustrated the shortcomings of divisive constructions of ethnic identity which were easily manipulated by hegemonic forces. This in turn gave rise to more nuanced approaches to collective action in Guyana, including the multiethnic Working People's Administration (WPA) and the grassroots women's organization known as Red Thread.

Rastafari culture would emerge in the 1970s at the center of these complex developments. As I discuss in Chapter Two, Rastafari culture to some extent transcended the dichotomous, hierarchical approach of colonial epistemology, authoring autopoetic communities defined by interdependence and connectedness to soil. Chapter Three illustrates how Rastafari culture continued to grapple with the gender dichotomy associated with the colonial era, as well as the meaning of African identity in the multiethnic context of Guyana.

I. Children of Israel: Collectivism and Resistance in Colonial Society

After a slave revolt in the British Guianese province of Demerara in 1823, slaves associated with the Bethel Chapel, a church involved in the uprising, were questioned by colonial authorities about the teachings of Bethel Chapel's minister, Reverend John Smith. Several slaves focused on the story of the Israelites of the Old Testament, which they retold in detail. A man named Azor testified:

> In the morning, he [John Smith] explains about David and Moses; in the noon, he explains about…the children of Israel in the Red Sea…Moses took the children of Israel and carried them through the Red Sea; then Pharaoh gathered the soldiers and went after them to bring them back; and the Lord made darkness and thunder between the king of Israel and Moses, and when Moses had gotten over with the children of Israel, Pharoah was drowned in the sea, and Moses built a temple and prayed to God.[53]

This retelling reflected the slaves' understanding of themselves as a collective united by a shared state of oppression and destined to be liberated together. The view that, as a slave named Manuel testified, "God did not wish that they should be made slaves,"[54] led the

[53] London Missionary Society, "The London Missionary Society's Report of the Proceedings Against the Late Rev. J. Smith" (London: Library of Congress, 1824), 22, http://cdn.loc.gov/service/gdc/gcmisc/lst/lst0078/lst0078.pdf.
[54] London Missionary Society, 16.

members of Bethel Chapel to organize and act on behalf of their mutual liberation. At the same time, Azor's emphasis on Moses as the "king of Israel," in conflict with the powerful Pharaoh, indicated that an orientation to hierarchical and male-dominated social organization characterized not only Biblical and colonial cultures, but the slave resistance movement as well.

In this section, I place resistance movements among enslaved, poor, and working-class people in British Guiana in dialogue with the hierarchical, dichotomous approach to humanity and nature that characterized colonial society. I argue that slaves and poor and working-class people challenged the place of the white, male self above nature, women, and nonwhite people; through slave resistance movements, free villages, cooperative economic endeavors, and social movements, enslaved, poor, and working-class people sought to establish communities defined by interdependence and connectedness to soil. At the same time, the position of women throughout British Guianese society mirrored that of nonwhite humanity in the colonial paradigm—women were dehumanized, overlooked, and abused; nevertheless, they challenged their inferior status and played critical roles in movements of resistance.

Many colonial Christians in British Guiana viewed the natural world with fear and aggression. In a sermon entitled "Evil and Dualism" delivered at the St. Andrew Church in Georgetown in 1938, Reverend R. Mackinnon asserted,

> In the world the Good God has created there is pain and suffering, disaster and calamity, sorrow and frustration. 'Nature is red in tooth and claw.' This Mother nature has in man produced a being higher than Herself, whom she forever seeks to destroy. Man has to protect himself against her. It is an unremitting struggle against a whole world of evil.[55]

[55] Reverend R. Mackinnon, "Evil and Dualism (Sermon by the Rev. R. Mackinnon, Minister of St. Andrew's on Sunday Night, August 7)," *The Daily Chronicle*, August 15, 1938.

Mackinnon associated nature—which he personified as female—with pain, suffering and death, identifying humanity as "higher" than nature, which was "evil."

The idea that nature was evil and had to be subjugated guided the colonial approach to land, which involved the enormously labor-intensive transformation of the landscape. The land that would be united under the name of British Guiana in 1831 was vulnerable to flooding and erosion. The indigenous population, who called it the "land of many waters," supplemented their semi-agricultural diet by fishing and hunting in the interior,[56] but colonial Europeans (Dutch, French, and British) established large-scale, export-oriented agriculture, requiring that the narrow strip of soil along the Atlantic coast be drained and protected from flooding by trenches, dams, and canals.[57] As Guyanese historian Walter Rodney noted, enslaved Africans were forced to manually shovel about 100 million tons of mud in the process.[58]

The colonial economy was precariously dependent on sugarcane production.[59] Given colonial society's psychological alienation from the natural world, it is not surprising that the monocultural methods the planters used worked against ecology. In 1938, a British colonial author discussed the plantations of yore nostalgically, referring to Plantation Lusignan as a "garden" in which the plant species were "not mixed, of course, but each in its own section"[60]—an ideal that ignored the fundamental ecological principle

[56] Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, 1.
[57] Alvin O. Thompson, *A Documentary History of Slavery in Berbice 1796-1834* (Georgetown, Guyana: Free Press, 2002), 3.
[58] Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, 1–2.
[59] Dependency on a single crop led to the devastation of British Guiana's economy when the introduction of European beet sugar caused sugar prices to plummet in the 1880s.
[60] "Plantation Lusignan's Housing Improvement Scheme," *The Daily Chronicle*, August 14, 1938.

of symbiosis: the complementarity of diverse forms of life. The author's description of the "smiling sugarcane from which the world-famous Demerara crystals are made"[61] illustrated how the colonial perspective reduced intricate ecological systems to crude profits.

Although the bodies of the laborers who transformed the land into the luxury product for export were absent from the rosy picture, the excess of labor exacted by the profit prerogative could never have been realized without the violent coercion of African slaves and Indian indentured servants.[62] Colonial epistemology approached these human beings, like the natural world, as essentially other than, and inferior to, the colonial self. Historian Alvin O. Thompson noted that Europeans, beginning in the fifteenth century, described Africans as "beasts," "savages," "monstrous folk," "liars," "thieves," and "uncivil,"[63] justifying the cruelty against them that profit-oriented agriculture required. Later, Indian indentured laborers would be demonized as "coolies,"[64] heathens,[65] and "idolaters."[66] Colonial doctors would classify noncompliant Indian laborers—especially "ganje" (marijuana) smokers—as "inveterate liar[s]," who were "idle," "careless," and violent.[67]

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[61] "Plantation Lusignan's Housing Improvement Scheme."
[62] Thompson, *A Documentary History of Slavery in Berbice 1796-1834*, 2.
[63] Alvin O. Thompson, "Slave Society During the Dutch Regime," in *Themes in African-Guyanese History*, by James G. Rose, David Granger, and Winston McGowan (Georgetown, Cooperative Republic of Guyana: Free Press, 1998), 39–40.
[64] Jagan, *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana's Freedom*, 337.
[65] Laxmi Mansingh, *Home Away from Home: 150 Years of Indian Presence in Jamaica, 1845-1995* (Kingston, Jamaica: IRandle Publishers, 1999), 1.
[66] Viranjini Munasinghe, "Theorizing World Culture Through the New World: East Indians and Creolization.," *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 4 (November 1, 2006): 553.
[67] Letizia Gramaglia, "Migration and Mental Illness in the British West Indies 1838-1900: The Cases of Trinidad and British Guiana," in *Migration, Health and Ethnicity in the Modern World*, ed. Catherine Cox, Science, Technology and Medicine in Modern History (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 76.

A view of women as essentially other than and inferior to men was prevalent in European cultures during the 19th and 20th centuries and had resulted in the subordination of women to their male relatives and spouses. In British Guiana, violence against women mirrored that at other levels of the imperial project, affecting women of every ethnic group. As ethnographer Jeane Christensen put it, throughout the Caribbean, "White men would oversee enslaved African men who would in turn oversee their women."[68] Historian Rhoda Reddock noted that enslaved women were forced to work as hard as enslaved men, even during pregnancy, but were overwhelmingly excluded from prestigious and skilled jobs.[69] Meanwhile, Jeremy Poynting described the plight of indentured Indian women as one of "multiple oppression,"[70] in the context of both plantation society and the Indian family structure.

In British Guiana as in other parts of the West Indies, coerced laborers challenged the colonial system by conceptualizing and pursuing alternative social and ecological relationships. Slaves complained about and protested their enslavement and resisted it through collective strategies, including slow-downs, sabotage, poisoning, escape, the pursuit of economic independence through agriculture and cottage industries, the purchase of freedom for oneself and others, and armed rebellion. These efforts were often rooted in an understanding of interdependence and mutual determination among the exploited groups.

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[68] Jeanne Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning and the RastaWoman: Gender Constructions in the Shaping of Rastafari Livity* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), 17.
[69] Rhoda Reddock, "Women and Slavery in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective," *Latin American Perspectives* 12, no. 1 (1985): 64–65, https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X8501200104.
[70] Jeremy Poynting, "East Indian Women in the Caribbean: Experience, Image, and Voice," *Journal of South Asian Literature* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 1986): 133.

For example, some participants in a slave uprising in Demerara in 1823 conceptualized themselves collectively as the "children of Israel" depicted in the Old Testament. According to the Biblical accounts, Moses, an Israelite living in Egypt, was inspired by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, where they had been enslaved to the Pharaoh. The Israelites escaped after Moses accomplished a series of miraculous works; they crossed the Red Sea and began a journey through the desert in search of a land of their own, the "promised land." The journey involved tests of faith, moments of despair, and violent factionalism among the Israelite people. Moses, who proved an unstable and insecure leader, was ultimately denied entry into the promised land, and died overlooking it from an elevated point.

Many of the leaders of the Demerara rebellion were deacons in the Bethel Chapel led by English minister John Smith of the London Missionary Society. After the suppression of the uprising, several members of Bethel Chapel were questioned about Smith's teachings in Smith's criminal trial. Their responses reflected their interest in the story of Moses and the Israelites. A church member named Manuel said:

> God gave Moses a painted rod to make the king afraid. God commanded Moses, that if the king's heart was hardened, Moses should say to the king, what is the reason you can't take God's advice. After that the king gave up Moses, and let them go in the promised land. After that the king wanted to follow them again, to bring them back, and then the king was drowned…[71]

According to the deacon Bristol, "when the children of Israel was with King Pharoah… Moses went to deliver them from the hands of Pharoah, and carry them to the promised

[71] London Missionary Society, "The London Missionary Society's Report of the Proceedings Against the Late Rev. J. Smith," 16.

land, and before they went to the promised land Moses died."[72] In such retellings, the fate of the children of Israel was contested by two powerful men, Moses and Pharaoh, though God played a decisive role in their escape. This narrative suggested that the enslaved people to some degree conceptualized themselves as a group that would achieve liberation together, with the support of God who, through the leadership of prophetic men, planned to lead them to an idealized land of their own.

The collective self-consciousness symbolized by the slaves' identification with the Israelites marked a transcendence of the ethnic divisiveness among slaves of distinct African origins that had presented a significant challenge to unity during an earlier uprising in Berbice in 1763.[73] Although colonial authorities attributed the rebels' interest in the children of Israel to the meddling of Reverend Smith, the slaves repeatedly attested that they had applied the stories to themselves on their own. As the deacon Bristol recalled,

> Some of the boys, when they read the bible, speak about the fighting of the Israelites when they go to war…When the Prisoner [Reverend Smith] read, they go home and read about it, and then they speak about it…I believe they do [apply the history of the Israelites to themselves], because when they read it then they begin to discourse about it; they said that this thing in the bible applied to us just as well as to the people of Israel…they read it, and their own hearts make them say so…[74]

The spontaneity with which collective identity formed among the enslaved people reflects the natural ability of human communities to recognize the interdependence of self and other, even in situations of ethnic diversity and extreme stress.

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[72] London Missionary Society, 22–23.
[73] Marjoleine Kars, "Dodging Rebellion: Politics and Gender in the Berbice Slave Uprising of 1763," *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 1 (2016): 48, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/121.1.39.
[74] London Missionary Society, "The London Missionary Society's Report of the Proceedings Against the Late Rev. J. Smith," 51.

The contest between Moses and Pharaoh formed part of another dialectic between self and other, as patriarchal militarism related to multi-gendered, collectivist forms of resistance. As historian Marjoleine Kars pointed out, in contrast with a scholarly focus on militant uprisings, enslaved people were involved in myriad nonmilitant forms of resistance; though militant uprisings often focused attention on male militancy,[75] the roles of women as farmers and childcare providers often sustained those rebellions.[76] In the case of the Demerara uprising, the leaders have been identified as men,[77] but some women who were ardent church-goers in Bethel Chapel were likely involved as well. In his diary, Smith described a woman who was part of his congregation: "Lucinda is a member of the church, and much affected with the gospel. She is an old woman, and, though her manager tells her not to come to church, she tells him she will come, even if he cuts her throat for it."[78] Lucinda's defiance in itself represents a significant form of resistance to enslavement and dehumanization.

Contrasting with the anti-nature approach of the colonial system, before and after the end of slavery in 1838, the coerced laborers of British Guiana sought to forge direct and harmonious relationships with land. As economic historian Rawle Farley noted, slaves excelled at cultivating food crops in their personal provision grounds, and they established escapee communities based on subsistence agriculture; one settlement of escaped slaves, destroyed by colonial authorities in 1811, was reported to have stockpiled enough food to feed 700 people for a year.[79] After emancipation, the free village

[75] Examples of female militancy include the Maroon woman, Nanny. See Christensen, Jeanne. *Rastafari Reasoning and the RastaWoman*. Lexington Books, 2014, 10-11.
[76] Kars, "Dodging Rebellion."
[77] McGowan, "The Demerara Revolt," 125–26.
[78] London Missionary Society, "The London Missionary Society's Report of the Proceedings Against the Late Rev. J. Smith," 6.
[79] Farley, "The Rise of the Village Settlements of British Guiana," 103.

movement involved an epic effort on the part of the former slaves to achieve autonomy from the plantation system through connectedness to soil. Initially through squatting and later through pooling resources and purchasing land, a mass exodus was accomplished from the plantations onto privately and collectively-owned farmsteads. Despite the obstacles erected by a fossilized sugar oligarchy, within ten years, nearly 3,000 properties were acquired by former slaves through joint stock purchases, housing 14,127 people.[80]

Free villages meant greater connectivity between the workers, the land, and the biodiverse food crops that were the fruits of their labor—striking a relative balance between the human community and local ecology; "Only so much was cultivated as the villagers and their families required for their support."[81] Connectivity with the land equalized gender roles somewhat, as women were instrumental in the cultivation and marketing of produce.[82] By the 1880s, Indian workers similarly sought economic independence from the plantations through rice farming and cattle-raising. Meeting with greater levels of official accommodation than the African-descended population, many Indian communities succeeded in providing for their own nutritional needs, as well as much of the national consumption.[83]

Beyond subsistence farming, an ethos of interdependence characterized the financial cooperatives, self-help organizations, and labor movements through which poor and working-class people struggled against the exploitative colonial economic system.[84] According to Caribbean historian Barbara P. Josiah, savings and credit associations,

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[80] Farley, 106.
[81] Farley, 105.
[82] Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, 76–77.
[83] Rodney, 88.
[84] Hazel M. Woolford, "The Origins of the Labour Movement," in *Themes in African-Guyanese History*, by James G. Rose, David Granger, and Winston McGowan (Georgetown, Cooperative Republic of Guyana: Free Press, 1998), 277–95.

mutual aid, friendly and burial societies, and financial tools known as "box-hands" allowed African Guianese communities to transcend ethnic differences and "create new worlds."[85] A labor movement spearheaded by an African-descended organizer named Hubert N. Critchlow unified Indian and African workers against the colonial elite.[86] Meanwhile, even as women's limited roles were reinforced by what historian Verene A. Sheppard called "the Victorian ideologies which were being imposed on the Caribbean,"[87] poor urban women challenged these limits, working outside the home in a variety of trades, and taking part in social movements—especially in riots.[88]

To summarize this section, as enslaved and exploited people in British Guiana departed from the dichotomous and hierarchical organization of the plantation and moved toward communities premised on interdependence and mutuality, they challenged dualistic conceptualizations of self and other at the levels of nature, gender, and ethnicity. By 1823, some members of a slave resistance movement expressed their collective identity in terms of the children of Israel, a spiritually significant group destined to reach an ideal homeland together. Through the free village movement and independent farming initiatives, poor and working-class people established greater connectivity between human communities and the soil; an ethos of interdependence and collectivism also shaped mutual aid and friendly societies and social and labor movements that united African and Indian people. Women contributed to these social movements, but they

[85] Josiah, "Creating Worlds," 106.
[86] Jagan, *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana's Freedom*, 337.
[87] Verene Shepherd, *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean* (University of the West Indies Press, 2002), 7, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015056280657.
[88] De Barros, *Order and Place in a Colonial City*, 148; Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, 206–8.

continued to occupy a secondary status, reflecting the persistence of gender dichotomy within the cultures of poor and working-class people in British Guiana.

II. The Third I: African Identity and Universalism in a Multiethnic Society

Questioning the analogy of a single culture of origin as a "root," poet and literary theorist Edouard Glissant emphasized the infinitely fine rhizomes into which roots bifurcate in soil. The soil, representing the infinitely complex inter-being that nourishes the roots of any tradition, is what Glissant called the

> *chaos-monde* (the immeasurable intermixing of cultures) the passive adoptions, irrevocable rejections, naïve beliefs, parallel lives, and the many forms of confrontation or consent, the many syntheses, surpassings, or returns, breaking what has produced them, which compose the fluid, turbulent, stubborn, and possibly organized matter of our common destiny.[89]

This arena of connectivity can be understood as the common ground of universal culture. Valuing and emphasizing this common ground implies viewing the relationship between self and other as a form of connection, rather than of separation—and in this sense challenges dual conceptualizations of self and other. Ultimately, Glissant argued, the aim is to enter into "the dialectic of totality"[90]—in which the self is understood as an expression of the other, and of the whole.

This section addresses how African and Indian people in British Guiana approached this dialectic of totality, as conceptualizations of group belonging based on ethnicity and ancestral origins entered into dialogue with a shared West Indian identity rooted in local conditions and a recognition of mutual determination among diverse

[89] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 139.
[90] Édouard Glissant, 17.

people. Anti-colonial sentiment came to be shaped, in part, by colonial understandings of ethnicity, as people of African descent conceptualized themselves somewhat monolithically as Africans, in juxtaposition with Indians and other ethnic groups in British Guiana. Pan-Africanist and Ethiopianist cultural trends, leading to the veneration of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie among some people of African descent, developed within and alongside a shared West Indian culture that emerged as poor and working-class people observed and reflected one another's traditions.

Throughout the African diaspora, resistance to the white supremacy of European empire became linked to pan-Africanist ideals centered on the concept of African racial unity as a basis for nationalism. Some of British Guiana's social movements intersected with pan-Africanist ideals, including the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) launched by Jamaican pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey. British Guiana hosted seven branches of the UNIA, beginning in 1919 and declining after Garvey's visit to British Guiana in 1937.[91] The UNIA supported the British Guianese labor movement, provided nutritional support to poor people of all ethnic groups, and focused popular attention on the Italian invasion of Ethiopia led by Mussolini in 1935.[92]

In the West Indies, anti-colonial consciousness among people of African descent was often linked to Ethiopia. Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell pointed out that the very word "Ethiopia," which was often used in the Bible to refer to Africa as a whole, had inspired hope and excitement among people of African descent throughout

[91] Nigel Westmaas and Juanita De Barros, "British Guyana," in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume XI: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910–1920*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1983).
[92] Nigel Westmaas and Juanita De Barros, clxx.

West Indian history.[93] Scholar of international relations Robbie Shilliam observed that when Mussolini's army invaded Ethiopia, some plantation strikes in British Guiana appear to have been motivated by solidarity with Ethiopia.[94] Shilliam noted that in one rural uprising, a striker lay down, blocking a bridge, and declared himself an "Abyssinian general."[95] Shilliam suggested that even at this early stage, some African Guianese people regarded Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie as their king, and perhaps their God.

According to historian Robert Hill, the Jamaican preacher Leonard Howell began selling photographs of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, whom he identified as the returned messiah, in Kingston in 1932.[96] In the photographs, the young Selassie, bearded and wearing a crown, appeared peaceful and solemn, not unlike many Europeanized images of Jesus Christ. According to ethnographer Barry Chevannes, these photographs were responsible for convincing many Jamaicans of Selassie's divinity; Chevannes quoted one Rastafari elder who said: "It drive me home, you know…Dead stamp, dead stamp of Jesus Christ…Most of the people saw the photograph say, 'But look, Christ change! This one is black.'"[97]

[93] Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Rastas' Psychology of Blackness, Resistance, and Somebodiness," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 40–41.
[94] Robbie Shilliam, "The Impact of the 1935 Italian/Ethiopian War in Guyana," *Robbie Shilliam* (blog), March 29, 2013, https://robbieshilliam.wordpress.com/2013/03/29/roots-and-routes-of-the-italianethiopian-war-in-guyana/.
[95] Shilliam.
[96] Robert A. Hill, *Dread History: Leonard P. Howell and Millenarian Visions in the Early Rastafarian Religion* (Chicago, IL : Kingston, Jamaica: Research Associates School Times Publications/Frontline Distribution Int'l ; Miguel Lorne Publishers, 2001), 29.
[97] Chevannes, 115.

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Even as pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism oriented people of African descent to ethnic identities tied to race and ancestral origins, a shared West Indian culture was emerging. By the 1920s, the Indian population had surpassed the African population in British Guiana.[99] A surplus of labor harmed both groups' wages and bargaining power, as poor economic conditions forced them to compete for meager resources.[100] Adding to the grievances of the African Guianese workers, public wealth generated through slave labor had been used to fund the immigration of the wage-earners who replaced African Guianese workers in the fields.[101] Meanwhile, African-descended people had largely moved away from the plantations, where the majority of Indian laborers were forced to remain during the period of indenture, resulting in the spatial separation of the two

[98] Lucy McKeon, "The True Story of Rastafari," *The New York Review of Books* (blog), January 6, 2017, http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/01/06/the-true-story-of-rastafari/.
[99] Winston Mc Gowan, James G. Rose, and David Granger, *Themes in African-Guyanese History* (Georgetown, Cooperative Republic of Guyana: Free Press, 1998), 227.
[100] Kean Gibson, *Comfa Religion and Creole Language in a Caribbean Community* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 6.
[101] Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, 175; Thompson, "Symbolic Legacies of Slavery in Guyana," 176.

groups. Finally, racist colonial stereotypes contributed to the groups' negative views of one another.[102]

However, according to Walter Rodney, Indian and African laborers of diverse backgrounds often resisted forced working conditions in mutually reinforcing ways.[103] Although Rodney identified the myth of Indian docility as a source of frustration among African-descended laborers, he described a pragmatic "dialectic of accommodation and resistance"[104] to forced labor among both groups. Tensions appeared to resolve as Indians completed their indenture and moved away from the plantations; a British report in 1953 noted "amity"[105] among African and Indian Guianese people, and projected a trend toward a shared national culture.

Spiritual cultures developing in the early 20th century reflected permeable identities among Indian and African people in British Guiana. For example, ethnographer Judith Roback described the Jordanites, or White Robed Army, a spiritual movement that developed among lower-class, African-descended people in the 1920s.[106] According to Roback's retelling of folk history, the Jordanite faith was founded on the teachings of Nathaniel Jordan. Jordan was taught by a Barbadian man named Bowen, the student of a Grenadian named Joseph MacClaren, in turn the student of an Indian teacher in Trinidad named Baghwan Das or Maharaj;[107] the faith was thus collaboratively developed by West Indians of Indian and African ancestry.

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[102] Thompson, "Symbolic Legacies of Slavery in Guyana," 194.
[103] Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, 151–73.
[104] Rodney, 151.
[105] Spinner, *A Political and Social History of Guyana, 1945-1983*, 33.
[106] Roback, "The White-Robed Army."
[107] Roback, 237–38.

Absorbing Hindu-derived spiritual practices, the White Robed Army represented connectivity between cultures of distinct ancestral origins. In this, the Jordanites paralleled Revivalism and Rastafari in Jamaica. As Laxmi and Ajai Mansingh noted, the cultures of indentured Indians in Jamaica had been largely stigmatized and ignored; "[t]he only people who did find and enjoy a metaphysical relationship with the Indians [in Jamaica] became Revivalists in the 1860s and Rastafarians in the 1930s."[108] In 1935, the Rastafari preacher Leonard Howell authored a text entitled *The Promised Key*, under the pseudonym G.G. Maragh, short for Gangunguru Maragh—a Sanskrit-based name.[109] Robert Hill described chanting, the use of Sanskrit-like words, fasting, the ritual use of cannabis, and "a belief in the power of magic"[110] as Hindu aspects of the Howellite movement, and suggested that an Indian man named Laloo who lived in Howell's community may have been the source of these traditions.[111] Meanwhile, Helene Lee's 2014 film about Howell, "First Rasta," connected the conceptualization of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie as an incarnate deity to the influence of Hindu spirituality in Jamaica.[112]

In British Guiana, the White Robed Army preceded Rastafari culture in embracing significant aspects of African, Indian, and European cultures. The Jordanites used the Bible, among other sacred texts, and like the Rastas, they refrained from cutting or straightening their hair.[113] They wore modest, all-white clothing, which was

[108] Mansingh, *Home Away from Home*, 4.
[109] Helene Lee, *First Rasta: Leonard Howell and the Rise of Rastafarianism*, eBook (Chicago Review Press, 2005), 97–98, http://www.myilibrary.com?id=537501.
[110] Hill, *Dread History*, 43.
[111] Hill, 43.
[112] Helene Lee, *The First Rasta*, eVideo (ArtMattan Productions, 2014), http://proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/login?url=http://tulane.kanopystreaming.com/node/116374.
[113] Roback, "The White-Robed Army," 241.

understood among the Jordanites as traditional African dress,[114] while according to Odaipul Singh, many Guyanese Hindu practices also involved wearing all white.[115] Jordanites removed their shoes before entering a church, a practice they explained through Biblical references; the prohibition of shoes within a temple was also typical of Hindu spiritual culture.[116] Like many Guyanese Rastas, many Jordanites were strict vegetarians, avoiding eggs, fish, and all animal products; they also avoided salt and abstained from tobacco and alcohol, with the exception, in some cases, of local fruit wine.[117] The Jordanites' emphasis on purity of food as a means of achieving longevity was reminiscent of Indian Ayurvedic principles centered on extending life through meditation, food, and medicinal practices, but also of a Bantu concept of "vital force."[118] This array of practices defied simplistic identification with Africa, and instead reflected the transcultural "dialectic of totality"[119] described by Glissant.

At the same time, the White Robed Army reiterated the dualistic gender paradigm that characterized the Bible and colonial culture, and which would later influence Rastafari culture. In church, men and women were segregated, and menstruating women were excluded.[120] The religion was organized hierarchically; women were restricted to inferior roles.[121] This approach suggests that the divisions between self and other at the level of gender were more deeply rooted than the ethnic divisions the Jordanite faith transcended.

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[114] Roback, 242.
[115] Odaipaul Singh, "Hinduism in Guyana: A Study in Traditions of Worship" (The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1993), 142, Hinduism in Guyana: A Study in Traditions of Worship.
[116] Singh, 135.
[117] Roback, "The White-Robed Army," 244–45.
[118] Gibson, *Comfa Religion and Creole Language in a Caribbean Community*, 36.
[119] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 17.
[120] Roback, "The White-Robed Army," 250.
[121] Roback, 258–59.

To sum up this section, as anti-colonial sentiment grew in British Guiana, ethnic divisions developed alongside a shared, local identity among poor and working-class people. While pan-Africanist and Ethiopianist movements oriented people of African descent to ancestral origins in Africa, Africans and Indians also developed a shared local culture, exemplified by the spiritual traditions of the Jordanites. This shared culture embodied connectivity between self and other and the mutually-nourishing relationships between diverse beings that is the principle of the soil. However, women were still viewed as essentially different from and inferior to men across the cultures of British Guiana.

III. Independence and the Cold War

Sociologist Kimberly D. Nettles quoted a woman of mixed Indian and African descent, Berta Roscoe, who helped another woman sell black-market flour during a time of severe restrictions on imports to Guyana. Berta Roscoe said:

> At one time a lady was sellin' the flour–the police they were in the district trying to take away persons with the banned foodstuff. So I took upon myself to take the flour from the woman and help her hide the flour by puttin' it in huge plastic bags and puttin' it in our pond. And, bein' that we use to make plenty oil at the time, we had these big four gallon cans. So what we use to do, when the woman come with the flour, we just place it in the tin and leave the tin outside, like the children are playin' with them out in the yard. So we were not afraid.[122]

Berta Roscoe's recollections reflect the hardship and repression poor and working-class people in faced under the People's National Congress (PNC) led by Guyanese head of state, Forbes Burnham. Only through the pragmatic cooperation of people like Berta and

[122] Kimberly D. Nettles, "Becoming Red Thread Women: Alternative Visions of Gendered Politics in Post-Independence Guyana," *Social Movement Studies* 6, no. 1 (May 1, 2007): 66–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/14742830701251336.

the flour seller—rooted in an awareness of their interdependent fates, rather than ethnic or ideological considerations—did many communities survive the deprivation and violence of this era. The solidarity of hungry mothers and children gave the lie to the PNC's divisive interpretation of black power and pan-Africanism, which disguised the interests of the United States government and international capital at the expense of Guyana's poor and working-class people.

In this section, I discuss how covert US intervention resulted in the emergence of African- and Indian-backed political parties engaged in mutual campaigns of antagonism and violence, as the colony of British Guiana became the independent nation of Guyana in 1966. I argue that this political climate challenged the relevance of ethnicity as a foundation for national identity; more nuanced approaches to the mutual interests of poor and working-class people arose among activists and intellectuals in Guyana who were guided by principles of interdependence among diverse groups, rather than rigid constructions of race and ethnicity.

The independence movement in British Guiana developed along multiethnic, socialist lines. Its principal leaders—Cheddi Jagan, who was of Indian descent, and Forbes Burnham, who was of African descent—initially worked together. In 1950, along with Jagan's white American wife, Janet, black power activist Eusi Kwayana, who came from the largely African-descended neighborhood of Buxton (and then went by his given name, Sidney King), and other activists from diverse ethnic groups, Jagan and Burnham launched the People's Progressive Party (PPP), advocating for "an independent nation built on socialist principles."[123]

[123] Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana*, 27.

The nationalist movement coincided with a global conflict orchestrated by the US and the Soviet Union. Political historian Stephen G. Rabe noted that the administration of US president Harry S. Truman had secretly adopted the view, in National Security Council Memorandum No. 68 (NSC 68) in 1950, that "the Soviet Union directed the international Communist movement and was bent on world domination"[124]—a view based self-centered fear of the Soviet Union, and by extension, all communists and socialists. Subsequent U.S. administrations embraced and expounded on NSC 68, prompting the United States government to stockpile nuclear weapons and engage in violence against nations and individuals all over the world.[125]

The US government and the CIA, fearing Cheddi Jagan's "pro-Communist"[126] ideology, began to cultivate an image of Burnham as a moderate, democratic leader; Burnham, who was consistently described as a "racist" and an "opportunist" in British and US intelligence,[127] used their bias to his advantage. In 1955, Burnham led a split in the PPP, and in 1958 founded his own party: the People's National Congress (PNC); Burnham was joined by Eusi Kwayana and other prominent black activists.[128] The PPP and PNC both appealed to ethnic insecurities in the bitter competition that ensued; the PPP used a Hindi slogan that meant "vote for your own,"[129] while the PNC warned African Guyanese voters that Indians wanted to steal their jobs and businesses.[130] Through the AFL-CIO, the CIA campaigned for Burnham and engaged in publicity and

[124] Rabe, 35.
[125] Rabe, 35.
[126] "Current Intelligence Country Handbook: Guyana" (Central Intelligence Agency, July 1, 1966), 1, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00826A003200120001-7.pdf.
[127] Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana*, 173.
[128] Rabe, 53.
[129] Rabe, 79.
[130] Rabe, 54.

direct financing of the PNC and other anti-PPP groups.[131] Nevertheless, the PPP, led by Jagan, won elections in 1957 and 1961.[132]

US President John F. Kennedy associated Jagan with Soviet-aligned Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, and pressured the British colonial government to impose new elections before granting Guyana's independence.[133] When the British hesitated, it appears that Kennedy personally ordered the CIA to foment the riots in which much of Georgetown burned to the ground.[134] Threatened with continuing chaos and violence, the British colonial government agreed impose new elections by a system of proportional representation designed to favor Burnham.[135]

In the run-up to the 1964 election, the CIA and AFL-CIO funded and campaigned for the PNC, the United Front (UF), and other opposition parties.[136] The CIA organized a strike against Jagan and the PPP, resulting in 800 casualties and thousands of displaced people in the wake of widespread fires and explosions.[137] These events marked a turning point in the nation's ethnic relations. Afterward, five thousand Indian- and African-descended people signed a petition requesting the partition of the country along ethnic lines; previously integrated villages became racially segregated.[138] During the strike, Burnham was reported to have personally incited violence in "places where they grow rice"—alluding to Indian villages.[139]

[131] Rabe, 57.
[132] Rabe, 80.
[133] Rabe, 81.
[134] Rabe, 89.
[135] Rabe, 105.
[136] Rabe, 130.
[137] Rabe, 126.
[138] Rabe, 126.
[139] Rabe, 111.

Despite the widespread violence, voter intimidation, gerrymandering, and thousands of dubious overseas votes, the PPP won 45.8% of the vote in 1964; the PNC 40.5%, and the UF 12.4%.[140] Through proportional representation, the PNC and UF were allowed to forge a coalition; Burnham became the Prime Minister, and May 26, 1966, British Guiana became the independent nation of Guyana.[141] Burnham would retain power through fraudulent, anti-democratic means from 1964 until his death in 1985.[142]

The antidemocratic rule of Forbes Burnham and the PNC illustrated the shortcomings of ethnicity as a meaningful source of unity in a multiethnic society. Sociologist Michael O. West referred to Burnham as puppet of "American overlords"[143] and noted his close relationships with State Department officials and US presidents. Nevertheless, Burnham initially enjoyed popularity among black power advocates, including Eusi Kwayana, because, according to historian Kate Quinn, he was the most vocal proponent of black power among all the Caribbean leaders, and he was understood internationally as a legitimate representative of black nationalist aims.[144] Nevertheless, Kate Quinn concluded that Burnham's engagement with black power amounted to manipulation, containment, and "opportunism,"[145] and scholars have underscored that his administration ultimately harmed people of both African and Indian descent. Mismanagement and corruption led to economic collapse, resulting in massive waves of

[140] Rabe, 138.
[141] Rabe, 139.
[142] Rabe, 170; Spinner, *A Political and Social History of Guyana, 1945-1983*, 211; Quinn, "'Sitting on a Volcano' Black Power in Burnham's Guyana," 138; Clive Y. Thomas, "State Capitalism in Guyana: An Assessment of Burnham's Co-Operative Socialist Republic," in *Themes in African-Guyanese History*, by James G. Rose, David Granger, and Winston McGowan (Georgetown, Cooperative Republic of Guyana: Free Press, 1998), 378.
[143] West, "Seeing Darkly," 80.
[144] Quinn, "'Sitting on a Volcano' Black Power in Burnham's Guyana," 137.
[145] Quinn, 150.

emigration.[146] Loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) were acquired and squandered; Burnham used revolutionary rhetoric to justify the massive export of wealth that followed.[147] Human rights were eroded and political assassinations were used to silence opposition.[148] According to political scientist Horace Campbell, "Africans in Guyana had been inculcated with ideas that they were the guardians of black dignity by the PNC, but the regime showed that this black consciousness was a sinister mythology which forced the people to live on their knees."[149]

The most blatant manifestation of this sinister racial mythology was the House of Israel, a group whose membership overlapped with the Guyana Defense Force, the police, and the government. According to Joseph Hamilton, a prominent member of the House of Israel, the organization's beliefs included:

> i. That the original Jews were black Africans;
> ii. Self love which meant in effect that their members were supportive of one another as people of African descent;
> iii. Reliance on oneself as a people supporting one another in businesses based on our 'ethnic origin.'[150]

The House of Israel acted as a political strong-arm organization, protecting its members and supporters through the manipulation of public officials and the intimidation of opposition through violence, including violence against people of African descent.[151]

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[146] Thomas, "State Capitalism in Guyana: An Assessment of Burnham's Co-Operative Socialist Republic," 382.
[147] Thomas, 386–87.
[148] Thomas, 390.
[149] Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance*, 172.
[150] The Commission of Inquiry on the Death of Walter Rodney, "Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Enquire and Report on the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of the Late Dr. Walter Rodney on Thirteenth Day of June, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Eighty at Georgetown" (The Commission on the Death of Walter Rodney, February 8, 2016), 33, http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/wrcoi/1.
[151] The Commission of Inquiry on the Death of Walter Rodney, 35.

In response to these developments, social movements emerged that were rooted in interdependence among diverse people. In 1973, landless African and Indian farmers launched an occupation of unused, foreign-owned lands under the auspices of the African Society for Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA), a pan-Africanist organization led by Eusi Kwayana. Kwayana described the move as a "joint assault on imperialist property"[152] that established an "honorable basis for unity among the exploited masses." The land occupation challenged Burnham's complacency toward poor farmers and forced him to commit to the nationalization of the lands, even as he ordered the eviction of the occupiers.[153] Nigel Westmaas identified this as the beginning of a larger movement of trans-ethnic solidarity that would culminate in the Working People's Alliance (WPA), an organization that united members of various civic and political groups desiring to transcend the PPP-PNC divide.

As the WPA grew, it engaged in publishing and educational efforts, and eventually became a political party.[154] Among its prominent supporters was the Guyanese scholar, Walter Rodney. A professor of history trained in Jamaica and London, Rodney had spent time among Rastafari communities in Kingston, and praised the Rastas for having "completely and inexorably broken with Jamaican society and its values,"[155] which he equated with "imperialism and its local lackeys." Such views put Rodney at odds with the Jamaican ruling class, and he was blocked from re-entering Jamaica in 1968. His banning inspired riots in Kingston that contributed to a growing awareness of

[152] Eusi Kwayana, "Burnhamism, Jaganism and the People of Guyana," *The Black Scholar* 4, no. 8/9 (June 1973): 72.
[153] Kwayana, "Burnhamism, Jaganism and the People of Guyana."
[154] Westmaas, "Resisting Orthodoxy," 70–75.
[155] Walter Rodney, *The Groundings With My Brothers* (Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1969), 13.

Rastafari culture. Rodney taught at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania until returning to his native country in 1974 to teach at the University of Guyana. When Burnham ordered that his position at the university be revoked, Rodney devoted himself to activism with the WPA.

Departing from the culture of ethnic divisiveness that had characterized the black power movement, Rodney and Kwayana included all nonwhite people in their respective conceptualizations of blackness. Responding to a prevalent construction of African identity that was tied to the historical suffering of African slaves, Rodney emphasized the past suffering of Indian workers, writing, "The West Indies has made a unique contribution to the history of suffering in the world, and Indians have provided part of that contribution since indentures were first introduced."[156] Eusi Kwayana wrote in 1968: "If black power means the overthrow of white power by non whites, by black men and brown men and yellow men on a world scale, we identify ourselves with it completely and without reserve."[157] As Africana studies scholar Nigel Westmaas noted, Kwayana defined pan-Africanism in autopoetic, rather than monolithic terms, as

> A dynamic movement continually transforming itself and gaining new ideological perspectives in light of changing circumstance. Flowing from masses, groups and occasionally leaders of governments. Tending to the goal of restoration of freedom and dignity at home and abroad.[158]

[156] Rodney, 26.
[157] Nigel Westmaas, "An Organic Activist: Eusi Kwayana, Guyana, and Global Pan-Africanism," in *Black Power in the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 166, https://muse.jhu.edu/book/28774.
[158] Westmaas, "An Organic Activist: Eusi Kwayana, Guyana, and Global Pan-Africanism."

Kwayana also focused on "how to share power in multi-ethnic societies and how to help women's emancipation."[159] These views presented a basis for collective action not in ethnic identity but in the potential of diverse people for mutual liberation.

In 1980, Walter Rodney was assassinated when a two-way radio he purchased from a government operative turned out to be an explosive and detonated in Rodney's lap.[160] Rodney's assassination demonstrated the vulnerability of movements premised on nonviolence and interdependence in a violently polarized world; it also revealed unequivocally that Burnham's PNC worked against black Guyanese radicalism. According to WPA activist Vanda Radzik, "You couldn't say it was a racial-card being played. This was a young, brilliant, Black Guyanese who was saying: 'This has to stop.' You know? He was an inspiration to everybody."[161] WPA sympathizer Karen de Souza described Rodney's funeral as "the most massive display of racial solidarity in the recent history of Guyana with over 30,000 in attendance."[162]

Guyanese people across ethnicities continued to work toward communities defined by interdependence. In 1986, several women who had been involved with the WPA collaborated with women in poor communities to establish the Red Thread women's organization, with the agenda

> to raise women's consciousness; make links across difference (race/ethnicity, class/status); increase women's access to earnings and education; improve community access to running water and food; to (re)value women's daily labor

[159] Westmaas, 161.
[160] The Commission of Inquiry on the Death of Walter Rodney, "Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Enquire and Report on the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of the Late Dr. Walter Rodney on Thirteenth Day of June, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Eighty at Georgetown," 49–58.
[161] Nettles, "Becoming Red Thread Women," 66.
[162] The Commission of Inquiry on the Death of Walter Rodney, "Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Enquire and Report on the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of the Late Dr. Walter Rodney on Thirteenth Day of June, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Eighty at Georgetown," 28.

> and their roles as caretakers and providers; and to challenge the prevailing male-centered political culture; all within a critique of global capitalism.[163]

Among other initiatives, Red Thread women engaged in income-generating projects and educational outreach among Guyanese women across ethnic groups, establishing social connectivity beyond the realm of partisan politics.[164] As recorded by Kimberly D. Nettles, Red Thread organizer Danuta Radzik explained,

> [W]omen did not want to join the political party. What they wanted is to get food and good education and good health care and whatever basic things that they were not getting in the society. So we decided that we'd form a women's group. Come out of the party, form a women's group.[165]

The Red Thread organization embodied the tenets of basic interdependence that had transcended ethnic and political divisiveness throughout Guyana's history.

To conclude this section, the conceptual self-other dichotomy of the Cold War distorted Guyana's independence movement, resulting in violent ethnic fissures and bitter political partisanship. However, poor and working-class people continued to pursue communities defined by mutuality; the occupation of foreign-owned lands involving both African and Indian Guyanese people prompted a movement of solidarity and grassroots social change. The assassination of Walter Rodney illustrated the fragility of such efforts, but it also revealed an underlying desire for reconciliation among the Guyanese people.

Conclusions

[163] Nettles, "Becoming Red Thread Women," 58.
[164] Nettles, 69.
[165] Nettles, 70.

This chapter has discussed how dichotomous, hierarchical conceptualizations of self and other competed with an ethos of interdependence and collectivism in Guyana's social history. Divisions between self and other engendered movements premised on integration, as diverse poor and working-class people worked according to their common interests and the synergistic energies of the natural world. The dialectic between self and other—or separation from and integration into the universal whole—would later shape the formation of Rastafari culture in Guyana.

Whereas colonial culture treated nature, women, and nonwhite humanity as other than and inferior to the European, male self, enslaved, poor, and working-class people throughout Guyanese history often conceptualized themselves as a collective and acted according to principles of interdependence and integration with ecology. Identifying with the enslaved Israelites of the Old Testament, African slaves in Guyana cast themselves as a collective on a divine journey to a land of mutual belonging. This symbolism would resonate across generations, contributing to a concept of interdependent selfhood within Rastafari culture.

Rastafari culture would also embody the dialectic between a cultural orientation to Africa and an emergent West Indian culture in post-emancipation British Guiana. Seeking to address the destruction of precolonial cultures through colonization, African diasporic people constructed a pan-African identity tied to concepts of race and ancestral origins in Africa. Some expressed allegiance to Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. At the same time, people of African and Indian descent developed a mutual identity rooted in shared local circumstances. On the spiritual plane, this yielded the culture of the Jordanites, or White Robed Army, which drew from

Hindu, Christian, and indigenous African spiritual traditions. Rastafari culture would develop strong Afrocentric and Ethiopianist aspects, while embodying African, Christian, Hindu, and universal spiritual currents.

Through covert US intervention, global Cold-War divisions between self and other gave rise to ethnically polarized political parties in British Guiana/Guyana. After independence in 1966, abuses of power by the PNC government and its leader, Forbes Burnham, would discredit allopoetic interpretations of black nationalism as a basis for shared selfhood in a multiethnic, decolonizing nation. The corruption and violence of the PNC, and the emergence of groups like the House of Israel would alienate some progressive intellectuals from the politics of black nationalism, with lasting consequences for the Rastafari movement in Guyana.

Rastafari culture would also inherit the dichotomous gender paradigm that prevailed throughout Guyanese history. In colonial British Guiana, the relationship between colonizer and colonized was mirrored by the relationship of women to men at every level of society. Although women were crucial participants in the social movements that challenged the colonial system, they were not often recognized or conceptualized as leaders. In the post-Burnham era, the Red Thread organization fostered interdependence among women across ethnicity, class, and political ideology. Reflecting these larger trends, Rastafari would emerge as a heavily patriarchal culture, but would eventually arrive at the insights into the importance of women's participation that informed the Red Thread organization.

Chapter Two will use ethnographic data to connect Rastafari culture in Guyana to the historical trends discussed above. I will illustrate how Rastafari culture crossed

conceptual and practical boundaries between self and other, constructing a worldview that contrasted with colonial epistemology and cultivating communities defined by interdependence and ecological sustainability.

CHAPTER TWO: THE DESERT TROD

In Chapter One, I discussed the dialectical interplay between dichotomous, hierarchical colonial epistemology and the people's movements that challenged it throughout Guyanese history. Using ethnographic data, this chapter situates Rastafari culture within this ongoing dynamic, focusing on how Rastafari culture challenged the dichotomous, hierarchical approach to humanity and nature that was a persistent legacy of colonial culture. The central argument of this chapter is that Rastafari culture crossed conceptual and practical boundaries between self and other, cultivating communities defined by social interdependence and ecological sustainability.

In the first section, I argue that Rastafari epistemology united spiritual and physical worlds, and humanity and divinity, while challenging the othering and devaluation of African people associated with colonial culture. Rastas experienced God in nature and themselves; their mystical and introspective spiritual approaches became integrated into the collective project of African cultural reclamation that was underway throughout the Caribbean. Traditions of Biblical discourse associated with Jamaican Rastafari culture helped to structure these cultural currents and supported the doctrine of the divinity of Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie. In part, Selassie's divinity signaled the potential of all Rastas to achieve divine perfection, and motivated community-oriented action on behalf of an ideal community.

In the second section, I discuss the evolution of the Guyana Rastafari Council (GRC), illustrating how the conceptual framework described above led to the

development of Rastafari communities defined by reciprocity and oriented toward soil. Originally known as Black Culture Craft, the GRC cultivated sustainable livelihoods, rituals, food customs, medicinal practices, and artistic expression. GRC provided life-saving support for poor and undervalued people through counseling, communal lifestyles, integration with nature, herbal medicine, vocational training, and mentorship. The GRC also envisioned and pursued land-based community development.

I. Jamaican I-ngels

This section provides a brief overview of the introduction of Jamaican Rastafari culture to Guyana. The main observation of this section is that Jamaican Rastafari culture gave structure to existing cultural trends in Guyana beginning in the 1970s. While the underlying currents of Christianity, pan-African consciousness, and Hindu cultural elements had long been present in Guyana, distinct Rastafari forms arrived via contact with Jamaican musical culture and Rastas beginning in the 1970s.

Widespread exposure to Rastafari culture in Guyana occurred initially through commercial music and state-sponsored festivals. In 1972, the PNC government launched the cultural arts festival, Carifesta, which hosted Rastafari-linked musical performers including Count Ossie and the Mystical Revelation of Rastafari. These performances exposed Guyanese people to "Nyah Binghis,"[166] the drumming and chanting sessions central to Rastafari spiritual rituals.

[166] Cambridge, *Musical Life in Guyana*, 197.

The Rastafari Brethren of Jamaica chanting as they make their way through the audience to the stage at Queen's College on Thursday night.

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The Rastafari Brethren of Jamaica were well received when they made their appearance at Queen's College. Picture shows two girls executing an African dance to an African tune played by the troupe.

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[167] "Rastafari Brethren of Jamaica Chanting" (Weekend Post and Sunday Argosy, September 3, 1972), Digital Library of the Caribbean, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/CA00199910/00001.

[168] "Rastafari (Image)" (Weekend Post and Sunday Argosy, September 3, 1972), Digital Library of the Caribbean, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/CA00199910/00001.

Popular recordings of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and other Rasta-linked reggae musicians became available during the 1970s. Ras Leon Saul, a Guyanese Rastafari intellectual and playwright who served as President of the GRC from 2011-2015, published a historical overview of the Rastafari movement in Guyana in 2017. Ras Leon Saul wrote:

> Along with the reggae explosion of the 1970s, Rastafari's acceptance in Guyana also began after Bob Marley's music became more popular…in the mid-70s. This sparked the fire that lit the consciousness of Rastafari in the hearts of many young Guyanese. The visit to these shores by [the reggae group] Third World around 1977…helped cement the Rasta message to aspiring Guyanese dreadlocks. Before that, there was the visit to Guyana by Count Ossie and the Royal Sons of Negus to Carifesta, along with cultural troupes from the Caribbean, especially Jamaica that brought the message home.[169]

The influence of Jamaican reggae and Rastafari culture prompted the development of local Guyanese reggae and Rastafari cultural activities. Reggae Fever, a festival organized by GRC elder and music producer, Jah Lion, and Ras Leon Saul, was the first major local event. Ras Swifty, a Rasta elder, musician, and founding member of the GRC, recalled:

> From that show [Reggae Fever] was where everybody get a more insight and feelings about Rastafari, cause seen Rastafari in different aspects. People dress up in African garments, people walk just half-naked, people who take crocus bag make clothes, people who dress to the best, cause they sighting Rastafari's the best. So with that aspect, through music, is how we get teachings…And that's how we start we living in Guyana.[170]

Ras Leon Saul also cited Reggae Fever as a formative experience. He said:

> [Reggae Fever] was the first big Rastafari musical showcase at the National Park, which had totally all local Guyanese Rastafari artistes. And we packed the

[169] Saul, "First Rastas in British Guiana Were Garveyites," 7.
[170] Ras Swifty, Rastafari in Guyana, July 13, 2017.

> National Park. It was like 10,000 or more people turned out for that. And I think that that's when, I think from that point Rastafari started to really take off.[171]

The cultural use of marijuana was re-introduced to Guyana around this time. Initially brought to the West Indies by indentured Indian immigrants in the 19th century, the social and ritual use of cannabis had diminished in British Guiana throughout the 20th century.[172] However, it had become entrenched among rural African-descended Jamaicans,[173] and had constituted an integral part of Rastafari culture since the 1930s, when Leonard Howell became the first large-scale "ganja-*farmer*,"[174] distributing marijuana to most of the Rastas in Kingston.

Introduced through music and festivity, local interpretations of Rastafari culture developed through an organic interplay of external and internal means. Rasta elders remembered the gradual articulation of Rastafari culture as an "each one teach one,"[175] word-of-mouth exchange. Formal groups were established later, including the Twelve Tribes of Israel in 1986[176] and the Nyabinghi Order in 1997,[177] both of which originated in Jamaica. The Guyana Rastafari Council became a formal organization in 1999, although its members had collaborated in Guyana under other names since the mid-1980s. Jamaican Rastas continued to be involved in processes of formalization. Ras Simeon, President of the Guyana Rastafari Council, said:

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[171] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana, interview by Erin Lierl, July 22, 2017.
[172] James H. Mills, *Cannabis Britannica: Empire, Trade, and Prohibition, 1800-1928* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 140.
[173] Ansley Hamid, *The Ganja Complex: Rastafari and Marijuana* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2002), xxxvii.
[174] Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 122.
[175] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.
[176] Brother Ruben, personal communication.
[177] Ras Swifty, Rastafari in Guyana.

> In Jamaica had a brother name Boanerges that establish Black Youth Faith in a early time. That was one of the patriarch of the Rastafari movement in Jamaica, that establish the house of Nyabinghi in Guyana…One of the ancient patriarch in Jamaica, what come to Guyana with the other…Rastafari I-ngels, and established this Nyabinghi order. That was done here already, but never had a churchical tabernacle…and the guidelines of the ancient order of Nyabinghi and so on, they hadn't that. But man living the black-heart life. You sight? Knocking drum, singing, Binghi.[178]

Whereas Rastas in Guyana were already tuned into the spiritual and emotional frequencies of Rastafari ("living the black-heart life"), including drumming, chanting, and "Binghi"—a word used by early Rastas in Guyana to denote informal gatherings centered on music and food—Ras Boanerges and other "I-ngels" (angels) would continue to shape Guyanese Rastafari culture through the articulation of formal doctrines and practices over the following decades.

To sum up this section, Jamaican Rastafari culture was introduced to Guyana through a combination of formal and informal means, including migration, personal research, the music industry, and state-sponsored and independent festivals. Nourished by existing cultural trends within Guyana, the local Rastafari culture drew inspiration as well as continuous doctrinal and formal structure from Jamaican sources, beginning in the 1970s.

II. Crossing Conceptual Deserts: God, Nature, and Africa

Discussing the significance of the Bible in Rastafari culture, Ras Khafra said:

> The Bible really shows you that the desert separates the house of bondage from the house of freedom. For move from Egypt to Israel, you got pass through the desert, like Moses. This livity represents the desert trod. Because it's about

[178] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana, interview by Erin Lierl, July 12, 2017.

> moving from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, from ignorance to enlightenment, from chaos to order. You know? We just got to be prepared… Because you can't enter with a certain kind of mentality and livity…So, you're passing through the desert. And through the desert trod, that is what is…mould you into Christhood and Godhood.[179]

Ras Khafra interpreted the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the promised land in terms of Rastafari livity, or lifestyle—the matrix of practices and beliefs designed to bring about mental and spiritual transformation among Rastafari individuals and communities, and to liberate them from dependence on the hegemonic system. Through their livity, Rastas sought to cross the psychological, spiritual, and material barriers that separated them from God, community, and land.

This section addresses how Rastafari culture in Guyana challenged the dichotomous, hierarchical approach to humanity and nature associated with colonial culture. I argue that Rastafari culture transcended conceptual divides between self and other, humanity and nature, and physical and spiritual worlds. Rastas approached divinity in mystical, introspective ways that contrasted with the Europeanized Christian traditions in which many were raised. Reclaiming distorted and suppressed aspects of African history and culture, Rastas conceptualized themselves as a collective united by shared African heritage. This collective was later united by the symbol of the divine Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. These views motivated the development of Rastafari communities defined by social interdependence and ecological sustainability.

Christianity played an important role in shaping the identities and spiritual experiences of many Rastas during their childhood. Christian religions had accounted for

[179] Ras Khafra, Rastafari in Guyana.

the majority of religious membership in Guyana since the colonial era,[180] and most of the Rastas I met were raised in Christian backgrounds. Ras Swifty said:

> Most people in Rastafari come out from a churchical background. Cause in we olden days, we's parents was go to church. And you, as youth, you have to go with them every certain day…At the youthful age you have to go to church. So we had a churchical background in all of us life.[181]

Ras Simeon described approaching God in his Catholic upbringing. He said:

> I used to go Sunday school and the fear of God rest upon I. So praying to God was for sort out your life, through how your parents troubling…it was praying for a meaning…Me mother and father never got house and land then. And I used to go and pay the rent. Forty dollar: one month rent at that time. And when you pay the forty dollar a month rent, money ain't there for another month for you could buy no kind of ration. So it was a connection to God for prayers as a part of living with some kind of protection from God.[182]

His relationship with God helped Ras Simeon to cope with anxiety and physical needs related to poverty—an experience likely shared by many young Christians in Guyana.

However, a more direct approach to divinity carried many Rastas beyond the Christian traditions of their families. In Ras Simeon's case, a powerful spiritual experience was triggered by bathing in a "black water"[183] spring in the town of Bartica when he was about 20 years old. Ras Simeon said:

> I spent three days in Bartica, bathe in the black water. So, bathe in the black water was like bathing in the river Jordan…It was a spiritual bath, bai…I see life different from that Iwa.[184] From that time, the light was different. When I come [back] to Georgetown, it's like, I's no longer physical man. You sight? Me ain't got physical desire, need. It was beyond that. That's why Rasta coulda burn out money and burn out clothes and burn work, and start to seek for your heritage. You sight? You know you're born for a purpose. You sight? It deh in your genes.

[180] Beaie, "The Republic of Guyana Population and Housing Census 2002 National Census Report," 33.
[181] Ras Swifty, Rastafari in Guyana.
[182] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.
[183] Sediment-darkened fresh water.
[184] The term "Iwa" references time, i.e., "hour," as well as the notion of power and the concept of universe/cosmology

> You connect to the Bible. You connect to history. So it must bring some inspiration somehow somewhere. Through common sense. Through common sense; you ain't gotta be educated. Through your common sense. Through your humanity. It's God make mankind, so once you is a person, you sight, you could feel the vibes. Nature.[185]

Contrasting with the hostility toward nature found in colonial Christianity, Ras Simeon's spiritual awakening was prompted by immersion in a natural spring, indicating his unmediated embrace of a natural world he saw as benevolent and instructive. Ras Simeon cited this experience as the critical moment in which he converted to, or "sight" Rastafari, connecting Rastafari spirituality with his departure from the anthropocentrism of Georgetown and the Catholic spiritual system in which he was raised.

Ras Simeon's experience at the spring indicated a relationship with divinity not in an abstract or celestial realm, but in the natural world and within Ras Simeon's own consciousness. He said:

> You can't read about God and accept God. God got spring from out a you own heart…It something speaking from within the kingdom. Deep within your kingdom. Far, far, far inside. You know? That separate you from this world, because you is got distance within you that you don't see the world no more… It's deep within this *agape* love, you know? That you could really experience what you need to.[186]

Whereas his Sunday-school prayers had placed him in the role of supplicant, requiring the intercession of the Almighty—conceived of as outside of and superior to human beings—bathing in the black water activated an inner strength that allowed Ras Simeon to transcend physical needs and dependency on an exploitative economic system. Ras Simeon embarked on a search for a spiritually authentic life, which he connected to

[185] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.
[186] Ras Simeon.

genetic heritage, history, and the Bible. At the same time, he identified knowledge of God as an innate, universal potential of all human beings, flowing from connection to nature and human consciousness.

Ras Simeon's mystical experience became intertwined with his developing interest in Africa. As noted in Chapter One, pan-Africanist and Ethiopanist trends had played an important role in Guyana's social history, and these currents were growing stronger in the 1960s, when many of the Rasta elders involved in this study were children and adolescents. Some Rasta elders recalled encountering a cultural identification with Africa in their parents' homes. Ras Simeon said:

> As a youth, I man father had a book in he wardrobe with Mandinga[187] busting chain. You know? A black slave busting a chain…So it left a question in me that answer through watching around and seeing, hearing, well, black people, they used to be into slavery, and all these different things.[188]

Similarly, Jah Lion recalled:

> Where I used to live in the country, they had a portrait of Selassie the First, King of Africa. Cause my parents was Garveyites, and I grew up knowing about the King…I was always into Africanism, African consciousness, from small. You know, any occasion my parents used to get. Ghana Day, Liberation Day, they always, you know, take me and all them thing. You know? So I grew up in this consciousness of, how do you say, being an African. And from then, I sight Rastafari in the 70s. And I realize, well, this is my way. This is what I want to be. What I was looking for all the time.[189]

[187] The Mandinga were an African society who became important partners with Europeans in the slave trade. See Walter Rodney, "Upper Guinea and the Significance of the Origins of Africans Enslaved in the New World." *The Journal of Negro History* 54, no. 4 (1969), 332.
[188] Ras Simeon.
[189] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.

When Jamaican Rastafari culture began to appear in Guyana in the 1970s, young people who had been exposed to pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism during childhood were receptive to the emphasis on African identity within Rastafari.

Ras Simeon described how spiritual feelings he experienced through experimentation with marijuana as a teenager led him to an interest in the silenced aspects of his black identity. He said:

> From the day I first touch the weed…the weed and the spiritual feelings about God create in me…this kind of self-interest, you know, in the black life… Because there was nothing black in the world. Not in me education, in school, your Father was never no black—he never talk nothing, no Marcus Garvey yet. You know? So in them time it bring me to this blackness.[190]

Ras Simeon's curiosity found expression in sage-like men in his hometown of Plaisance. He said:

> [There were Rastas in Plaisance,] but not with teachings of Rastafari. It's more with congo bongo [large matted dreadlocks] pon they head…And them teach I-man when was like fourteen years of age. I tell you bout forty years ago [around 1977] in Plaisance…Plaisance is one of the village that slaves pool their money and buy it…So they had a spiritual vibes in these places. Where the ancestors them left feelings and vibes. That once you deh pon a certain Africanness, you gon feel them vibes.[191]

The men with dreadlocks did not yet attest to the formal doctrines of Rastafari, but they identified with African culture, and Ras Simeon connected them with the spiritual resonance of Guyana's free village movement.

Such groups fostered feelings of acceptance and belonging among young spiritual and intellectual seekers. Ras Simeon explained:

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[190] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.
[191] Ras Simeon.

> When you go by them Rasta man, them Rasta man sight you and them *seeing* you! What you gon' become. Them man say, 'Watch: that's the Rasta man coming there.' That man's baldhead [without dreadlocks]. But the Rasta man come and they watch. Watch how them path. And…they got a little sip [Ital food or marijuana] left for the I. You know? So, it's in that, it was accepting. By ones who coulda seen you. You was a one of them. From then, I didn't knot up yet… But growing with Afro hair. They didn't have no Jheri curl or them thing, you sight? You have to comb out. You got Afro hair. Or you plait. Cornrow and them, plaits. You know? So them time we used to buy fork, becau' we couldn't buy combs. You use fork and comb you hair with the fork. You know? So your hair deh high up in the air.[192]

The older men recognized Ras Simeon's inner self-awareness, although he had not yet adopted the outer appearance of a Rasta by wearing dreadlocks. Subsequently, Ras Simeon demonstrated his African identity by growing out his "Afro" hair.

The project of redeeming suppressed and distorted knowledge of Africa became a collective undertaking of these early affinity groups. At first, this occurred informally, through word of mouth and migration. Jah Lion explained:

> We didn't have teachers in the early 70s. It's just about from the middle of 70s, then we started to see a few elders. A few brethrens with locks. And then from then on, it developed until now. So I been foreign [abroad] for a little while and I was more exposed to the consciousness of Rastafari…Nuff meetings, nuff, you know, gatherings…And at the gathering they pass information on. Like it's a underground railroad. You know? You know something, I know something. We pass it to each other. And so Rastafari become more strong.[193]

Similarly, Ras Simeon recalled:

> Rastafari at that time was to know about the slavery and what African people them went through. It was really studying your past life…Where you come from, what happen. You know, who was your freedom fighters…What was your education, what was your history, what was your culture…Them was the things was important to I and I. You sight? So when we sight Rastafari it wasn't no Bible knowledge…This is what they call a spiritual calling.[194]

[192] Ras Simeon.
[193] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.
[194] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.

Ras Simeon's statement that African cultural research was the common aim of "I and I" indicates that the transcendence of conceptual barriers between self and other was related to the deconstruction of the racial hierarchy that had historically dehumanized African people. As Ras Simeon and Jah Lion indicated, reclamation of African identity involved the rejection of European education in favor of common sense, intuition, informal discourse, and self-education as more legitimate processes of conscientization.

These processes involved a critique of Christianity and the Bible, which were seen as instruments of social control and understood to have supported slavery and colonization. Jah Lion said:

> When they already beat us with these unbridled cruelty, they give us the Bible now that doctrinated us. Make we believe in a lot of nonsense. 'You can't see God till you're dead.' And 'Pray and pray.' Why must pray? You know how much people pray during slavery? And still had you could slave. You could pray now and go out there and ain't nothing happen for you. But if you meditate, and sort out the way you got to go and do, it be done!…Our parents go to church, pray till you're dead. You're hungry all day till you're dead.[195]

Jah Lion's argument addressed the dichotomous Christian view of God as a separate being, directly experienced by the human self only after death. He observed that prayer, which dramatized the dual, self-other relationship between the human self and God, placed the practitioner in the passive role of waiting until the afterlife to attain relief from suffering and unite with God.

[195] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.

On the other hand, Jah Lion saw meditation as a practical means of preparing oneself for transformative action—placing power and agency within, rather than outside of, the personal self. He said:

> Nothing happen with prayers!…They say prayers is for fools. They say prayers make God laugh…But if you get up and meditate, then things happen…So we gotta be more realistic with what we do. And know that you gotta go within, meditating, and you gotta go out there and do positive thing for I…And you know, meditation does bring about progress. Praying ain't doing nothing.[196]

Whereas prayer deferred social justice to a separate, other-worldly life, Jah Lion observed that meditation empowered people to accomplish tangible goals. It also aligned practitioners with the needs of a larger collective, inspiring them to "do positive thing for I," that is, for the greater, collective self.

Meditation, which places the practitioner face-to-face with his or her subjectivity—the self, or "I" of the person—often yields an insight into the nature of subjectivity as a mental and emotional construct. This insight has been playfully expressed by Rastas through the insertion of the syllable "I" into myriad words and phrases in everyday speech.[197] Ethnographer John P. Homiak pointed out that the I-gelic order, a group of ascetic Rastas in Jamaica in the 1960s, developed a style of chanting in which the syllable "I" was repeated unceasingly.[198] In Guyana, it was common to hear Rastas refer to themselves as a group in terms of "I and I," and to one another respectfully as "the I"—suggesting an acknowledgment of their mutual subjectivity.

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[196] Jah Lion.
[197] Velma Pollard, *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari*, Revised Edition (Barbados; Montreal: Canoe Press; McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).
[198] Homiak, "Soundings on Rastafari Livity and Language," 159.

Breaking down the construct of the individual, personal self led Rastas to recognize the sentience of other beings, including nonhuman life forms. This awareness led many Rastas to become vegetarian. Ras Simeon said,

> Me spirit reject flesh-eating. Ca [Because] one time I could remember me mother give I food and I tell she, 'Well, me ain't want any of them chicken and them thing no more.' And you know how they is behave when you say like you don't want it? Like it's a big problem. So I end up running and go with me auntie… But it was a calling, I was fourteen years of age. And it was a spiritual calling.[199]

Ras Simeon's conviction put him at odds with his Christian parents' food customs and led him to reject a staple source of nutrition in a time of poverty. Ras Simeon's vegetarianism was rooted, in part, in his sensitivity to the suffering of animals typically used for meat.

As contact with Jamaican Rastafari culture increased in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, Rastas in Guyana began to study the Bible with renewed interest. Ras Simeon said:

> When I and I start sight them [Rastas from Jamaica] trod in the scriptures, man start reading the scriptures more deftly. You sight? That you had to now know the scriptures before you could really full of reasoning. Ca [Because] you gon be questioned. And you got speak with Christian about what you know about God through he own scriptures. You got talk with the Muslim, with a overstanding of who was Mohammed…Now have to know for talk to the Hindu brother. And got to overstand bout Lord Krishna.[200]

At this stage, scriptural erudition became an important means of establishing legitimacy within the Rastafari community and in the wider, multicultural society of Guyana.

[199] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.
[200] Ras Simeon.

Rastas' interpretation of the Bible reinforced the articulation of their identity as Africans. Ras Simeon explained:

> Our overstanding of the Christ is the Ethiopian overstanding of the Christ. Not a English understanding about Christ, like how a English Christianity teach about Christ and enslave you and all these things. We talking bout a Ethiopian Christianity. Before Christ. Christianity before Christ! Christ come and learn in Egypt. And he gon start…So, we, the Rasta man, went back home. Went again home. Ca [Because] a man home is he history. Is your source of inspiration. You sight?[201]

Even while rejecting Europeanized Christianity, Ras Simeon emphasized the African roots of Biblical culture. His suggestion that Jesus studied in Egypt before beginning his life as a spiritual teacher placed an important Christian story within the mystical framework of Rastafari; according to the book of Matthew, Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert, where he overcame the temptations of the Devil in a series of visions; afterward, he began his ministry.[202] This shamanic story is reminiscent of the archetypal vision quest used by indigenous people on every continent; Ras Simeon's claim that this episode took place in Egypt connected the Christian account to the mystical frequencies of the indigenous landscape of Northern Africa. It also pointed to the fact that the Bible, set at a geographical confluence of what would later be understood as African, European, and Asian cultures—could not be accurately classified as a European cultural artifact. Along these lines, Ras Khafra noted:

> The fathers of Christianity were African: St. Augustine and Tertullian and these people. These people is who carry Christianity into Europe. You know? And Ethiopian form of Christianity is older than Rome. So you can't tell me it's a European thing. Right? But then the interpretation of it is European, right? And the book that you is use, the King James, is a European version…But then they

[201] Ras Simeon.
[202] Matthew 4:1-11.

> got the Amharic version, which is older than the King James. And it got more books than the King James.[203]

Rastas thus understood the idea of European and African cultures as monolithic and discrete entities to be a construct; instead, these cultures were geographically contiguous, and had influenced one another throughout history beyond distinction.

At the same time, Rastas sought to establish an identity that was definitively African; Ras Simeon's observation that "a man home is he history" indicated the search among Rastas for a reference point in the precolonial African past that could provide unity and direction after the disorienting experiences of enslavement and colonization. This search involved, in addition to the Bible, a vast literature on African history and culture. Ras Ashkar described Bongo Isdras's literary collection, which was remarkable at a time when Afrocentric books were relatively rare in Guyana:

> He had a lot of books on African history, African spirituality, and things like that. Books that you heard about but that never seen before. Like the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Sixth and Seventh books of Moses, the *Stolen Legacy*, by George G.M. James, which is a Guyanese writer, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney writings, the writings of Ethiopian Coptic Christianity… He had a lot of leaflets, booklets, and so forth, pon Rastafari itself…He's the first person we saw with the Kebra Nagast, the Ethiopian Book of Kings. But he had a photocopied version that someone sent to him…And he carefully and jealously guarded that photocopied manuscript…[204]

The next generation would continue this process, generating new results with increased access to information. Ras Khafra said:

> When Rastafari came, the Bible was the only book available…Subsequently though, you now have a generation of Rastas now who have access to different materials. You know? History and culture of Africa, East, West, North, South. So, we get to question the Bible with a more critical mind…People like myself,

[203] Ras Khafra, Rastafari in Guyana.
[204] Ras Ashkar, Rastafari in Guyana, July 26, 2017.

> we now interpret Rastafari in a Nile Valley spiritual cultural context…I could use the Bible or the Baghavad Gita, or these things, but you know, these things are recent things…These things are just versions. Watered-down versions and carbon copies of a older, original thing. You sight? So, well, I even go to the source, rather than deal with these things. And that source is the Nile Valley…the version don't change, it's written in one language, and the writing's in stone, so you can't even erase it.[205]

Ras Khafra's statement reflects the importance Rastas placed on authenticity as they sought to mend the severed links between past, present, and future. Biblical scholarship can be understood as one element of this ongoing search for an authentic cultural origin in the distant African past.

The reconstruction of African identity through Biblical interpretation converged with Rastas' approach to God in the practice of ritual discussion known as reasoning, through which Rastafari epistemology was dialectically articulated. Gathering together, reading, and discussing sacred texts, Rasta groups formulated the conceptual underpinnings of their spiritual and ethical outlook. Ras Khafra explained:

> We used to sit down…and we used to pass around chalice [smoking pipe], and read from the sacred books: the Bible, and there's another book he [the elder, Bongo Isdras] liked, named the Oahspe,[206] the Kosmon Bible…And then he would say, 'Read this part.' And then he say, 'How you see it?'…When you gon go in the Bible for yourself…it's cause you to see the Bible in a different light… It's like you could reflect on yourself and your actions and your life and so on. So when you go into the Bible and you're reading of Christ, and a connection is being made. A realization is occur. Then you say, 'Wha? How this story sound so like me story?' And then you come to realization, this how you is become Rasta. Cause consciousness is like, black people sit down in church, and pastor talk about the people in slavery for 400 years, and what they going through. But they can't make a connection between them and they story that deh in Bible. So, you know, it's like if you stand in front the mirror, and you see yourself, but you don't know it's you. You know what I mean? It means that you're unconscious, right? Consciousness is when you could hear your story and you know that's you

[205] Ras Khafra, Rastafari in Guyana.
[206] The Oahspe, also known as the Kosmon Bible, is a millenarian faithist text by an American dentist named John Newbrough, who claimed to have composed it through divine inspiration. See *Oahspe; a New Bible in the Words of Jehovih and His Angel Embassadors. A Sacred History of the Dominions of the Higher and Lower Heavens on the Earth for the past Twenty Four Thousand Years,* London, England, Los Angeles, Calif.: Kosmon Press, 1935.

> story. Rasta go in the Bible, and he read the Bible, and he realize that is he story. It's not something that happen 2,000 years ago. It's not history, it's prophecy… That's the realization that makes people Rastafari…When you come to the realization, the realization is: you is this. It's your story. So unlike people who gon worship a Christ, we become that.[207]

According to Ras Khafra, the Bible was used to cultivate consciousness of oneself; he described it as a mirror that helped adepts, in the presence of elders and peers, reflect on the ethical implications of their actions, and cultivate Christ-like qualities. This involved self-identification with divinity, and, like the enslaved participants in the Demerara uprising nearly 200 years earlier, with the Israelites of the Old Testament.

Afrocentric readings of the Bible culminated in the conceptualization of the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, as the returned messiah. Selassie had been declared God among Jamaican Rastas in the 1930s, but he was not widely understood that way by Rastas in Guyana until at least the 1970s. Selassie's divinity was supported through Biblical prophecy; as Ras Ashkar explained, "It was the Bible which talked about the return of the messiah in its kingly character and…the coming of the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of Judah. It's the Bible that talk about the descendant of King David and Solomon."[208] Selassie's divinity was also substantiated by the Kebra Nagast, the Ethiopian text that traced Selassie's lineage to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

As emperor of a sovereign African state, Selassie was an appealing anticolonial symbol among African Guyanese people. Ras Leon Saul noted:

> After we became an independent country and started more on the socialist path, questions begun to be raised about colonialism…and colonial Christianity… and

[207] Ras Khafra.
[208] Ras Ashkar, Rastafari in Guyana.

> that went hand in hand with our revolutionary outlook. And with it came the rejection of the white Jesus—blond-haired, blue-eyed conception of Jesus. And so, when the knowledge of Rastafari became available, it was easy for some of us to switch allegiance from Jesus the Christ to Jah Rastafari.[209]

In addition, whereas Jesus's story was confined to the distant past, Selassie's contemporary earthly presence was significant. Ras Leon Saul said, "I can't serve a dead God and live. My God has got to be a living spirit, a living man."[210] Similarly, Jah Lion said:

> Everything is flesh and blood. If it ain't flesh and blood it ain't real. That's why we could chant 'Selassie I.' Because we talk to Selassie I; we pinch Selassie I. We know ones sit down and eat with the King. So we know that's real. Nobody ever seen this unseen God that talk from the cloud, or in a bush.[211]

The view that God lived in the material world—especially in the body of an African person—reconciled spiritual and material planes while supporting black sovereignty and the spiritual merit of African people.

Although Selassie's special status as a messiah, like Jesus Christ's, apparently positioned God's presence within a single historical person, Selassie's divinity was also interpreted in terms of the divinity of all human beings. Ras Leon Saul said:

> Haile Selassie taught me to find God within myself. I am the I am. And that's most important to I. Because for me to look outside of myself for another form of God, I'll be in another form of slavery. Mental and spiritual slavery. So my God lives in me. I am my God. I am my father.[212]

[209] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.
[210] Ras Leon Saul.
[211] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.
[212] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.

Some Rastas viewed Selassie in terms of the culture of divine kingship they associated with precolonial Africa. Ras Khafra explained:

> [In] the Nile Valley tradition…the highest aspiration of man was divinity, because of the *summum bonum.* And education and so on was about cultivating the divinity…However, the king was who represented the final outcome of who you supposed to become…That's why the king on the throne was God… Divine kingship was a Nile Valley thing, that's where it start. But that's what the king represented: the highest aspiration. But everybody had the potential of becoming divine and royal.[213]

Ras Khafra referred to the work of Guyanese historian George G.M. James, who held that the concept of the *summum bonum,* a Latin phrase meaning "the highest good," with its counterpart in the Greek concept of the *telos,* meaning "ultimate goal or aim," originated in practices of self-perfection and purification in ancient Egypt.[214] Seen from this angle, it is significant that Selassie was a king who wielded temporal political authority; his divinity symbolized not only the individual's potential for divine perfection, but the perfectibility of earthly political and social systems.

This teleological view gave meaning and direction to the Rastafari movement, activating idealized qualities including selflessness and responsibility to others. Ras Simeon said:

> The future of mankind is a Christlike life. And Rasta is the future of mankind… They're not gon be just only a physical man but a spiritual man… And when they doing things, it's not money they working for. They working for eliminate poverty and ignorance and disease…Man gon become great in outlook. Like how Rasta is great in outlook. We didn't come from no bench and desk, but we see the whole world and we deh pon helping mankind live with more love and overstanding of each other differences. If I is the least among them and the worst among them, the stone that the builders refuse, rise from the depths and dust off I skin…And tell you, 'Don't throw down that man. Don't knock that person there. Get a man water fi drink.' I thirsty but I ain't saying I want water for drink, you

[213] Ras Khafra, Rastafari in Guyana.
[214] George G.M. James, *Stolen Legacy*, 2016.

> know, I say, 'Get that man water for drink!' I hungry but I say, 'Get that man food fi eat.' So what we saying is that God in man is the future.[215]

In Ras Simeon's vision of the future, earthly power would become inseparable from Christ-like selflessness and generosity. The disconnect between work and its benefit for the collective would be mended. Objectified and othered groups would be elevated, their dignity restored, and their spiritual significance acknowledged. Rastas saw Selassie's incarnation as an indication that such a reversal of circumstances was at hand, and this inspired many to work diligently on its behalf.

Mutual emotional and psychological connection to Selassie motivated community-oriented activism among disparate Rastafari groups throughout the decolonizing Caribbean region, often in circumstances of great need. In this way, Selassie's meaning transcended his dimension as a historical person and came to represent the sum of the spiritual and practical accomplishments of the transnational Rastafari movement. Ras Khafra explained:

> I could remember struggling with grasping the concept of how could a man be God…But then you realize that when you ask yourself the question, the livity is designed to answer it…Because you's ask a question and then, now, you life now's take a tour, right, that is carry you around and bring you back round to the position from when you ask the question from the beginning, but you just realize now what is the answer…You come to realize now he's indeed God. You can't question it. The livity's teach itself, man, through experience…The Bible really shows you that the desert separates the house of bondage from the house of freedom. For move from Egypt to Israel, you got pass through the desert, like Moses. This livity represents the desert trod. Because it's about moving from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, from ignorance to enlightenment, from chaos to order. You know? We just got to be prepared…Because you can't enter with a certain kind of mentality and livity…So, you're passing through the desert. And through the desert trod, that is what is…mold you into Christhood and Godhood.[216]

[215] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.
[216] Ras Khafra, Rastafari in Guyana.

Ras Khafra suggested that although Selassie's divinity was counter-intuitive, the Rastafari way of life, known as its livity, affirmed it in a way that rational thought could not. Ras Khafra connected the appreciation of Selassie's divinity to the "desert trod"—the journey that would carry the community to the promised land.

In his formulation of the desert trod, Ras Khafra connected two distinct Biblical stories: the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the promised land and Jesus's fast and temptation in the desert. Whereas the Israelites' Old Testament trek entailed the movement of a people toward an ideal community, Jesus's retreat was a meditative process of self-purification and introspection. Linking the two, Ras Khafra related the liberation of the collective to the transformation of the individual self. The desert that lay between the community and the promised land also lay between the individual human self and the true self: God, or Selassie. Stating that "you can't enter" the promised land without having attained a certain level of self-realization, Ras Khafra identified Selassie as the path, or desert trod, leading to this accomplishment.

To conclude this section, Rastafari culture in Guyana challenged the dichotomous, hierarchical approach to humanity and nature found in colonial culture. Many Rastas in Guyana experienced divinity in nature and within their own consciousness, contrasting with the Europeanized Christian traditions in which many were raised. Rastas' intuitive spiritual experiences became linked to a search for knowledge of African history and culture. Influenced by Jamaican Rastafari culture, Guyanese Rastas incorporated traditions of Biblical discourse into their collective project of connecting with the African past. These processes culminated in the conceptualization of Ethiopian emperor Haile

Selassie as the returned messiah, a view some Rastas harmonized with precolonial African traditions of divine kingship. At the same time, Selassie pointed to the potential of all people to achieve divine perfection and take leadership in the construction of an ideal society. Selassie became a symbol of the highest aspirations of the Rastafari community, and a guide on the path toward the promised land.

III. Crossing Material Deserts: The Guyana Rastafari Council

In an interview in 2017, Ras Khafra recalled his initial involvement in the Guyana Rastafari Council. He said:

> In 2003, they [the GRC] applied for 500 acres of land, and they said, 'Well, Rasta have to deal with farming and community development. You can't be a Rastafari organization without land.'…And that became like the overarching goal, to develop the 500 acres of land. When I joined a year after, I saw the vision. I saw persons who were aspiring to something great, and I had not had that kind of experience before: working together and things like that. I had passed through the education system, and I was not aware of the importance of an organization. You know, that we live in an organized world, and that we have to be organized. You can't be an individual. You have to be organized.[217]

Ras Khafra was inspired by the GRC's vision of an autonomous community rooted in soil. The plan to develop 500 acres of land reflected the Rastafari community's awareness of the interdependence between human community and ecology; autonomy from an oppressive global economic system was understood to be impossible without life-sustaining connectivity with land. Meanwhile, Ras Khafra's emphasis on organization reflected awareness of the interdependent relationship between the individual and the larger human community; only by working together, Ras Khafra pointed out, could aspirational development schemes be achieved.

[217] Ras Khafra.

The previous section discussed the ways in which Rastafari culture challenged the dichotomous, hierarchical framework of colonial epistemology, by crossing conceptual boundaries between self and other, humanity and nature, and physical and spiritual worlds; Rastas conceptualized themselves as a collective united by shared African heritage and symbolized by the divine Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. This section argues that these conceptual accomplishments led to the development of Rastafari communities defined by interdependence and ecological sustainability. I discuss the development of the Guyana Rastafari Council (GRC), beginning with its roots in the informal craft workers' collective known as Black Culture Craft.

Ras Simeon became one of the first students of Bongo Isdras, whose home in Georgetown's Bourda Market served as the base of a craft workers' collective known as Black Culture Craft. Ras Simeon described his initial encounter with Bongo Isdras in remarkable detail after the passage of about thirty years:

> The elder [Bongo Isdras] deh right there, and I living up the road. But I never see he. God didn't make I for see he then. So one day, passing! And there was this brother with a knife in he hand, cutting a piece of leather. You sight? And I stand, well I watch, ca [because] he got matted locks, you know? And when I sight he, you see, it's a doorway to higher life. This how I behold him…I got my picky-picky dread. I got on a baseball hat pon me head. And I stop! And I watch the dread. And when I put me eyes pon the dread, the dread lift he head, so me and he eye make four…He asked me if I knot up under my hat. If I got knot. So I take off my baseball hat and shake up so. He say, 'Come.' And he's call me in. And I come in, and he got fronto [tobacco] leaf…And him say pass one dem fronto leaf, and I pass and he take out a piece of weed and he cut up and we roll one joint. And we start reasoning.[218]

Ras Simeon described Bongo Isdras as a doorway to something higher, evoking an epithet he also used for Haile Selassie: "keeper of the door."[219] In a sense, Bongo Isdras

[218] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.
[219] Ras Simeon.

symbolized the divine self Ras Simeon was seeking to become. The mirroring between the elder and the younger man, as the two pairs of eyes "make four," and Ras Simeon's dreadlocks were revealed, suggested their sense of shared selfhood. After smoking with the elder on the threshold of the house, Ras Simeon became part of the group of artisans that gathered and worked there.

Mangrove-like, Bongo Isdras gathered people around him and cultivated mutually beneficial relationships among them. Partially paralyzed, Bongo Isdras could not walk, but he was nevertheless capable of helping to foster a functional community. Ras Simeon recalled:

> He couldn't walk…It take me a little while before I know. Ca [Because] he does always sit, he does work!…So I start going there and thing and that man teaching craft and you know, you learn how for make this and how for make that and thing, how Rasta got produce. You know? Ca you got make your own money.[220]

The vocational instruction Ras Simeon and others received at Black Culture Craft would help to support them economically throughout their lives. In 2017, Ras Simeon continued to sell handmade jewelry in the Bourda Market, not far from the Black Culture Craft headquarters.

Like Ras Simeon, Bongo Isdras's widow, Sister Isis,[221] met Bongo Isdras when he was busy working on the porch. Sister Isis identified the meeting as a key moment in the development of her Rastafari identity. In 2017, Sister Isis still lived at the house she had shared with Bongo Isdras for many years. She kept a shop there, selling hand-made

[220] Ras Simeon.
[221] Although some interviewees asserted that women were not involved in the early stages, Sister Isis and at least one other woman participated in the community surrounding Bongo Isdras. One sistren asserted that women were present, but that they were in the home, and were therefore less visible than their male counterparts.

African textiles, leather sandals, artisanal crafts, and natural medicines. Sister Isis had learned these crafts from Bongo Isdras, whom she described as "multitalented" and a "work man."[222]

The livelihoods developed by Bongo Isdras and Sister Isis represented a departure from dependence on foreign corporations, export-based agriculture, and the mining industries that had dominated Guyana's economy since the colonial era. Sister Isis and Bongo Isdras made clothing, shoes, handbags, drums, and art; they sold coconut water and sugarcane juice. Sister Isis showed me pictures of herself with Bongo Isdras at fairs and exhibitions, dressed in clothes they had made themselves. She recalled that even while Bongo Isdras was detained for several months for possession of marijuana, he continued to manufacture bags and shoes, contradicting the colonial-era stereotype of ganja smokers as lazy and idle.

Sister Isis informed me that in her life, she had only been employed by another person—in a jewelry shop called the "New York" boutique—for one month. She rejected wage labor in a consumeristic system as a source of illness and a form of slavery. Sister Isis's independent livelihood was tied to her intimacy with God, who, she said, put her to sleep at night and woke her in the morning with fresh inspiration for her artisanal work. Trusting in God to provide for her needs, Sister Isis cared for herself holistically, in contrast to people who endured stress and physical harm in pursuit of an income.

Beyond supporting themselves, Bongo Isdras, Sister Isis, and members of Black Culture Craft fostered a thriving community. They developed rituals, hosted events, and cultivated knowledge of natural medicine. Sister Isis showed me photos of Rastafari

[222] Sister Isis, Rastafari in Guyana, interview by Erin Lierl, July 26, 2017.

weddings at which Bongo Isdras officiated, and other events that took place in the back yard, for which they cooked Ital (vegan, unprocessed) food for all. She described Bongo Isdras's skill at curing illnesses, recalling that he cured one person's skin disease through dietary measures. Sister Isis had recently cured her own chronic skin infection using cabbage and banana poultices.

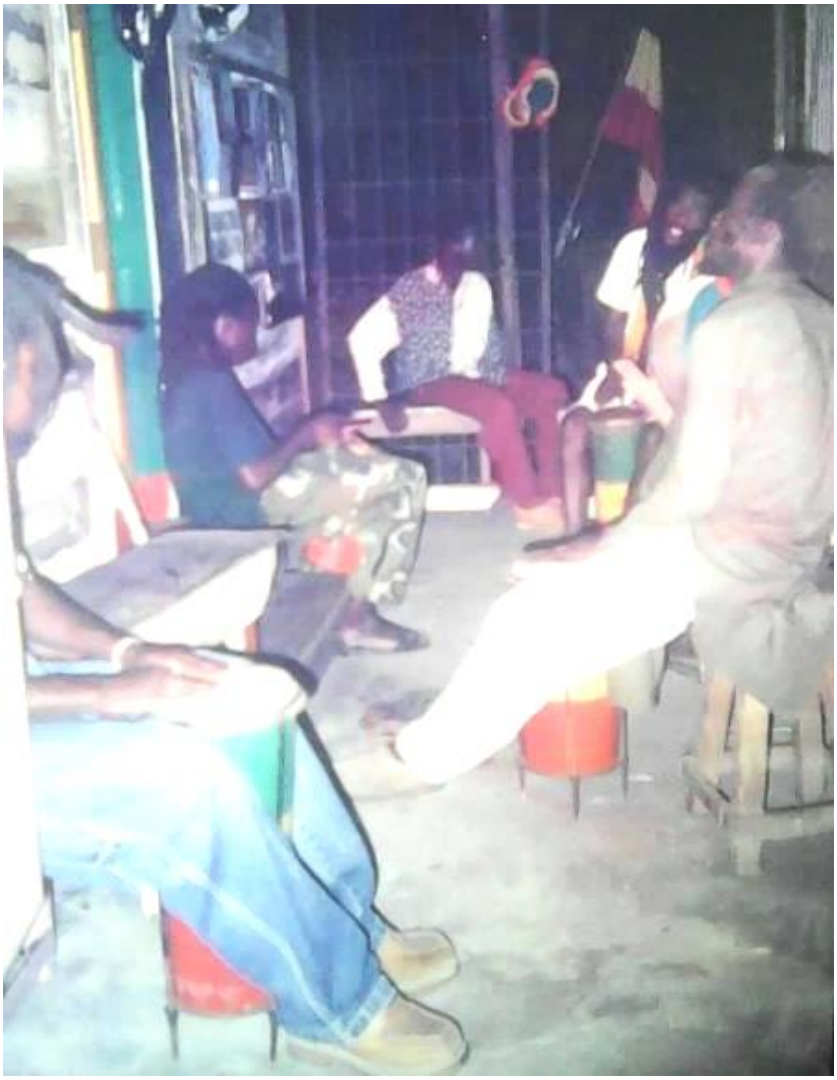
Sister Isis and Bongo Isdras[223]

[223] Photo courtesy the Guyana Rastafari Council.

Drumming at the GRC[224]

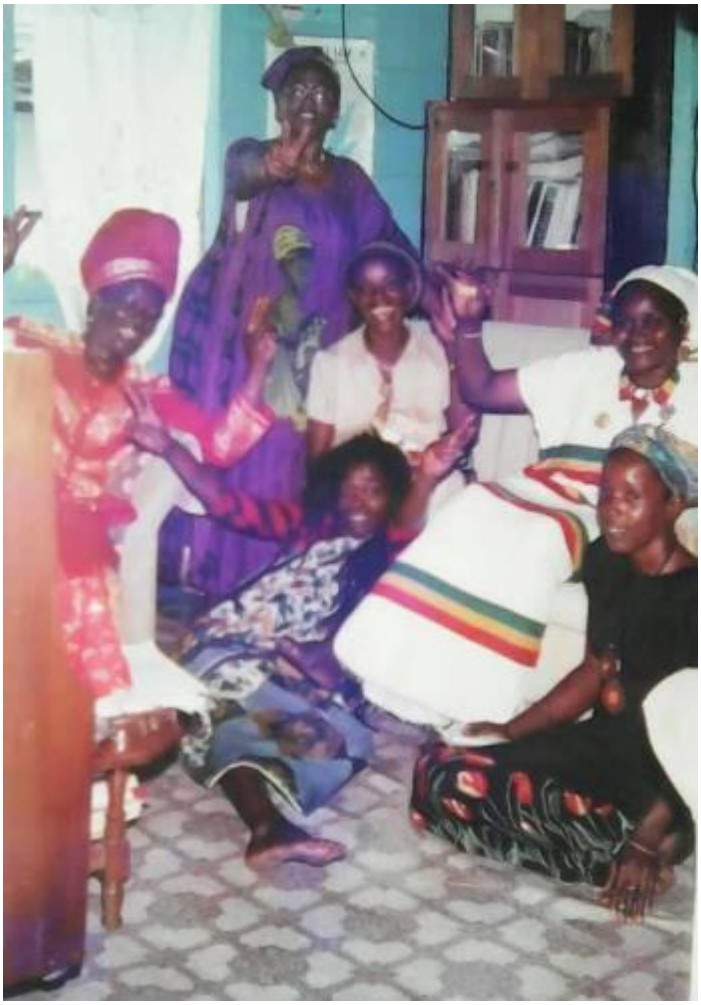
Community at the GRC[225]

[224] Photo courtesy the Guyana Rastafari Council.
[225] Photo courtesy the Guyana Rastafari Council.



Drumming at the GRC[226]

[226] Photo courtesy the GRC.



Women at the GRC[227]

For many, the Rastafari community associated with Black Culture Craft provided a critical social and safety net. Jah Lion recalled that the Rastafari community was necessary

> to take me out of this dungeon that I was in. And this kind of life I was living. So Rastafari became my salvation. And you know, from then on, start doing things that was beneficial to Rastafari. As time goes, I get more wise and conscious of the ways of being righteous. So from then on I take it one at a time, meeting brothers like Papa Swifty, and…we start to build a foundation.[228]

[227] Photo courtesy the GRC.
[228] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.

Similarly, Ras Swifty became engaged in Rastafari culture at a time when he felt he was in danger of committing violence. He said:

> I had a girlfriend giving me a misunderstanding, and I was in the verge of saying I gon kill her. Ca [Because she was] playing with my emotions. And within them times Rastafari was rising. Something tell me the only way I could get over this emotional vibes of saying I'd kill her was to sight Rastafari. You sight? Cause Rastafari means do good. So that is how I sight Rastafari. Which many brethren get comfort through reasoning with brethren and brethren.[229]

This kind of spontaneous interpersonal counseling offered a life-saving intervention for people who lacked access to basic social services.

As many Rastas left home at a young age, the Rastafari community became a safety net that provided them with emotional and material support. Among Sister Isis's pictures were snapshots of a young man she and Bongo Isdras had adopted when his family was unable to support him; Bongo Isdras took in several young people in this situation, who received psychological counseling and vocational training in his care.

Ras Ashkar, a prominent Rastafari intellectual and former Assistant Secretary of the GRC, was one such student of Bongo Isdras. Ras Ashkar recalled that as a teenager, he lived with foster parents who could not financially support him; after leaving school at the age of sixteen, Ras Ashkar became interested in Rastafari culture. He said:

> I was a poor, black youth, and living in a society that was emerging as a very consumerist, kind of materialist society…Living in such an environment and with no access to those possessions, you yourself tend to lose, diminish your value in your own eyes…And I can clearly say that Rastafari perfectly filled that void that existed in me before. I found meaning; I found value within Rastafari.[230]

[229] Ras Swifty, Rastafari in Guyana.
[230] Ras Ashkar, Rastafari in Guyana.

Ras Ashkar found personal validation and a positive role-model in Bongo Isdras. He recalled:

> When I found Isdras…I found what I was looking for. Because in all ways, Isdras embodied what was considered Rastafari in its true essence. Right? He was Nyabinghi, so no meat-eating. He kept as much as possible away from any processed food…He wore African clothing, African prints, that he himself made. The surroundings, the yard that he lived in, very cultural, had trees and plants and so forth, so you get that feelings, as if you were, you know, in tune with nature, in tune with a life that is at odds with the life in what I now know as Babylon system…That was the start of my ten first years within Rastafari.[231]

With support from Bongo Isdras, Ras Ashkar and another young man spent one year cultivating a remote piece of land in the interior of Guyana. Ras Ashkar said, "for me it was a good escape from Babylon…A welcome escape from poverty, too."[232] This departure from a system in which poor black people were undervalued, in favor of immersion in a life-sustaining natural world, reflected the historical trajectory of the Rastafari movement in Guyana.

Over time, the organizational character of Black Culture Craft shifted. Ras Simeon recalled:

> At the time we start seeing them things in the scripture, we change the name from Black Culture Craft to Voice of Thunder. Because the elder [Bongo Isdras] get for realize that he name is written in the scriptures! The work weh he doing… Then, from Voice of Thunder, we realize it is important now to deal with nation-building, cause we look and see how the Majesty [Haile Selassie] really lead Ethiopia as a nation, the only independent nation during the time of battles [World War II]. And he had to keep Ethiopia protected, so we sight that the nation of Ras Tafari growing upon these shores [in Guyana] must be protected. Must got some administration.[233]

[231] Ras Ashkar.
[232] Ras Ashkar.
[233] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.

Conforming to the Biblical narrative of the transnational Rastafari movement, Black Culture Craft became Voice of Thunder—a name that referenced the book of Revelations.[234] Later, the formal establishment of the Guyana Rastafari Council responded to an increasing focus on Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, whose example inspired GRC members to pursue aims associated with nationalist leadership.

Whereas Ras Simeon had been one of the first students of Bongo Isdras, Ras Khafra was one of his last. Like the other students, Ras Khafra recalled being moved by his first meeting with the elder in 2004. He said:

> One day I went to the post office to post a letter and then the spirit say…'You going check out this place,' cause it was right through the same street. And then I went in search of it, and I found it, and I signed up the same day and I never left until now. So, he encouraged me to leave home and go and live there. And doing that, my initiation into Rastafari livity started.[235]

Ras Khafra was inspired by the GRC's vision of cultivating 500 acres of land, and by the idea of being part of something greater than himself. He said:

> I saw persons who were aspiring to something great, and I had not had that kind of experience before: working together and things like that. I had passed through the education system, and I was not aware of the importance of an organization. You know, that we live in an organized world, and that we have to be organized. You can't be an individual. You have to be organized.[236]

Ras Khafra's statement reflects that not only was an interdependent, cooperative model necessary for the mutual upliftment of exploited people; for many, it was also more inspiring and rewarding than an individualistic lifestyle.

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[234] Revelations 1:6.
[235] Ras Khafra, Rastafari in Guyana.
[236] Ras Khafra.

According to Ras Khafra, Bongo Isdras developed his students' skills by placing them in a position of responsibility to others. For example, he taught Ras Khafra to cook by making him responsible for group meals. Ras Khafra said:

> He [Bongo Isdras] said, 'Alright, you gonna have to start cooking from today.' And he said, 'Look, here what happen. You start cutting up, let's see.' And he watch you. And say, 'No, no, you don't cut it so big. Just cut it small, so. The small you cut it, the more flavor you can get out of it.' He show you how fi cut up. He gon tell you, 'Mm-mmm, you're peeling it too thick. Most of the nutrients is in the skin so.' Then you bring it to the next stage, and you can look at it, and then when you're done now, you can taste it.[237]

Through caring instruction, Bongo Isdras taught Ras Khafra a practical skill with a tangible, communitarian benefit. At the same time, he cultivated his student's unique creative sensibilities. Ras Khafra's value was thus developed in proportion to his responsibility to the collective.

Bongo Isdras's instruction contrasted with the mechanized, rote learning of the public education system. Although Ras Khafra had attended the prestigious President's College and the University of Guyana, he felt the public education system had not cultivated his sense of social responsibility. He said:

> As the elder used to say, wha deh in your mind should be irrigated through your hands. A lot of [people] they can't irrigate it through their hands. I went through that...I passed through the education system, but I still wasn't conscientious of certain things. I still wasn't functional. It's being involved in the organization that made me functional, but I had to take up responsibility that I wasn't prepared for. I had to prepare myself for the role that I had to play. And this is how I see education could be. So, give people responsibility. And you become, right? Rastafari's about becoming.[238]

[237] Ras Khafra.
[238] Ras Khafra.

Ras Khafra's emphasis on developing oneself through responsibility to others challenged educational approaches which produced standardized knowledge with little or no applicability in the context of the community. Bongo Isdras helped his students become more than an individual person with an arbitrary repertoire of skills; their value was firmly rooted in the value they added to the collective.

Ras Khafra's emphasis on using one's hands, meanwhile, challenged the privileging of abstract knowledge over concrete, embodied, or performative knowledge in European and colonial education systems. Ras Khafra said:

> Our educational system is designed in that way, where they…try and teach you these things in an abstract way, and then say, 'Well, after you pass, then you gon go and get the practice and whatever,' right? We saying no, cause that's not how we learn. Right? And that's not how I learn in Rastafari Council either. Cause when I went there, you had to…use your hands, right? And in using your hands, the spirit of what it is that you're doing—the abstract, which is the spirit—you just automatically see these things, these things speak to you, they just come to you. You know? And especially if you have somebody there guiding you.[239]

In this light, Bongo Isdras's instruction in artisanal craft work represented more than vocational training; it addressed the fundamental underpinnings of colonial epistemology. Ras Khafra noted:

> What I saw with the craft thing was that it was more than teaching you how to re-create stuff…It was basically about developing the creative spirit in you. So even things that you weren't taught, you were able to approach it in a way that you could handle it and learn of it, and create it…Take something you throw away, like coconut shell and all different thing, and take it and give life to it. Give value to it. That was what the craft thing teach us. To think in a certain way.[240]

[239] Ras Khafra.
[240] Ras Khafra.

After Bongo Isdras passed away in 2005, his students continued to work toward the interdependent Rastafari community he had envisioned. In 2017, Ras Khafra was developing an alternative education program premised on practical instruction and the cultivation of responsibility. He said:

> You have a lot of students who don't go to school. So we gon be recruiting from that population first. And then too, you have a lot of persons who already graduate from UG [University of Guyana], but yet they're still dysfunctional. So it's now bringing them into our education system…At what you call like the primary level, up to age 10-11, is where we just gonna have them learning agriculture and learn foods, and learn craft and stuff like that…But it gon be more practical. And we gon re-design the syllabus that they have for these different courses and fix it up in our own way…you can't teach astronomy you don't have an observatory. You can't teach agriculture and you don't have a farm.[241]

Ras Khafra's commitment to providing alternative education reflected the cultivation of his responsibility, creative vision, and confidence in handling complex and unfamiliar tasks, through his experiences with Bongo Isdras and the GRC.

To summarize this section, the Guyana Rastafari Council actualized the Rastafari understanding of the personal self as integrally connected to nature, God, and the human community. Originally known as Black Culture Craft, the community that gathered at Bongo Isdras's house in Bourda Market was defined by reciprocity and interdependence; it served as a social safety net, providing psychological counseling, shelter, nutrition, and vocational training to marginalized people. Registered in 1999 as the Guyana Rastafari Council, this community sought to acquire land and establish a sustainable community tied to soil. Meanwhile, through alternative educational methods, Bongo Isdras cultivated

[241] Ras Khafra.

responsibility and creative vision among his students, qualities which would carry the GRC into the future.

Conclusions

The Rastafari movement in Guyana emerged from a history of resistance among poor and working-class people to the dichotomous, hierarchical approach to humanity and nature found in the European colonial system. Transcending conceptual barriers between self and other, the Rastafari movement fostered social and ecological connectivity and interdependence. Rastas experienced divinity in mystical and introspective ways that went beyond the Europeanized Christian traditions in which many were raised. They connected with God through nature, introspection, and meditation, experiencing God as a part of themselves and the immediate physical and social world. This spiritual approach became linked with an interest in African identity that united people of African descent who had been historically marginalized, challenging the erasure and distortion of African history and culture.

Beginning in the 1970s, Jamaican Rastafari helped to shape these cultural currents. A tradition of Afrocentric Biblical discourse originated in Jamaica became an important source of legitimacy within the Rastafari movement and the wider society. Reading the Bible through the "spectacles of Ethiopia," Rastas in Guyana affirmed African contributions to Biblical culture and developed a new spiritual and ethical framework through critical Biblical exegesis. Like some participants in the Demerara uprising in 1823, Rastas identified collectively with the Israelites of the Old Testament;

they also identified with the Christ figure, aspiring to achieve divinity through self-purification and spiritual practice.

Emerging from these Biblical traditions, the divinity of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie became symbolic of the shared, divine selfhood of all Rastas. The concept of a black messiah supported notions of black sovereignty and spiritual value and pointed to the potential of all Rastas to achieve divine perfection. As a living God, Selassie brought heaven and earth together, heralding the advent of an idealized world. The teleological view Selassie embodied motivated Rastas transnationally to organize and engage in communitarian endeavors in the spirit of nation-building.

Rastas' transcendence of conceptual dichotomy between self and other contributed to the development of communities defined by interdependence and orientation toward soil. Black Culture Craft supported itself through artisanal crafts and developed its own rituals, celebrations, food customs, and medicinal practices. Including and assisting socially undervalued people, the elder Bongo Isdras carefully cultivated students' skills and sense of responsibility to others. Registering formally as the Guyana Rastafari Council, the organization aimed to implement land-based initiatives and civic undertakings premised on responsibility to and participation in a greater collective. The transcendence of concepts of self and other thus brought the promised land within reach.

The following chapter discusses some of the continuing challenges to the realization of the promised land, or a socially interdependent and ecologically sustainable community tied to soil. The context of ethnic polarization arising during Guyana's independence era would lead to divisions within the Rastafari community. Meanwhile, the persistence of the conceptual gender dichotomy associated with the colonial era

would limit the ability of women to facilitate social connectivity and propel the movement forward, hampering the realization of a land-based community.

CHAPTER THREE: MANY RIVERS TO CROSS

In 1999, Ras Swifty, a founding member of the Guyana Rastafari Council (GRC), stepped back from the Rastafari movement in which he had been an active participant for almost two decades. His reasons indicate the toll ethnically polarized politics and chronic poverty had taken on the Rastafari community in Guyana. Ras Swifty said:

> I's a person, if I into something, I's need it physically move. I can't take just reasoning and reasoning. So it used to be a lot of reasoning. We make headway, cause we go and get 500 acre of land on the Mabura Road. One time we start collecting coconut, palm…but it never really take off…till when the PPP government went in power. They start reversing. They tell we out of the 500 acre, we only could get 60. Ca [Because] they allot it out to a lot of they people them… I man having 7 children…I didn't see things going me way, so I tell them I gon look out for me relative now, cause I see they ain't reaching certain level. So I take a decline and I start going jungle and look for the mineral so that I could maintain me children them…Now it's nearly over 3 years I ain't doing nothing, cause I man damage my hands them. And it's the youths them of I [my children] who is assist me financially to a level.[242]

According to Ras Swifty, the GRC's development plans—requiring land, materials, and governmental support—stagnated between 1980, when Ras Swifty became involved with the Rastafari movement, and 1999, when he withdrew from the GRC. When the People's Progressive Party (PPP), supported mainly by Guyana's Indian population, came to power in 1992, the Rastafari community, consisting mainly of people of African descent, lost support it had received under the African-supported People's National Congress (PNC), including access to land and resources. Poor economic conditions led Ras Swifty

[242] Ras Swifty, Rastafari in Guyana.

to seek work in the toxic mining industry to provide for his children. After becoming disabled, he relied on his family for help meeting his basic needs. Economic hardship forced others in the Rastafari community to emigrate, undermining the spatial and social basis of the community. The stagnation that frustrated Ras Swifty was a symptom of the divisiveness, distrust, and resentment that accompanied the return, with money and status, of community members who had lived abroad during difficult years.

Whereas Chapter Two celebrated the progress of Guyana's Rastafari community toward a promised land defined by interdependence and mutuality, this chapter analyses some of the pitfalls the Rastafari community encountered along the way. The central argument of this chapter is that the ideal community partially eluded the Rastafari movement due to forces both within and outside of the movement. Where aspects of the movement coincided with a dichotomous conceptualization of self and other, they interfered with the broad-based social and ecological connectivity upon which the realization of the promised land was premised. This observation supports a key insight of this research: that the conceptual distance between self and other also separates human communities from the promised land—a state of social nonviolence and ecological sustainability.

In the first section below, I discuss how a dualistic understanding of gender associated with the Bible led to the articulation of the Rastafari movement along patriarchal lines, limiting the contributions of women. In the second section, I address how Rastas' orientation to the PNC and its leader, Forbes Burnham, entangled the Rastafari movement in a politics of big man-ism and ethnic divisiveness that interfered with the Rastafari movement's connectivity within the broader society of Guyana.

Conceptual divisions between self and other at the levels of gender and ethnicity limited the movement's ability to acquire land and maintain internal unity. However, the dynamic, autopoetic quality of Rastafari culture allowed Rastafari community members to continuously redefine the movement on their own terms.

I. Our Womanhood: Gender Dichotomy and the Promised Land

Looking back on the movement in which he had participated for nearly 30 years, Ras Leon Saul spoke eloquently and somewhat ruefully about what he viewed as a critical flaw in the Rastas' conceptual and practical approach. He said:

> We need to be more supportive of our womanhood…And that's why we've not been successful in life. Because the black man and the African male fights down the African female so much, he has done himself a lot of harm. Because how can you cut out the more potent part of yourself and suppress it? And that's what we've been doing all the time. Suppressing ourselves, our feminine self. The woman is a nurturer. Apart from the fruit-bearer, she's a nurturer. She give birth to us, nurture us and bring us up to beat them up…We impose ourselves like oppressors, like slave masters upon the woman folk…And that's why we're in the direst straits we are in right now. Cause we have damaged our own godhead, or goddess-head, so to speak. Or even not damage it, we are not cognizant of it. Where in its very being, we ignore the presence of woman. To the extent it's to our own detriment.[243]

Ras Leon Saul highlighted the realm of connectivity between self and other, pointing out that violence against women harmed men as well, as rigid cultural parameters of masculinity caused men to reject and suppress aspects of themselves. Ras Leon Saul described concurrent trends of violence against women in terms that evoked colonial oppression and slavery, drawing a connection between past and present—and internal and external—violence against the perceived other.

[243] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.

This section analyses approaches to gender within the Rastafari community. I argue that the Bible and a context of global patriarchy contributed to a dualistic view of gender, wherein men and women were understood as essentially different from one another, and their respective social roles circumscribed. Men were generally conceived of as leaders of communities, while women were restricted to the domestic sphere; homosexuality and gender nonconformity were considered unacceptable. However, some Rastas challenged this approach, which mirrored colonial epistemology and diminished the movement's capacity to establish sustainable, nonviolent communities connected to soil.

As anthropologist Myriam Huet noted with regard to Rastafari communities transnationally, distinct gender codes for men and women to some extent represent a defensive means through which marginalized men have sought to establish a significant role in society and the family.[244] Huet noted:

> Rastas all agree that a strong Nation depends on enduring, solid family ties. In this effort to reform family life, Rastas men have attempted to claim back a role and influence within the family unit in societies that have extensively been analyzed as matrifocal and where men have tended to be on the margin. 'Lion' and 'lioness' have to work side and side and complete each other. Both bredrins and sistrens seem to agree that men and women should not compete for the same roles within the family unit but rather seek to complement one another. Atatah explains that one of the reasons why couples made up of a black Rastaman and a white sistren do not work out is that 'these women see man and woman as equals. They bring their ideas about equality between man and woman. No! As a woman, you have a role and as a man, you have another role. You complete each other.'[245]

[244] Myriam R. Huet, "Doing Jah-Jah Works at Home and Abroad: Rastafari Nation Building and the Dynamics of Diasporic Identity Construction" (Tulane University, 2011), 375.
[245] Huet, 377.

In the context of historical genocide and continuing marginalization, aversion to ambiguity of gender roles may also represent an emphasis on procreation as a means of survival. Barry Chevannes described the view of gender he observed within Rastafari culture in Jamaica in terms of masculine and feminine principles associated with nature and fertility:

> …man and woman are not equal; one delivers, the other receives. She cannot receive unless or until he delivers. She waits upon him, even as the moon waits upon the sun. Both do not rule the sky at the same time; his coming up is her going down. The man completely dominates. Although a man should treat his wife well, there is no doubt who is the ruler: 'How come you to go to a woman and have children with her? You is a power.' Life, human life, comes from the man. It is the man who originates it. The woman only nurtures life for him; she is only a 'helpmate.' She therefore is not God, though she may be God's mother.[246]

The dichotomy between men and women constructed here centers on the different physical roles of men and women in reproduction, indicating that the assumption of procreation as a fundamental purpose of life and an element of survival and continuity of the community perhaps informs the dualistic understanding of gender in Rastafari.

Nevertheless, this dualistic approach places a conceptual division between men and women, representing a contradiction to the mutual divinity of the intersubjective self, "I and I." To begin with, the reproductive role of women is significantly downplayed in the view described above, apparently overlooking the mother's equal contribution to the offspring's genetic makeup, not to mention her central role in gestation and childbirth. The lesser reproductive role of the mother is then used to justify women's lesser claim to Godhood.

[246] Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 86.

Even if the importance of the mother in reproduction were taken into consideration, gender dichotomy premised on reproductive functions would still reduce the spiritual identities of people to their physical forms in the same way that other forms of discrimination draw conclusions about people based on skin color, appearance, differences in abilities, and other physical differences. In addition, the binary view of gender entirely fails to account for LGBT people and all people who cannot or do not choose to procreate. This dualistic view thus ignores the diversity of nature, imposing contrived and polarized categories on a heterogeneous population.

It should be emphasized that gender dichotomy did not originate with Rastafari; rigidly defined gender norms influenced most Guyanese males beginning in their childhood. Several Rastas I spoke with made references to authoritarian fathers and step-fathers, who in some cases justified their supremacy in the home through their roles as breadwinners. In the 1980s and 1990s, when several Rasta elders involved in this study were coming of age, female-headed households in Guyana were on the rise, but they still represented under 30% of the total;[247] meanwhile, domestic violence affected one in three women.[248] As children, many future Rastas encountered male dominance and gender-based violence in their parents' homes.

Meanwhile, cultural parameters of masculinity in the largely anti-LGBT culture of Guyana placed high-stakes limitations on what was considered acceptable male behavior. Sociologist Mahalia Jackman estimated that in 2016, more than half of the Guyanese population supported Guyana's antiquated laws against homosexuality, which

[247] D. Alissa Trotz and Linda Peake, "Work, Family and Organising: An Overview of the Contemporary Economic, Social and Political Roles of Women in Guyana," *Social and Economic Studies* 50, no. 2 (June 2001): 85.
[248] Trotz and Peake, 93.

Jackman called "relics of British imperialism,"[249] despite the fact that they put Guyana at odds with international human rights principles. In 2017, the laws remained on the books, and LGBT individuals continued to face widespread violence and discrimination.[250]

Even a slight deviation from the gender code could have severe consequences for young men growing up in Guyana. As sociologist David C. Plummer noted, throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, failure to conform within the taboos and obligations of manhood, including being perceived as "effeminate, soft, [or]…gay" could lead to "rejection, violence, and even death."[251] It was within these parameters of masculinity that the Rastafari movement in Guyana developed.

According to several interviewees, the early Rastafari movement in Guyana consisted almost exclusively of male participants. However, one Rasta woman asserted that women were merely less visible because they were in the home. This suggestion corresponds with the assertion of Jamaican musical scholar, Herbie Miller, that women played key roles in the early Rastafari movement in Jamaica, but they were not acknowledged due the male-oriented culture of the society at large.[252] It is possible that women participated in significant ways in the early movement; this is a topic that should be investigated further.

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[249] Mahalia Jackman, "They Called It the 'Abominable Crime': An Analysis of Heterosexual Support for Anti-Gay Laws in Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 132, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-015-0209-6.
[250] Columbia Law School Sexuality and Gender Law Clinic, "Documentation of Country Conditions Regarding the Treatment of Gay Men, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgender Individuals in Guyana," May 2017, Columbia Law School Sexuality and Gender Law Clinic.
[251] David Plummer, "Masculinity and Risk: How Gender Constructs Drive Sexual Risks in the Caribbean," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 10, no. 3 (2013): 168–69, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-013-0116-7.
[252] Herbie Miller, "Brown Girl in the Ring: Margarita and Malungu," *Caribbean Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 57.

Lower levels of visible female participation may also be explained in terms of the greater social risk identification with the movement presented for women. This view is in line with Maureen Rowe's suggestion that the disempowered social position of women in Jamaican society barred many from the privilege of choosing a radical lifestyle. Rowe wrote:

> RastafarI, it must be noted, was first articulated by males. As it evolved, the movement was regarded as a cult of outcasts, whose members bordered on the ridiculous, if not the insane. Females would, of necessity, be wary of involvement with a male without any obvious prospects. One of the reasons that females marry in the Jamaican culture, is that of social and economic advancement…[253]

Loss of status and security could be catastrophic for women in Guyana, as was evidenced by the experiences of Welete Selassie, an outspoken, independent-minded Rasta woman who had been involved with the Twelve Tribes of Israel since 1999. Welete told me that when she first became involved with Rastafari, her mother put her out of the house; subsequently, a landlady, incensed at finding Welete reading the Bible, threw kerosene on her body and attempted to burn her to death.

In addition, in the early stages of the movement, some Rasta men actively discouraged women from participating. In 2017, several Rasta men expressed regret about the exclusion of women and attributed it to Biblical doctrines. Jah Lion explained:

> A sistren could not come in the congregation…We never give no respect to the sistren them…the Bible say the woman defiled and she certain things…a lot of mis-overstanding that we get out of the Bible. So man interpret it they way and chucks it pon other man…All a we got mother, we got wife, we got girlfriends. You know? We still rebel against the women. All of them is the light, they there before you…But, you know, they got some silly man: 'The man come first!' and

[253] Maureen Rowe, "The Woman in Rastafari," *Caribbean Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 15.

> jump pon them kind of ruling and brainwash other youths that 'Man supposed to stand strong and woman weak.'[254]

Biblical doctrines supported prohibitions against female participation, even in traditionally feminine roles like cooking. According to Ras Swifty, "We fire women comin' round we congregation, men didn't have women, they congregate by theyself;" the Rasta man would cook, and the woman would eat afterward, because she "come second."[255]

Gender dichotomy was evidenced in the cultural practices surrounding the celebration of Haile Selassie's 125th birthday at the Nyabinghi headquarters in Linden. Within the tabernacle, men and women were segregated by gender; women did not play drums, and women spoke much more rarely before the assembly than men. Women covered their hair, while men did not cover theirs; women wore skirts and dresses, while men wore pants. Men cooked and distributed food and water; women asked permission before entering the kitchen. Meanwhile, the principal leaders of the Nyabinghi house, the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and the GRC were all men.

The adoption of distinct gender roles does not necessarily constitute the oppression of women. Many Rasta women feel empowered by the dress, which can be more comfortable than other forms of clothing, and which identifies them as part of a social and ideological movement, earning them respect and perhaps protection from harassment and violence in public. Their role within the home also affords many women a measure of protection; a preference for this arrangement may be connected to the post-slavery period when, as Walter Rodney noted, the withdrawal of women's labor from the

[254] Ras Swifty, Rastafari in Guyana.
[255] Ras Swifty.

plantation meant the protection of women from underpayment, over-work, and violence.[256] Meanwhile, rules governing male dress and behavior can also be burdensome. My argument, however, is that the presence of distinct roles for men and women reflects a dualistic paradigm in which men and women are essentially different from one another, rather than essentially the same, and thus mutually identified with God.

Some Rastas suggested that the religiously-structured patriarchy found within Rastafari culture was a hold-over from colonization, whereas in Africa, women had been at the heart of the social and cultural matrix. Jah Lion observed, "We didn't know nothing about Jesus till the plantation…We exist for thousand years before, we didn't know about Jesus. We know about the black Madonna and child. That is what you take and make into Jesus and Mary."[257] Another elder noted that the Christian concept of the trinity did not originally refer to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but to the Father, the Mother, and the Child. Finally, Ras Leon Saul said:

> God is mother. God is female. The goddess mother is the original energy, not man. That's patriarchal. That's Western conception of relationship. African conception, you go to the Madonna and child…The great mother…The matriarchy is where it's at in Africa.[258]

Such arguments shifted the focus from patriarchal conceptualizations of divinity to a spiritual ethos centered on the qualities and actions of mothers. Going a step further, Welete Selassie stated that she habitually told her children that she, their mother, was God. Welete defined God as a benefactor without which you could do nothing. Thus, she

[256] Walter Rodney, "Plantation Society in Guyana," *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems and Civilizations* 4, no. 4 (1981): 651.
[257] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.
[258] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.

noted, even if her children prayed to God, God would tell them to go through their mother to get what they needed.

It should be noted that while equating women with motherhood reinforces gender dichotomy, people of all gender identities are capable of embodying what are understood as maternal qualities, including the ability to feed, nurture, and empathize with others. These qualities, which many Rasta men express, are precisely those which reflect recognition of self in other, and upon which the construction of the promised land is premised. While male conceptualizations of God do not necessarily contradict the valuation of maternal characteristics, discourse surrounding Haile Selassie has been formulated within a decidedly patriarchal, hierarchical framework; Selassie was described as the "King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of Judah."[259] As a descendant of Biblical kings, Selassie was a patriarch in the tradition of the Bible.

Some Rasta women challenged patriarchal interpretations of Rastafari theology. Welete Selassie noted the historical and symbolic importance of Haile Selassie, but she emphasized the intimate divinity of all people, saying all were mutual children of God. God is in ants, Welete Selassie said, so what is so special about this one individual? Similarly, Sister Isis said that it was important to be, like Selassie, a leader, but she stressed that the Almighty lived in each heart and each soul. Finally, Sister Nicole Cole pointed to the dual coronation of Haile Selassie and his wife, Empress Menen, as a symbol of gender balance emic to Rastafari culture. Sister Nicole said:

> Rastafari, like many other faiths, are heavily patriarchal…Even though the emperor and empress was crowned alongside each other on the second of November in 1930, the movement, which was borne heavily out by men

[259] Ras Ashkar, Rastafari in Guyana.

> ascribing to the faith, have done some amount of disservice to the female aspect of it by downplaying or attempting to downplay the role of women.[260]

Thus, some Rasta women challenged the emphasis on the male embodiment of divinity expressed by Selassie, conceptualizing God in pervasive, intimate, and female-embodied ways.

Some Rastas noted that the inferior status of women within the movement had undermined the movement's collective development aims. Ras Leon Saul said:

> In the early days, there was a kind of suppression of even the voice of the female. Now, even though they might have the chance to say things and do things… because of the traditional outlook that Rasta women must be seen and not heard, you're still not getting enough from them…If Rastafari women were more involved in the administration of our community, we'd get far more done.[261]

Ras Leon Saul's assessment was born out by the example of Sister Nicole Cole, a social worker, educator, and mother who had served as Vice President of the Guyana Rastafari Council (GRC) from 2010-2014.

Although her election as Vice President of the GRC in itself illustrated a degree of openness to female leadership within the Rastafari community, Sister Nicole had faced resistance to her leadership among some Rastas, based simply on her status as a woman. She said:

> I've had a brother challenge me for the leadership just because I am a mere woman. Just because I am a female, I can't lead. I have heard them say, 'No woman can lead I and I.' Right? 'No woman can lead.'…When they heard of the fight that I received as being the first female Vice President, there were some brothers who stood up for me, and I applaud them…But, I will tell you, it's a drag on your energy if you are leading and you are trying to fight the people

[260] Sister Nicole Cole, Rastafari in Guyana, July 18, 2017.
[261] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.

> outside, who see you as different, and those within you who are supposed to support you is also fighting you.[262]

After completing her term, Sister Nicole chose to step back from her leadership role, illustrating how challenges to female leadership had discouraged the efforts of women.

The subordination of women to men hindered women's ability to form relationships independently of their spouses, resulting in the loss of social connectivity through friendships, interest groups, and other mechanisms of lateral solidarity through which women often facilitate community development. Sister Nicole noted:

> I've been warned. I would have been warned by some of the sisters in the movement who say, 'Don't talk to this sister. If you talk to this sister here, she man gon cuss you out.' So, even though you would want to give them a little knowledge, you wait until you don't see the brother around, and then you go tell her something. But generally, when you're warned, you tend to back off. Because remember, now, I don't want to be harmed. I'm a survivor of violence, and I've already had a couple of scars.[263]

Some Rasta women were not allowed to talk to other women within the movement, let alone organize independently within the wider society.

Violence against women contributed to a negative view of Rastafari culture within Guyanese society, causing women who might otherwise be inclined toward the movement to distance themselves. Stigma against Rastafari culture affected the community as a whole; the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent concluded in 2017 that in Guyana, "Rastafari suffer multiple forms of discrimination based on race, gender and religion."[264] Sister Nicole noted experiencing discrimination, despite having achieved post-graduate education. She said:

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[262] Sister Nicole Cole, Rastafari in Guyana.
[263] Sister Nicole Cole.
[264] Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, "Statement to the Media by the United Nations'

> It's ten years since I've graduated. But you still find the stigma and the discrimination. It doesn't matter that you've gone to school. I think perhaps if I was of any other denomination and I'd gone to school, the stigma and discrimination would not have been that great. But just the fact that you've identified with Rastafari, you are painted with a brush and stereotyped.[265]

While much of the stigma Rastas faced undoubtedly stemmed from racism and cultural ignorance associated with colonialism, the contributions of women could do much to transform the movement's public image. For example, Sister Nicole Cole established a Rastafari presence on governmental advisory panels including the Rights of the Child and the Women and Gender commissions, giving the Rastafari community a platform through which they could affect national policies.

However, some Rastas objected to precisely this kind of outreach. Sister Nicole explained:

> Rastafari also have a caution, too, as it comes to worldly knowledge. Because remember, we sing against what is called the Babylonian system. The Babylonian system is seen as this normal society that want you to go to this school and shave your hair and cut your beard, and you know, to look anything other than who you are…So there are those within the Rastafari community in itself who will shun worldly things. So, I myself, I may have been deemed to be out of the Babylonian system because of the fact that…I've been to school, and so I have a profession, and I have to work with persons who would not subscribe to my Rastafari belief. And so, in order to be included…you do not fight every battle…you still have to survive and get by at the end of the day.[266]

Sister Nicole's professional independence and ability to work with diverse people allowed her to forge connections within the wider society that were potentially instrumental in the establishment of sustainable communities in Guyana. However, some

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Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the Conclusion of Its Official Visit to Guyana, 2-6 October 2017," October 6, 2017, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22212&LangID=E.

[265] Sister Nicole Cole, Rastafari in Guyana.

[266] Sister Nicole Cole.

Rastas drew a categorical distinction between themselves and the wider society, which may have made such aims more difficult to accomplish.

Tensions existed among Rastas about how to relate with Babylon. One point of view rejected involvement with the government, the public education system, and all forms of officialdom, while another supported working pragmatically within the system to achieve certain aims. At a meeting, one Rasta man in his early thirties protested that the elders within the movement had consistently refused public assistance, leaving a vacuum in the material and educational opportunities of the youth. The leaders had even rejected land, the young man said, because it was less than what had originally been promised.

Another young Rasta man, perhaps in his mid-twenties, made a speech before the Nyabinghi gathering, in which he proposed an educational initiative. He said that through literacy, the movement would have greater success in securing support from political elites. The Rastas could be raising billions of dollars, he concluded, but they couldn't approach the government with their "creole language skills." His speech was followed by a strong condemnation of this line of thinking by a slightly older man, who pointed out that although Rastas didn't speak like educated people, they were not fools, and they lacked nothing which Babylon could give them. Instead, it was to nature that the true education pertained: knowledge of plants and farming, to provide skills necessary to survival and self-sufficiency.

Nevertheless, there was a growing sentiment among Rastas of diverse groups that working with public institutions was necessary. At the national Rastafari conference, speakers and members of the audience frequently raised such topics as establishing a

Rastafari political party, seeking land and material assistance, and lobbying to change specific laws. Sister Nicole observed: "In order to have our rights respected, we need to get into Parliament where laws are passed…And order for you to do that, you have to go into politics…what will protect us is the law."[267]

While there were legitimate reasons for Rastas to distrust the political system, the embrace of diverse approaches reflected the self-organizing, adaptive principle of the soil—whereas a rigid, monolithic approach to complex challenges had resulted in stagnation and breakdown. The latter approach, based on a conceptual dichotomy between the Rastafari community and Babylon, had in fact limited the Rastafari community's access to land. Ras Leon Saul observed:

> You have to burst out of the confines of the community and deal with society at large to get success. Because to stay in your enclave is being narrow in your outlook. And we don't have much respect within the Guyanese society, because there is nothing people can point to and say, 'Look what they've done,' or 'Look what they're doing.'…We tried to get land. Acres of land outside of a place called Linden, to get involved with agricultural pursuits. But because of basic inability to make money happen, to raise funds, to do economic ventures, paying for the land is problematic. So, we weren't too successful in acquiring the land because the community in general is not too focused on economic pursuits. There's a weakness when it comes down to economic pursuits and working together for make money. That's where our weakness lies.[268]

The contributions of women like Sister Nicole could do much to restore connectivity between the Rastafari community and the wider society, and in turn with land itself.

The dynamic and autopoetic character of the Rastafari movement has allowed it to redefine itself through the perspective of each participant. Sister Nicole continued to insist that the inferior status of women was not true to the essence of Rastafari, and that

[267] Sister Nicole Cole.
[268] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.

through education and the integration of women, the community could better live up to its own standards. She said:

> The onus is upon individuals within the community to shine forth a positive light all the time. To show that regardless of what is said, that there are those among us who will portray the light and positivity of Rastafari…And I have worked to bring a better image to what Rastafari is perceived about, and that image is one that has transcended boundaries.[269]

Other women challenged norms specific to female Rastas, such as those against wearing pants or showing their hair in public. Welete Selassie said, "It's a choice. You choose to be whatever you want. I choose to be a Rasta. That's my choice. I'm pleasing with myself. I don't need anybody to tell me about me."[270] Such women themselves took on authorship of the Rastafari movement, rather than rejecting it on the basis of others' interpretation. Sister Nicole said:

> I will say exactly how I feel. And that can be a bit controversial for persons who are taught to uphold a lie. But that's part of Rastafari. It tells you to speak the truth…When you know the truth, you are able to make decisions that are in your best interest. And you can mitigate impending challenges.[271]

In 2017, it appeared that Rastafari culture in Guyana was gradually integrating greater levels of female involvement. In the planning of the national Rastafari conference, women played an instrumental role, performing important tasks even while supervising and caring for small children, with the help of community members. Although at the conference, women appeared on stage much more rarely than men, their contributions to

[269] Sister Nicole Cole, Rastafari in Guyana.
[270] This quote is a transcription of interview notes which may reflect a slight paraphrase.
[271] Sister Nicole Cole, Rastafari in Guyana.

the event's success were indispensable. As Ras Leon Saul aptly said of women in the Rastafari movement, "They keep it together."[272]

At the same time, the community appeared to maintain an antagonistic stance toward homosexuality and gender non-conformity, reflecting a view of gender focused on differences between men and women, rather than their essential relatedness. Many Rastas were united with British colonial society and the majority of the Guyanese population in supporting the criminalization of homosexuality. In a letter to the editor in 2008, Ras Ashkar stated:

> Homosexuality is an aberration, a social pathology, just like suicide, murder, substance abuse and other such social ills. And it would be unscientific to treat it as a normal and natural way of life. And while I will in no way advocate the killing of gays, I would definitely advocate some form of psychotherapy and behaviour control.[273]

Ras Ashkar classified homosexuality as inherently harmful, presumably even in private and between consenting adults. While it is important that Ras Ashkar rejected death penalties for homosexuals, his support of "behaviour control" vindicated violent methods of state coercion against a nonviolent lifestyle.

Some women who protested their own situation within the Rastafari gender paradigm joined Rasta men in opposing gay rights. Sister Nicole said:

> I've had to articulate the position of Rastafari as it relates to the legalization of homosexuality, to which the Rastafari do not support. So, even while sitting on the Women and Gender [Commission], when it came to such an issue, I had to break ranks, and to say the constituency I represent do not support that… Why did they send me forward if I wasn't going to represent them? It didn't matter

[272] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.
[273] Ras Ashkar, "Those in Support of Homosexuality Are More Interested in Their Hedonistic Agenda than in Individual Freedom," *Stabroek News*, May 27, 2008, sec. Letters to the Editor, https://www.stabroeknews.com/2008/opinion/letters/05/27/those-in-support-of-homosexuality-are-more-interested-in-their-hedonistic-agenda-than-in-individual-freedom/.

> that some members of the community didn't really see me as a leader because I am a woman. When I speak on issues, they will meet you on the road and to say, 'Thanks, man. I agree with what you said, X, Y, and Z.'[274]

Sister Nicole's comments suggest that even if some Rastas personally supported LGBT rights, strong feelings on the subject within the movement would make it risky to challenge the mainstream view in a public way.

The Rastas' stance on homosexuality, while not exceptional within Guyana or the West Indies more broadly, seemed incongruous with their larger ethos of radical acceptance—and with the long-standing Guyanese history of leveraging complementarity in diversity: the fundamental principle of the soil. This stance likely further limits the movement's social and ecological connectivity; beyond the alienation of LGBT people in Guyana who might otherwise be attracted to the movement, the anti-LGBT bent of Rastafari culture tends to chill international support, especially among progressive-minded people who are sympathetic to LGBT rights.[275] While some Rastas simply label such groups as "Babylon," there is no denying that the energies and talents of additional allies could lend momentum and material assistance to the movement whose ideals otherwise hold, for many, great appeal.

To sum up this section, Rastafari in Guyana developed along patriarchal lines, reflecting a global culture of patriarchy and the influence of the Bible. Premised on conceptual gender dichotomy, the patriarchal structure of the Rastafari movement limited the contributions of women. Whereas an emphasis on the male embodiment of divinity in

[274] Sister Nicole Cole, Rastafari in Guyana.
[275] Ellen Kohlings and Pete Lilly, "From One Love to One Hate: Europe's Perception of Jamaican Homophobia Expressed in Song Lyrics," in *International Reggae: Current and Future Trends in Jamaican Popular Music* (Kingston, Jamaica: Pelican Publishers Ltd, 2013).

Haile Selassie reinforced a patriarchal ethos, some Rastas pointed to matrifocal spirituality and the role of Empress Menen to support an equal status for women in the movement. The participation of women remained limited in 2017, but some Rasta women challenged the symbols and doctrines of patriarchy, redefining the movement on their own terms. Meanwhile, Rastas largely continued to support the criminalization of homosexuality, in conformity with the dualistic gender constructions of colonial culture and contemporary Guyanese society.

II. The Great Leader: Big man-ism and Partisan Politics

Ras Swifty reflected on challenges that faced the Rastafari community after an initial phase of unity in the 1970s and early 1980s. He said:

> A lot of brethren who went away sight Rastafari in England, Canada and them thing, they come home with wealth. And when they come home with wealth, instead of falling in, in the same unity, like how they come and reach the brethren them who ain't got wealthy living, they pulled theyself up, they's big dread. So from then, if the system fighting we, and make the fabric start fade away, man start looking individually… man start looking to get wealth, and forget the unity and love. And that's how it break down this whole thing, to the fabric of the unity and love.[276]

According to Ras Swifty, the social and spatial connectivity of the Rastafari community was eroded as individuals who emigrated to wealthy countries returned with money and status that set them apart. At the same time, Guyana's ethnically charged politics had shifted, bringing the Indian-backed PPP to power. The privileges the Rastafari community had enjoyed under the African-backed PNC were revoked; Rastafari identity was criminalized, and lands that had been granted for communitarian initiatives were

[276] Ras Swifty, Rastafari in Guyana.

rescinded. Deprived of the right to gather without police interference, the Rastafari community dissipated.

In this section, I describe the orientation of the Rastafari movement in Guyana to Prime Minister and later President Forbes Burnham and his PNC party as a form of big man-ism. The concept of big man-ism appears in scholarship on Haitian and West African cultures and politics,[277] but it should not be understood as an African or African-diasporic phenomenon; instead, big man-ism is a global dynamic in which international, national, and local men—and, less commonly, women—wield power over others in self-serving, violent, and mutually-reinforcing ways.

The term "big man" appears often in the speech of West Indian people as recorded by ethnographers; Barry Chevannes quoted a Jamaican Rasta who described the autocratic politician Alexander Bustamante as a "big man."[278] Above, Ras Swifty used the term "big dread" to describe those Rastas who returned to Guyana with status and wealth. In 1985, John P. Homiak noted that some Nyabinghi elders had what he referred to as "bigman"[279] status, and he later described a dynamic in which elders competed for power and status in terms of "bigmanism."[280] Myriam Huet noted how this dynamic had led to divisions within Rastafari communities:

> …the movement's breakdown in islands like Martinique and Guadeloupe is due to Elders' disproportionate egos, thirst to be revered, and desire to control

[277] Jana Evans Braziel, *Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Elizabeth A. McAlister, *Rara!: Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Karin Barber, *West African Popular Theatre* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 52; Eugene L. Mendonsa, *West Africa: An Introduction to Its History, Civilization and Contemporary Situation* (Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 518.
[278] Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 148.
[279] John P. Homiak, "The 'Ancients of Days' Seated Black: Eldership, Oral Tradition, and Ritual in Rastafari Culture" (Brandeis University, 1985), 418, https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.tulane.edu/docview/303389763/abstract/F682B6C6037455FPQ/3.
[280] Homiak, "The 'Ancients of Days' Seated Black."

> decisions affecting the group. Elders who thrive on younger bredrins idolizing them will commonly strive to assume a dictatorial position within their group, community, congregation, or organization. In turn, tensions might erupt between Elders and result in fissions and the formation of cliques of Elders with their respective following.[281]

In addition to the internal dynamics of Rastafari communities, I apply the concept of big man-ism to global issues related to the monopolization of power. The concept thus incorporates both hierarchy and patriarchy, while emphasizing the interlocking networks of nepotism and patronage that allow local and transnational big men to undermine people's movements tied to soil. Oriented to individual ego, desire for personal gain, and fixation on individual public personas, big man-ism is the opposite of the intersubjective collectivism of the promised land. I argue in this section that Rastas' orientation to the national big man, Forbes Burnham, to some degree eclipsed the grassroots interdependence and mutuality of the Rastafari movement, as Burnham's administration exacerbated ethnic tensions in Guyana and eroded human rights and material well-being for all Guyanese people.

Big man-ism defined local neighborhoods in Guyana, many of which were run by authoritarian men and local bosses. In her ethnographic analysis of Guyanese cultural politics, Brackette Williams described the relationships between truly big men (national elites), small big men (local elites dependent on national elites), and big small men (at the top of the local small man class) as hierarchical and mutually-reinforcing systems of power and status, through which a small number of men arbitrated the flow of goods and services to "ordinary" people.[282] Future Rastas in Guyana likely developed an awareness

[281] Huet, "Doing Jah-Jah Works at Home and Abroad," 202.
[282] Brackette F. Williams, *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins: Guyana and the Politics of Cultural Struggle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 78–83.

of these systems of power, which determined who could "get through" bureaucracies and other obstacles in order to meet their needs.

The interdependence of national and local big men was reflected at the transnational level; the big-man status of Forbes Burnham was dependent on the patronage of the US government and the regional big man, President John F. Kennedy, who oversaw Burnham's rise to power. Burnham boasted to the British governor in the early 1960s that "'a word to George Meany' would open doors to him.'"[283] Meany was president of the AFL-CIO, the organization that helped the CIA sabotage the democratically-elected leader of British Guiana, Cheddi Jagan, at Kennedy's behest. Burnham's comment reflected how transnational networks of power and patronage were shifting during this era, as the dismantling of British empire in the Americas was underway. It also illustrated how big man-ism came into direct conflict with democracy, even when it emerged within the framework of US democratic leadership, with Kennedy as its figurehead.

After leaving their parents' homes, many young men who would later become Rastas served in the military, as the PNC government tightened its grip on power by bolstering the nation's military and para-military forces with large numbers of African-Guyanese recruits. Ex-military Rastas in 2017 predicted their numbers were great enough to influence the policies of then-President David Granger, who was a retired military officer. As soldiers under the PNC administration of Forbes Burnham, these future Rastas were undoubtedly shaped by hierarchical, male-dominated authority structures, as well as anti-Indian racism; over 90% of the military were of African descent, and paramilitary

[283] Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana*, 100.

gangs were known to invade Indian homes and brutalize their inhabitants.[284] Many Rastas who served in the military were probably obligated to make a loyalty pledge to the ruling party—a requirement of all defense forces beginning in 1977.[285] Such experiences forcibly oriented Rastas to the national big man, Forbes Burnham.

Beyond the influence of military culture, Rastas viewed Burnham sympathetically because he represented ideals shared by the Rastafari community. A Guyanese man of African descent, Burnham had presided over Guyana's independence in 1966, and was an important symbol of decolonization and black nationalism. An outspoken supporter of pan-Africanist ideals, Burnham had participated in the non-aligned movement, restored Guyana's relations with Cuba, and visited African countries including Ethiopia, where he met Haile Selassie. According to Ras Leon Saul, Selassie "advised the Guyanese leader on aspects of visionary governance,"[286] and afterwards Burnham became more sympathetic to the Rastafari movement. Burnham declared Guyana a Cooperative Socialist Republic in 1970, and in 1971, he announced a national goal of complete economic self-reliance by 1976, under the slogan of "Feed, Clothe, and House the Nation."[287] Burnham's stated ideals were thus aligned with the Rastas' desire for autonomy from an exploitative global economic system. As Ras Leon Saul observed:

> We [the Rastas] were the only ones who were giving fact to his [Burnham's] philosophy of Feed, Clothe, and House yourself FCH program: buy local, be local…That time was a time of stringent economic curtailment of imports, so we were the ones who supported that aspect of nationalization and focusing on local produce and growing your own and eating your own, because of who we are as Rastafari. So because of that, Burnham became enamored, somewhat, of Rastafari.[288]

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[284] Rabe, 163.
[285] Spinner, *A Political and Social History of Guyana, 1945-1983*, 162.
[286] Saul, "First Rastas in British Guiana Were Garveyites."
[287] "Guyana Sets Self-Help Goals," *Afro-American (1893-1988); Baltimore, Md.*, June 12, 1971.
[288] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.

As part of his larger strategy of political patronage, Burnham practiced selective non-enforcement of Guyana's existing laws against marijuana, especially for use among the Rastafari community. Although it fell short of a constitutional right to cannabis use, Rastas cited their relative freedom to smoke marijuana under Burnham's administration as a key factor in the development of the Rastafari community. Jah Lion said:

> In the 80s we had a president that was all for pan-Africanism. And give Rasta a helping hand. Not prosecuting Rasta. You know, let us get we freedom. If you need to smoke your weed, he said, 'Well, you can just smoke your weed. Don't do it in the public. Smoke your weed.' He tell the law, 'Don't go in people house and lock them up for no weed.' Ca [Because] he ain't fill up the jail with Africans…So we had a good grace at that time, about 8, 9 years in the 80s, until he died. You know, Rastafari grow from strength to strength. We keep a lot of shows, we had activities, exhibits. Nuff, nuff things. We start participating in more arts, getting consciousness and knowledge and realize well, this is the way. Cause most people was headed for doom. Cause we had no guidance for show us. No guidance, no nothing.[289]

The freedom to practice their culture fostered gatherings that diverted young people from desperation. Heightened cultural activity in turn reinforced official approval. Describing one event organized by the Rastafari community, Jah Lion said:

> We had five days of exposition that was natural. Wasn't nothing from the system, zinc sheet or nothing. Everything came out of the jungle. Benches, seats, tents, you know, everything was a natural meditation. And the President loved that! Because he send the Prime Minister at the time, who was Desmond Hoyte, to tell them Rasta, 'Good works.' He passed, and he invite all him ambassadors. He said 'Well, this is what I talking about.'[290]

Many Rastas in 2017 remained loyal to Burnham's legacy. Ras Simeon, speaking at the national Rastafari conference at the University of Guyana, said:

[289] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.
[290] Jah Lion.

> [T]he great leader LFS Burnham…reclaimed us from the hands of the enslavers and colonizers, pushed them back behind the borders and placed our feet on the path of self-liberation, self-determination and self-reliance. After recognizing that he had been betrayed by those around him and that Rastafari was the only group of people who was with him on his mission, he made us the heir of his legacy with those immortal words that every elderly person in Guyana knows, 'Killing me is a waste, another Rasta will take my place.'[291]

Similarly laudatory views of Burnham prevailed among the Rastas, who identified Burnham as one of them. Ras Leon Saul recalled, "We considered Burnham a Rasta man. So we used to take markers and draw his locks on his posters. We used to put on his locks for him."[292]

Nevertheless, Burnham's rhetoric was betrayed by his actions. While Guyana's 1970 constitution was founded on principles of cooperative socialism, in practice, Guyanese industries were nationalized through repurchase on terms favorable to foreign corporations, leaving Guyana in foreign debt.[293] Mismanagement and corruption led to the collapse of industries, decreased wages, the deterioration of basic services, and the emigration of approximately half of the Guyanese population.[294] Burnham secured loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which, according to Guyanese economic historian Clive Thomas, were willingly accorded because "the Burnham regime…continued to serve the fundamental interests of American capital."[295] Even as more than 30% of the national product was channeled abroad, the government used revolutionary rhetoric to justify the repressive measures this level of deprivation

[291] Ras Simeon, "Speech of Hon. Ras Simeon. President of the Guyana Rastafari Council at the National Rastafari Conference Held at the University of Guyana on July 20-21, 2017." (National Rastafari Conference, Georgetown, Guyana, July 21, 2017).
[292] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.
[293] Thomas, "State Capitalism in Guyana: An Assessment of Burnham's Co-Operative Socialist Republic," 376.
[294] Thomas, 382.
[295] Thomas, 384.

required.[296] Rights of due process were eliminated, and political assassinations were used to silence opposition.[297] The news media was nationalized, and stories, including that of Walter Rodney's death, were reported inaccurately.[298]

The erosion of human rights under Burnham's government affected the Rastafari community. Several interviewees recalled that attacks on Rastafari cultural expression were common throughout the 1970s. Ras Leon Saul noted the "beatings and locking up of hundreds of Rastafarians at the National Park who had attended a musical showcase commemorating the birth anniversary of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie 1 on Sunday, July 23"[299] in 1978—eight years after Burnham's visit to Ethiopia. In 1980, the dreadlocks Ras Swifty had grown for three years were cut by the police, in the absence of a criminal charge. He said:

> They feel when you cut, when they cut your natty [dreadlocks], the Rastafari movement gon decline. But it didn't decline. It make people more stronger, because when, like me first crop, three year crop, from 1977 to 1980 cut, I fast for two weeks. Cause it's the most queerest feelings I ever had. Ca [Because] when they cut off me hair I feel like me ain't got head…you don't had to go in jail [to have your dreadlocks cut]. The police come—at a corner, and thing, they pull up, they scissors and knife, razor blade, any sharpest thing. Cutlass, anything. They just hold your hair and cut it off.[300]

Ras Swifty identified this brutal, traumatizing experience as an assault on Rastafari culture itself. The feeling of mutilation Ras Swifty described indicates the importance of dreadlocks to Rastafari identity; often likened to antennas, locks are thought to connect

[296] Thomas, 386–87.
[297] Thomas, 390.
[298] Thomas, 396.
[299] Saul, "First Rastas in British Guiana Were Garveyites."
[300] Ras Swifty, Rastafari in Guyana.

Rastas to nature and subtle spiritual frequencies. The political act of severing them thus exemplifies the alienation from nature big man-ism implied.

Meanwhile, the freedom to use marijuana, dependent on Burnham's personal good will, vanished after Burnham's death in 1985. Ras Swifty recalled:

> Before 1985, in the early 70s, we had the best times of life as Rastafari. The gathering, no police ain't bother we. But when, 1985, Forbes Burnham passed away and Mr. Hoyte take it up, we can't gather. It make the unity of Rastafari start fading out individuals. Cause where the gathering come the police come beat you up, sweep your house, till they find a seed. Everybody gone. Lock you down…ten gram fine. So they try to disintegrate we.[301]

In 1988, Guyana passed the Narcotics and Psychotropic Drugs (Control) Act—according to one Rasta, as a condition imposed by the IMF—which enacted a three-year minimum sentence for possession of marijuana. Many Rastas attributed the subsequent disintegration of the Rastafari community to these harsh sentences, combined with intensified police aggression. Stigmatized and endangered, Rastafari gatherings diminished. The lack of interpersonal contact and positive shared experiences isolated individuals and severed community bonds.

Conditions of poverty led many Rastas to emigrate to the United States, Canada, and other countries seeking work. When some Rastas who had lived abroad returned, they brought with them money, status, and a different cultural outlook. The imbalanced power dynamic this caused led to divisiveness and distrust within the Rastafari community. Jah Lion said:

> [W]e can't put we energy in force because we got division. This group think they better than this group. And that group think they better than this group. It doesn't make no sense! We should build a multitude. Thousand of us. Got land all over.

[301] Ras Swifty.

> Cultivate. Producing. Factories…It shouldn't be like that, because I and I part of the King. Why should his children be separate?[302]

Ras Leon Saul attributed divisiveness among the Rastas to "[m]aterialism, individualism, 'I want, I want, I want,' 'I gotta get,' 'I gotta be the man.' Ego, individuality, and a lack of understanding about the collective determination of a community."[303] This lack of unity interfered with Rastas' ability to cultivate viable communities. Ras Leon Saul explained:

> During Burnham's time we had much more unity. We used to do much more in the community, in terms of service. We were more involved in agriculture pursuits. We were a lot more self-reliant, and there was lots more respect for us. And there was much more love amongst the brethren and sistren. We used to meet a lot more often, and it was better back then than now.[304]

Acknowledging the despair and frustration of Rastas who were in their twenties and early thirties in 2017, Ras Leon Saul said:

> We have not done enough to gather them, organize them, to teach them, and to pass on the knowledge that allows them to be more self-confident. And to be more able to work out for themselves through self-reliant methods…It's really because of the economic concerns and constraints. In the rush for survival and to make a dollar every day, you don't find much time to socialize and sit down and reason together, through which you could pass on information. Cause in my time, becoming Rastafari, was a lot of reasoning sessions we had. A lot of Binghi gatherings, a lot of fire, sit around the fire reasoning…A lot of reasonings brought us through. Word of mouth, you know? That doesn't happen much right now in Guyana.[305]

To some degree, these outcomes were the predictable results of US policies, beyond the control of the Rastafari community. Nevertheless, Rastas' support of Burnham, though

[302] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.
[303] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.
[304] Ras Leon Saul.
[305] Ras Leon Saul.

motivated by a communitarian vision of pan-African unity and local self-sufficiency, instead linked the Rastafari movement to a transnational network of mutually-reinforcing big men that undermined the interconnectivity of diverse subjects that was the basis of the promised land.

As discussed in Chapter One, the ethnic polarization of Guyanese politics was a contrivance of the CIA and other US actors within Guyana. Rastas' support for the Burnham regime reflected the entanglement of the community's aspirations in the culture of anti-Indian sentiment promulgated by the PNC. As Ras Swifty recalled,

> Most people who sight Rastafari, they call them rogue and vagabonds, rebel against society. Ca [Because] that's how we feel about life. Growing up in society where we come from. The parents working hard, earning, but still seems like something missing. So we decide to rebel against society. Which we had a certain culture…you normally don't trouble African descendants. So we trouble the other race amongst we. We say, like the Indians, we say, 'They ain't come and get money. We come out of slavery and still it's a fight for survival.' So we used to prey—make them we prey.[306]

Ras Swifty explained Rastas' violence against Indians by noting that Africans had been slaves, while Indians were paid for their labor. Such feelings of resentment, stemming from colonial injustice, were leveraged by the PNC,[307] resulting in the ethnic polarization Rastas understood to have negatively affected them under Indian-backed PPP governments between 1989 and 2015.

Burnham's rule illustrated how big man-ism interferes with people's movements tied to soil. An ambitious leader deriving power from outside forces is an imposition on the soil, which functions through the interdependent integration of all of its heterogeneous components. In contrast, the big man derives authority from the illusion of

[306] Ras Leon Saul.
[307] Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana*, 54.

a common enemy, leading to the destruction of mutually nourishing relationships between self and other. This was true of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie as well as of Burnham; according to sociologist Asafa Jalata, successive Ethiopian regimes, including that of Haile Selassie, leveraged the support of global powers to engage in ethnic cleansing and other atrocities within Ethiopia. Jalata wrote:

> Ethiopian racism and white racism have conveniently intermarried in US policy formulation and implementation in Ethiopia…The Ethiopian government has historically obtained its political legitimacy and financed its engagement in human rights violations through global connections. Just as Britain supported Ethiopia during the first half of the 20th century, the United States provided financial assistance to the Haile Selassie government from the mid-20th century to the mid-1970s…The financing provided from these external resources enabled successive Ethiopian states to engage in terrorism.[308]

Guyanese Rastas' embrace of Burnham and the PNC marked an apparent departure from the political approach often found in Jamaican Rastafari culture. As anthropologist Anita M. Waters noted, "virtually every scholar of Rastafari"[309] in the Jamaican context has described the movement's fundamental distrust of partisan politics. Religious scholar Ennis Barrington Edmonds described the Rastafari movement in Jamaica as "a deliberate undertaking aimed at delegitimating the Jamaican sociopolitical order imposed by external powers and maintained by their local cohorts."[310] As noted in Chapter One, Walter Rodney described Jamaican Rastas as having broken completely

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[308] Asafa Jalata, "State Terrorism and Globalization: The Cases of Ethiopia and Sudan," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46, no. 1–2 (April 1, 2005): 85, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715205054471.
[309] Anita M. Waters, "Reluctant Candidates? Rastafarians and Partisan Politics in Jamaica and Elsewhere," in *Rastafari in the New Millennium a Rastafari Reader*, by Michael Barnett, First Edition, UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 291, http://libproxy.tulane.edu:2048/login?url=http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780815650799/.
[310] Ennis Barrington Edmonds, *Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 65.

with "imperialism and its local lackeys."[311] Nevertheless, in the context of Guyana, where ethnic tensions played a significant role in the development of political partisanship after independence, Rastas viewed Burnham as a legitimate leader, and became ardent supporters of the PNC.

Still, ethnic partisanship should not be understood as an inherent aspect of Rastafari culture in Guyana; instead, this trend is counter-balanced by universalist principles that transcend superficial constructions of race and ethnicity. Ras Ashkar said:

> Although it's largely a Afro-centric group…the one love ideology is very central in the movement. So it matters not if you're white, black, Indian, or so forth. As long as you come, as we say, chanting Rastafari, as long as you subscribe to the Rastafari idea, you're accepted…within the group, you have a lot of Rastafarians of different racial backgrounds…You really don't feel uncomfortable if you are part of the collective. It's an open-door kind of religion… Although there's an emphasis on blackness, I think in practical, day-to-day realities, that blackness…is used in a more philosophical, rather than a practical, day-to-day way. So it's like a way of life, it's like a state of mind, that blackness. So whether you are white, whether you're Indian in terms of race and so forth, it doesn't matter, as long as you subscribe to this notion of blackness. And of black dignity and so forth.[312]

Ras Ashkar's notion of blackness transcended race, potentially inviting broader unity within Guyanese society. Casting the net even wider, Ras Leon Saul said:

> Apart from the nomenclature and the name-tag, for me, Rastafari is no different to anybody who is seeking divinity, or a divine way of life, based on love…Ca [Because] you don't have to have the locks, you don't have to eat Ital, you don't have to smoke marijuana. Just love, man. Ain't got no love, ain't no Rasta. Rasta gotta be about love in its fullness.[313]

In recent years, leaders from the GRC, Nyabinghi order, and Twelve Tribes of Israel have made a point to avoid even giving the impression of political partisanship, instead

[311] Rodney, *The Groundings With My Brothers*, 13.
[312] Ras Ashkar, Rastafari in Guyana.
[313] Ras Leon Saul, Rastafari in Guyana.

focusing on securing commitments from candidates in both of Guyana's main parties on issues pertinent to the Rastafari community.[314]

Rastafari culture in Guyana should be credited for its strong tradition of selfless servant-leadership, which has survived the skewed political climate of the Burnham era. The Guyana Rastafari Council has sought to foster unity among the various Rastafari groups in Guyana, attempting to bring divergent organizations together to share in the national platform established by Sister Nicole Cole and the GRC. In a statement at the national Rastafari conference in 2017, Ras Simeon spoke on the theme of unity. He said:

> As His Majesty [Haile Selassie] said when He came to the Caribbean in 1966…we need to organize and centralize. In spite of the command to us by our Father, we continue to see division and separation within the Rastafari movement…We see those among us who have, not associating with those who don't have. All the while, a great percentage of our members face unemployment and continue to wallow in poverty and illiteracy. Today, the face of the most wanted criminal in Guyana is a person with locks…Rastafari is faced with a choice. We can choose to heed the words of our Father to centralize and organize our efforts…or we can remain in our little splinter groups in conflict and competition…The Guyana Rastafari Council chooses to heed the command of the Emperor to centralize and organize, even if that means that a new and more acceptable President is chosen. I'd rather be a servant in a strong nation that the leader of a weak and divided nation.[315]

Ras Simeon's preference for servitude over leadership, in the interests of the collective, illustrated a humility that contrasted sharply with big man-ism. His subsequent statements reinforced a commitment to democratic values, rather than top-down leadership. He said:

> I think that we need to centralize and organize along modern lines and using the modern principles of accountable, transparent and inclusive governance. There

[314] Freddie Kissoon, "What Rastafari Did Saturday Afternoon, All Guyanese Should Do," *Kaieteur News Online*, January 26, 2015, http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2015/01/26/what-rastafari-did-saturday-afternoon-all-guyanese-should-do/; "Rasta Community Did Not Endorse the PPP/C | Guyana News and Information Discussion Forums," accessed July 6, 2017, http://guyana.hoop.la/printer-friendly-topic/rasta-community-did-not-endorse-the-ppp-c.

[315] Ras Simeon, "Speech of Hon. Ras Simeon. President of the Guyana Rastafari Council at the National Rastafari Conference Held at the University of Guyana on July 20-21, 2017."

> must be established among us a structure and a process to which we all agree that will give the members of our community the opportunity to elect their national representatives and remove them if they are not functioning effectively.[316]

Ras Simeon advocated for aims of accountability and inclusivity that contrasted with Burnham's unlimited, antidemocratic power.

This section has illustrated how a global dynamic of big man-ism interfered with the Rastafari community's development efforts in Guyana. Rastas' orientation to Guyanese head of state, Forbes Burnham, entangled them in a scheme of ethnic partisanship that served the interests of foreign capital at the expense of communities tied to soil, contradicting the principles of interdependence that made the Rastafari movement effective and postponing the implementation of the promised land. Fixation on the individual personality of Forbes Burnham can be understood as intimately connected to the individualism and desire for personal gain that challenged the communitarian ethos of the Rastafari community after the damage of the Burnham years was done. Nevertheless, strong traditions of trans-ethnic solidarity, political nonpartisanship, and democratic servant-leadership survived within the Rastafari movement.

III. Ras Ville: A Case Study in Rastafari Community Building

The experiences of Ras Benjamin "Lepke" illustrate how the Rastafari movement's allegiance to Forbes Burnham interfered with the establishment of the promised land. I met Ras Benjamin at his home in Ras Ville—a Rastafari community Ras Benjamin founded around 1980. Ras Benjamin was a white-haired elder, but he was

[316] Ras Simeon.

strong, agile, and youthful in spirit. His yard was surrounded with herb gardens, rainwater catchment basins, and huge trees populated with parrots. Ras Benjamin, who identified himself as a reincarnation of the gangster "Lepke" from a 1975 Tony Curtis film, had evolved during his lifetime from a "rebel on the road"[317] into an almost ascetic "herbalist" and mystic.

Around 1979, Ras Benjamin was enlisted by Forbes Burnham to launch an agricultural project in Guyana's hinterland. Ras Benjamin recalled:

> When the former leader Forbes Burnham, he used to be in town. And he tell we come pon a place, Regent and Wellington Street, and see a whole portion a we and he said, 'If y'all is Rasta, Rasta don't there in the city, Rasta is go in the jungle.' And we start communicating with he and he give us a portion a land in the jungle name North Fork.[318]

Burnham gave the young men land, tools, and rations, and sent them to a remote site in the interior where they were told they had license to run their own affairs. In Ras Benjamin's words, "Burnham said, 'Well, y'all control in there. Y'all do y'all thing in there.'"[319] The mission reflected Burnham's aim of developing Guyana's hinterland, which, without adequate planning and oversight, more than once resulted in disaster.[320]

Ras Benjamin and the other Rastas at North Fork cultivated a crop of cannabis plants. According to Ras Benjamin, "had a little competition with some Rasta man and the pork knocker [miners] them. And a whole calamity, tragedy, break out."[321] There was a fight; a pork knocker was wounded. A "war" followed between the Rastas and the

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[317] Ras Benjamin, Rastafari in Guyana, July 10, 2017.
[318] Ras Benjamin.
[319] Ras Benjamin.
[320] In 1978, a US minister named Jim Jones forced more than 900 people to commit suicide at a cooperative community in Guyana's hinterland. Jones was supported by Burnham despite allegations against him in the US.
[321] Benjamin Breen, "Drugs and Early Modernity," *History Compass* 15, no. 4 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12376.

"Baldhead" (non-Rastas).[322] The police arrested the Rastas and charged them with marijuana cultivation. Twenty-three or more were beaten and jailed; their dreadlocks were cut forcibly. Ras Benjamin recalled that the Rastas, after having their hair cut, and being beaten brutally, were unrecognizable. At least four crocus bags filled with marijuana were seized. The police required the prisoners to sell some of their crop to buy rations while they remained in jail, and the police sold it themselves for private profit. Some officers smoked the marijuana in front of the Rastas, while ridiculing Rastafari culture, shouting "Jah, Rastafari!" and laughing.[323]

After the wounded miner died, Ras Benjamin—who maintained he was not involved in the fight—found himself facing charges for murder, marijuana cultivation, and destruction of property. The latter charge was levied because Ras Benjamin had destroyed a reservoir that diverted water away from the Rastas' farm. Ras Benjamin had believed himself justified in destroying the reservoir because he had been given permission to cultivate the land and exercise authority over the area. Ras Benjamin explained: "Put a reservoir block off we creek. Fi run the water somewhere else. How you gon do that?…So I go and break out the reservoir, say, 'Y'all can't do that. Y'all can't kill we water way. Burnham send me here. So we got have free access.'"[324] Having no funds with which to mount a defense, Ras Benjamin was in danger of losing his freedom and perhaps his life. When the miner's death certificate was presented, however, it cited natural causes; Ras Benjamin was released after spending three months in prison for damage to property. However, his "terrible and dreadful"[325] journey had just begun.

[322] Ras Benjamin, Rastafari in Guyana.
[323] Ras Benjamin.
[324] Ras Benjamin.
[325] Ras Benjamin.

After his release from prison, Ras Benjamin became part of another of Burnham's initiatives. Burnham had committed to the nationalization of unused foreign-owned lands, which were to be allocated to small farmers. Ras Benjamin remembered:

> After I come out of prison, I come over here and was sitting behind there, on a concrete bridge, pulling a joint. And when I look up on the lantern post, I saw a poster…mark 'Land to the Tiller.' Well, since going to school I educated, right? So I said to myself three time: 'Land? Tiller? Land? Tiller? Land? Tiller?…I said, 'What? I can take it.'[326]

Instead of applying to the advertised program, Ras Benjamin squatted on the land—a trash dump that had been vacated by a Canadian company. Ras Benjamin occupied the land, cleaning and preparing it for agriculture, on his own authority. He recalled:

> When I come in, and living, people used to say 'Mad. You're a madman. You take the whole place there.' Ca [Because] look: I put this whole place shine like the first, you know? Before I start planting…I clean the road too. The road had nuff grass and rubbish, so I work farm daytime, and road afternoon. Block off round so, and block off the front. Anybody I see in here gotta answer to me.[327]

After five months, Burnham visited Ras Benjamin and accorded his project official approval. Ras Benjamin said:

> Forbes Burnham asked me: 'Wait, man, I man, who send you?' I say, 'Jah Rastafari.' And he say, 'Well, show me from where to where you take.'…That's the same day when he tell me I entitled to seven ganja plants. After we walk and he see me works and everything…in the presence of the then chief and all the guards, he give me permission for seven marijuana plants. I used to trod this city freely with herb in Forbes Burnham time…Forbes Burnham now used to come visit every fortnight and bring plants and…assistant, tools…[328]

Ras Benjamin invited other Rastas to live in Ras Ville, and they worked together as an agricultural collective. According to Ras Benjamin, "it was togetherness…Was one for

[326] Ras Benjamin.
[327] Ras Benjamin.
[328] Ras Benjamin.

all and all for one."[329] Ras Ville was known throughout the Rastafari community. Jah Lion recalled:

> You coulda go in Ras Ville and get your food any time, you know. Planting and doing these simple things. At least it get most man off the streets. And give them a place of culture where you could reason, and…get a better overstanding of things.[330]

Burnham's patronage thus facilitated the establishment of a Rastafari community rooted in soil; meanwhile, Ras Ville was cited in the PNC newsletter, *New Nation*, as evidence that Burnham's policies benefited small Guyanese farmers.

However, Burnham's patronage did not protect Ras Ville or Ras Benjamin in the long term. By 2017, Ras Benjamin had served five three-year sentences and two six-month sentences in prison for marijuana. Without formal documentation of the rights Ras Benjamin had been granted, Burnham's informal permission for the plants was irrelevant. Ras Benjamin said:

> You know how many people know the privilege that I get? And they is put me in prison for this…But hear what they is turn and say now. 'Where the paper deh?' Right. So hear what I show them now. 'Don't want no paper. Burnham give word of mouth.'[331]

Ras Benjamin was left to face the judicial system on his own, arguing his cases on the merits of the issue. He said:

> I show the magistrate where in 1920, in British Guyana, ganja used to sell over the counter. I take out the clipping out the papers, at 18 cents a ounce. Believe it or leave it. So I asked her now, 'What make it now narcotics? What's ganja deh? A herb! What change it now?' Them basic I did stand pon.[332]

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[329] Ras Benjamin.
[330] Jah Lion, Rastafari in Guyana.
[331] Ras Benjamin, Rastafari in Guyana.
[332] Ras Benjamin.

Although Ras Benjamin's argument was sound, he continued to receive the minimum 3-year sentence. Undeterred, he approached the unjust law in a manner reminiscent of Thoreau's civil disobedience, yet he did not rule out violent resistance. He said:

> I am not waiting on the system to tell me that my herb free. Ca [Because] I'm a herbalist. I haffi live my life…I stand up fi this, I stand up fi this country with this…Ca I not a criminal…but if you all gon continue tormenting me, I'm gonna put a grenade in y'all pocket…You got protect yourself if somebody coming for damage you. Ca you only say you could exist.[333]

Ras Ville became a residential subdivision. As families purchased lots and moved in, Ras Benjamin, without documentation of his right to the land, could not control the development of the area he had rehabilitated and cultivated for years. He maintained his own home and yard in Ras Ville, but he complained of pollution caused by leaking sewage pipes and overpopulation in the area, factors that endangered his ability to grow food in a sanitary way.

Ras Benjamin's experience illustrates the way in which big man-ism interferes with the establishment of the promised land. Ras Benjamin sought to establish a community integrated with ecology; through land grants, permission to cultivate cannabis, and material support dependent on Forbes Burnham, Ras Benjamin was able to accomplish this aim in the short term. However, lacking broad-based support within Guyanese society, these benefits disappeared after Burnham's death. The land was redistributed, and the right to grow and use cannabis was revoked. Ras Benjamin spent nearly two decades in prison, and although he retained a homestead in Ras Ville, the

[333] Ras Benjamin.

agricultural community gave way to a residential housing development dependent on the mainstream economic system.

Conclusions

My observations in this chapter have mostly flowed from the statements of Rastas themselves with regard to the challenges the movement has faced; their ability to reflect upon these issues exemplified the adaptive, autopoetic of the soil. Ras Ashkar said:

> As persons grow, if the movement doesn't grow and develop, persons tend to leave that behind and hold on to something that suits and that is in accord with their level of mental development…What has to happen for the movement to survive in any way in Guyana is the movement itself has to grow…It's only when it opens itself to questioning that you can see that growth. Because when it opens itself to questioning, some of its shortcomings would be revealed. Some of the things that are keeping back the growth of the movement will be revealed, and its strengths will be emphasized.[334]

With the aim of supporting such growth, this chapter has addressed some of the pitfalls the Rastafari movement in Guyana has faced on the path toward its communitarian ideal. Those pitfalls have been intimately related to conceptual fissures between self and other, which produced social divisions and severed the community from land.

The influence of the Bible and a context of global patriarchy contributed to the reiteration of dichotomous gender constructions and the emergence of patriarchal norms within Rastafari culture. Nevertheless, some Rastas pointed to matrifocal spirituality and the symbol of Empress Menen as theological supports for female empowerment within the movement. Openness to greater participation of women appeared to be increasing in 2017, as Rasta women redefined the movement on their own terms. Meanwhile, most

[334] Ras Ashkar, Rastafari in Guyana.

Rastas continued to support the criminalization of homosexuality, a view reinforced by rigid social parameters surrounding gender in Guyanese culture.

Following US interference in Guyana's political system, the Rastafari movement became entangled in a global dynamic of big man-ism that harmed the movement's communitarian development efforts. Serving the interests of the US government and international capital, Forbes Burnham and the PNC manipulated ethnic tensions in Guyana in order to maintain power; support for Forbes Burnham and the PNC contradicted the Rastafari movement's strong traditions of anti-racism and intersubjective connectivity, reflecting the distorted political climate rather than the essence of the Rastafari movement. While many Rastas remained avowedly loyal to Burnham in 2017, they approached contemporary political partisanship with pragmatic skepticism, focusing their efforts instead on unity, love, and collective progress.

CONCLUSION

Rastafari culture in Guyana emerged as part of a historical dialectic between a dichotomous, hierarchical paradigm and a paradigm centered on the integration of self and other. In Chapter One, I presented the dichotomous, hierarchical approach as the one guiding colonial policies of anti-ecological economic development, slavery and indenture, and the oppression of women. The conceptual division of nature and humanity into superior and inferior categories led to the forced displacement of African people from their ancestral lands. As displaced Africans were incorporated into the allopoetic, industrialized agricultural economy of British Guiana, connections to community, ecology, and the spiritual world were severed. The conceptual distance between self and other thus corresponded with the physical alienation of people from land and the multidimensional connectivity symbolized by soil.

Displacement from lands of origin gave rise to the experience of alienation and exile which the Biblical story of the Israelites evoked among enslaved people throughout the Caribbean region. The promised land sought by the Israelites symbolized Africa, often referred to in the Bible as Ethiopia. At the same time, the slaves' self-identification with the Israelites marked an ideological transition from division toward integration, as they framed themselves as collective destined to reach an ideal community together. This involved the transcendence of differences between people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and an awareness of mutual determination in the context of shared

circumstances. The interconnectivity that formed among enslaved people in itself constituted a promised land capable of nourishing nonviolent communities anywhere.

As they transgressed the distance between self and other, communities in British Guiana connected with physical soil through subsistence agriculture in the free village movement, as well as smaller-scale food production, including rice farming initiatives. Connectivity with the soil brought free laborers into greater harmony with biodiverse energies and ecology. Socially, soil-based communities closed the distance between workers and the fruits of their labor, requiring less coercion and fostering greater social equality. Beyond subsistence agriculture, poor and working-class people pursued financial and social initiatives premised on concepts of mutual benefit and interdependence that reflected the autopoetic symbiosis of the soil.

At the same time, conceptual dichotomies between self and other persisted among enslaved, poor, and working-class people of British Guiana and independent Guyana. As people of African descent challenged European racism and cultural supremacy, they developed pan-Africanist and Ethiopianist identities based on concepts of black dignity and African unity. While aspects of these movements coincided with the principles of mutuality and interdependence described above, pan-African identity hinged on a concept of Africa and African-ness constructed during the colonial era—namely, of African-ness as a meaningful racial characteristic. This view drew a categorical distinction between people of African descent and people of Indian descent, whose growing presence in British Guiana after the prohibition of slavery initially represented a burden and an injustice to African communities.

Pan-Africanist identity developed throughout Guyanese history along with its counterpoint: a more universal culture rooted in shared local circumstances, which reflected a recognition of self in other across ethnic barriers. As African and Indian people lived and struggled together, they absorbed one another's beliefs and practices, mutually influencing one another at profound spiritual levels. This was exemplified by the Jordanite faith developed by people of African and Indian descent and incorporating elements of African, Indian, and European cultures. In British Guiana, as throughout the West Indies, the new forms and insights yielded by such inter-cultural connectivity defied simplistic association with geographical origins based on European maps. The embrace of the other these forms evidenced represented instead the fertile soil of universal culture from which Rastafari wisdom would emerge. Connections between multiethnic people also nourished an independence movement in British Guiana that incorporated leaders of Indian, African, Chinese, and European descent, who shared a vision of a multiethnic nation founded on socialist principles.

A conceptual dichotomy with regard to gender persisted throughout the colonial era. Reflecting the leadership of Moses and other Biblical patriarchs, the leaders of most of British Guiana's slave revolts were men. Nevertheless, women were involved in multiple forms of resistance, from acts of defiance and sabotage to the purchase of freedom for themselves and others, and they sustained slave rebellions through agriculture and child-rearing. After the prohibition of slavery, women were largely confined to agricultural and domestic work, extending their exclusion from specialized and higher-status trades throughout the period of enslavement. The free village movement and the emergence of agricultural projects independent of the plantations gave

women a relative measure of equality, as they took some leadership in agriculture and marketing. Although women continued to occupy a secondary status in the social movements that arose in the late 19th and early 20th century, they carved out new livelihoods and participated in processes of social change, uniting their voices and bodies with riots against a fossilized plantocracy that held the people in poverty.

In Chapters Two and Three, I discussed how Rastafari culture embodied the ongoing dialectic between division and integration described above. Contrasting with the Europeanized Christianity in which many Rastas were raised, Rastas experienced God in themselves and in nature, and approached spirituality as an integral aspect of the immediate physical and social world. Challenging the racism and cultural supremacy of the colonial paradigm, Rastas sought truth about the African past that carried them beyond colonial epistemology. The increasing influence of Jamaican Rastafari after the mid-1970s imparted to Rastas in Guyana a tradition of Afrocentric Biblical discourse that supported an integrated view of self and other. Echoing enslaved African Guyanese people more than a century earlier, Rastas cast themselves as the Israelites on a mutual journey to the promised land.

Rastas also used the Bible to develop on a personal spiritual level, through self-identification with the Christ figure and the cultivation of divine attributes, including compassion, intimacy with nature, and enlightened leadership. The conceptualization of the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, as the returned messiah pointed to the potential of all people for divine perfection, while supporting the sovereignty and spiritual merit of African people. A symbol of the collective itself, Selassie pointed to an ideal of righteous leadership that inspired communitarian efforts throughout the Rastafari world.

By crossing the distance between self and other, Rastafari culture made way for communities defined by interdependence and connectedness to soil. An example of one such community, the Guyana Rastafari Council developed autopoetically, through organic, mutually nourishing relationships between its participants. Originally known as Black Culture Craft, the group dedicated itself to non-exploitative, nature-centric livelihoods. It fostered community through celebrations, rituals, and cultural innovation, and by providing shelter, nutritional support, counseling, and mentoring for people with limited access to social services. Registered formally as the GRC, the organization envisioned and pursued large-scale land ownership and the development of autonomous community through connection to soil. The GRC thus reflected the connection between Rastafari principles of connectivity between God, community, and nature, and the ethos of social and ecological responsibility that inspired its members to pursue communitarian development initiatives.

At the same time, conceptual dichotomy persisted within Rastafari culture in Guyana. Although in many ways, the barriers between self and other were all but eliminated in the mystical, nature-centric, and communitarian approach of Rastafari, a stark division between men and women continued to inform the movement. In the early Rastafari movement, many Rasta men discouraged women from participating; later, women's roles remained circumscribed. To some extent, the confinement of women to subordinate roles reflected European cultural norms that had been imposed on the entire Caribbean region. However, the subordination of women has been a feature of cultures everywhere since long before the rise of Europe as a global power. Othering of and violence toward women represents perhaps the most significant obstacle to the

development of socially nonviolent and ecologically sustainable communities globally; for the Rastafari movement, strict gender norms based on conceptual gender dichotomy curtailed contributions of women to the movement, interfering with its long-term success in acquiring and developing land.

Conceptual dichotomy between self and other would take another form in the context of the Cold War, during which the United States and the Soviet Union viewed one another with fear and animosity reminiscent of colonial attitudes toward nature, women, and nonwhite people. This division between self and other orchestrated violent conflict on a global scale; covert US intervention in British Guiana caused the splintering of British Guiana's independence movement into ethnically polarized political parties.

The Afrocentric aspects of Rastafari culture entered into tension with its universalist underpinnings in the context of ethnic polarization before and after Guyana's independence. While promoting pan-Africanist propaganda and anti-Indian racism, the ruling PNC party and its leader, Forbes Burnham, operated in collusion with the US government and international capital, harming the Guyanese nation in the process. Under Burnham and the PNC regime, contrived understandings of race and of Africa itself, hearkening back to the dichotomous thought of the colonial system, utterly failed as an epistemological basis for land-based communitarian development. The superficial and divisive aspects of Afrocentric ideology were gruesomely demonstrated by the House of Israel, which, aligned with the police, the army, and every level of government, brutalized Guyanese citizens with impunity while espousing a version of collective selfhood based solely on racial solidarity among Africans. African Guyanese people were not spared; the PNC government was responsible for the assassination of Walter Rodney,

a black Guyanese radical who was one of the first intellectuals to validate Rastafari ideology in an academic context and to engage in social activism as an ally of the Rastafari movement.

Rastafari in Guyana emerged from within a disempowered section of Guyanese society and had little control over these geopolitically-orchestrated events. Many Rastas grew up in a culture of big man-ism, in which the patronage of elites was a necessary aspect of accessing goods and services. Many served in the military at a young age and were likely taught in that context to scorn and demonize Indians by powerful men of African descent with whom they identified. In the context of state-controlled media, many formed intellectually without exposure to dissenting views. In addition, Burnham's stated ideology appealed to young black radicals who were interested in cultivating a new nation in autonomy from the exploitative forces of colonialism and neocolonialism. Finally, Burnham's non-enforcement of laws against cannabis and his support for Rastas' agricultural initiatives fostered real progress toward Rastas' ideals of community and integration with nature.

After Burnham's death, however, the temporary benefits associated with his patronage dissolved. Prosecutions against marijuana use increased, Rastafari gatherings were systematically raided, and land grants were reduced or revoked—the "promised" land withdrawn. The community was scattered; divisiveness and individualism emerged, leading to the kind of fear and animosity among Rastas that defined the relationship between self and other in the dichotomous paradigm. These outcomes were in large part the inevitable results of transnational policies, but the vocal support of many Rastas for Forbes Burnham throughout his reign of absolute power, which was for dissidents and

Indian people a time of terror, exacerbated the alienation between African and Indian people. This alienation would result in governmental opposition to the Rastafari movement when the Indian-backed PPP came to power.

Nevertheless, the Rastafari movement in Guyana is not defined by conceptual dichotomy between self and other. Instead, the movement is continuously defined and redefined through the evolving subjectivity of each of its members, in relationship with its myriad diverse participants, "I and I." Some Rastas have joined members of radical movements all over the world in challenging limitations on the roles of women. Rasta women in Guyana have taken authorship of the movement, defining it on terms that leave room for female embodiments of divinity. Women have held official leadership positions in the GRC, and among all Rastafari groups in Guyana they have taken a central role in community organizing efforts. This shift aligns with a growing global awareness of the position of women as a critical factor in the development of autonomous, land-based communities.

In recent years, Rastas in Guyana have largely transcended the political partisanship of the independence era, holding the PNC and PPP parties accountable for tangible outcomes as a precondition of the Rastafari community's support. Since 2017, the Rastafari movement has conducted a massive campaign against unjust laws against marijuana that have negatively affected Rastafari communities. Members of the three major Rastafari organizations as well as members of smaller groups and individuals not associated with any group have been involved in well-organized mass demonstrations advocating for the right to the sacramental use of marijuana. The inspiring displays of unity this has involved have also showcased the creativity, wit, and beauty of Rastafari

culture in a focal, public way. As they have been throughout Guyanese history, women are a central part of this collective movement, demonstrating in large numbers alongside the men. The demonstrations have projected an impressive image of Rastafari culture, precisely as Sister Nicole Cole and Ras Leon Saul suggested as a means of gaining respect among the wider society. It is possible that the Rastas will secure the legal right to practice their culture openly by influencing popular opinion through this kind of collective action; their rights would then be protected from political whims and changes in regime.

Rastafari in Guyana continues to move forward. In 2018, a new GRC headquarters was constructed at the former headquarters of Black Culture Craft in Bourda Market. The new center provides a meeting space, classroom, and hub for Ital food sales, reasoning sessions, musical events, and other cultural activities. The spatial and social connectivity this headquarters embodies perhaps represents a promised land in the heart of Georgetown. For GRC members, the location in Bourda Market is sacred ground where many formative moments in the history of their community have taken place. Situated within a coastal landscape that recalls the alienated labor of African slaves, the GRC headquarters embodies instead voluntary participation and a desire to create something of value that transcends the personal, individual self.

This thesis has addressed the progress of the Rastafari movement in Guyana toward a promised land defined by social nonviolence and ecological sustainability. However, all human communities are obligated to make this journey and—precisely because of the principle of interdependence between self and other—we cannot arrive except as one. This is reflected by the fact that the failure of US leaders to overcome

division between self and other on the geopolitical level became an obstacle to social integration and well-being for people in Guyana. Reflecting the interconnected nature of ecology, division anywhere is division everywhere. This issue is far from resolved. Currently, despite the intentions and efforts of Rastas in Guyana to foster social and ecological harmony within Guyana and transnationally, the persistence of the US and other major polluters in an oil- and fossil fuel-based economic approach is projected to result in conflict among people in vulnerable environments like Guyana as land is compromised and resources become scarcer. This conflict will predictably take the form of racial conflict and violence against women, as it would in any context of deprivation and extreme stress.

This observation sheds light on the issue of reparations for slavery and genocide of African people raised in the introduction of this thesis. There is perhaps no transfer of wealth, process of psychological healing, or geographical relocation that would address continuing violence against the descendants of enslaved people as would the total spiritual and material transformation of human lifestyles in hegemonic countries. The historical victims of violence are not those that require healing, transformation, and enlightenment, so much as the contemporary perpetrators of similar violence. Moreover, violence can no longer be understood without an awareness of ecology as an integral part of the human self. The conceptual and practical transcendence of self and other accomplished within Rastafari culture provides a useful model for the global transformation that is needed for the restoration of harmony. Thus, while I have delineated some of the challenges that have faced the Rastafari movement, it is not the

Rastas but the industrialized world that must change completely and urgently, as a precondition for the survival of humanity and other life forms on earth.

I will close with the words of Ras Simeon, which bear extended quotation, as they reflect the essence of this thesis and provide guidance for a world in transition:

> A future's a way of life, you sight, that man must now meet…So we saying that man come to become a divine being…to live in harmony and love. He come for live for each other. We all come to serve one creator. All religion speak about one God who created the heaven and earth and the moon and the star and thing. They call he different name but they talking about the one who create heaven and earth. And the moon and the stars. Man and woman. Not true? Right. They talking about that God. The future of your life is to know him! And to obey him! …to love each other like themselves…You see a white man, you mustn't pelt he. You see a Muslim, you mustn't pelt he because you were deh pon different religion or different nation. You know? You must able to live side by side with all faith…It's not big house and big car and you make another thing, you went to Mars and you come back and you say there's some land there, another place and thing…and you kill one another and you ain't got food, and two thirds of the world population hungry and unfed, and you got food that you could feed the people. But you got it store up. You lock it up. You sight? 'Not until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned.' Majesty spoke these words. And not until: that is the future of mankind. And that's what Rastafari working towards. The mindset of man and people, that's what Christ come a work for. All the prophets. You know? For mankind live to the standard that he wouldn't really harm he neighbor. Ca [Because] peace belongs to your neighbor…We must keep the peace. Turn on your music and wake up, 'Good morning, neighbor!' You sight? Yeah. If somebody come and ask your neighbor, 'That man over there,' he say, 'Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no! No! Not he, not he! That's a good man.'…So we said the future of mankind is a Christlike life. And Rasta is the future of mankind. We ain't come for create no new future. We come for occupy a space in people heart and change the intentions of the heart. You sight? A knife is a good thing, but don't use it for kill. A human being is a good being but don't let he use heself to be destructive.[335]

[335] Ras Simeon, Rastafari in Guyana.

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