



# The Rastafari in Ethiopia: Challenges and Paradoxes of Belonging

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# **The Rastafari in Ethiopia: Challenges and Paradoxes of Belonging**

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*“Beginnings are usually scary and endings are usually sad, but it is everything in between that makes it all worth living.”*

King of Reggae, Robert N. Marley

**Author's statement**

This research thesis has been submitted in fulfillment of requirements for the (Research) Master of Arts in African Studies.

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Signed: Mahlet Ayele Beyecha

**Declaration**

I certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone, and has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. The content of this Research Master Thesis is the result of work that has been carried out since the official commencement on August 1, 2017 of the approved research program.

Mahlet Ayele Beyecha

November 2018

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## **Dedication**

To my children, Zu-I-Lu and Alula Kock, who are growing in the Rastafari culture.

To my husband, the father of my sons, Jahnoch, by whom my Rasta-womanhood has been guided to come to full growth, and for feeding me, in the nine years of our married life, with consciousness from his ceaseless search for truth.

To Ras Kawintseb, godfather of my Rastafari way of life, mentor in the faith, and a friend to me and my family



## Note for Examiners

In most cases, participants are identified by their real names, i.e., their Rastafari name. However, at times, I do not name the informant. I use “anonymous.” At other times, I use pseudonyms. In this respect, given the background story of the anonym or the pseudonym, you might have been introduced to her or him in other parts of the thesis. This is due to the precarious nature of the repatriates’ relation within the Ethiopian community hosting them and the government of Ethiopia. I consider it an ethical responsibility to ensure protecting research participants. I make sure that nothing I say in this thesis or what they say in the video jeopardizes their stay in Ethiopia. Should you have any doubt or question of verification on the audiovisual, I am happy to show the material prior to publication.

Throughout the thesis, you will read Rastafari language, known as dread talk, and Amharic language. Where a word or a phrase in these languages appears for the first time, I provide the translation in brackets and in the footnotes. For further reference, I have also included a glossary at the beginning of the thesis.

In Rastafari women are referred as sistren, empress or Mama for elders, while men are referred as brethren and Ras prior to their names. Similarly in this thesis, you may find sistrens used as Sister or Mama to same names. For instance Sister Ijanya is referred both as sister and Mama Ijannya.

This research is carried out amid the ongoing issue of the the legality of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia (see Chapter Six). Some of the community members have the Ethiopian national Identification card by the time this work is finalized. However others still remain without the Identification card. In this regard, the research is based on the data collected from August 1, 2017 to August 2018. The first six month from the field followed by online communication with the members.

The short videos are combined together to tell the story in the text and will be presented in CD with the print version of this work. Moreover, the videos will be inserted in their appropriate pages within the text when published online. List of the videos are provided at the end of the thesis with respective page numbers in the text and with the topic of interviews and footages related to the research. For smooth reading of the work, the video list within the text are removed.

List of figures, tables and abbreviations are moved at the end of the thesis as per discussion with the supervisor.

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## GLOSSARY

The embeddedness of the text with Rasta vernaculars and, to some extent, with Amharic words has necessitated providing meanings and definitions.

In Rastafari, word and sound bear important features of the *livity*, particularly with regard to the aspect of language. Rastafari language, known as “Dread Talk” or “I-talk” is primarily spoken, rather than written, and it is based on Jamaican Rastafari. Although this is not a complete and separate dialect, like Jamaican patois, it is a different way of speaking that is based on a play with English words. In general, the Rastafari movement is based on positive beliefs and words and these are demonstrated in their language. Deliberately reflecting love, peace, unity, including greeting people regardless of whether they know them or not, is uniquely descriptive of the Rastafari people. One of the major reasons to create a new vocabulary is to reflect positivity by inverting some of the English words. For instance, “over” is used to replace “under”, as in “overstand” replacing “understand”. Another common example is “backward” replacing “forward.” A very familiar thing to hear in any conversation with a Rastafari is the use of ‘I’ in many words such as ‘Selassie-I’, ‘InI’, ‘I-man.’

### Dread Talk (or I-talk)<sup>1</sup>

<i>Apprecilove</i>	Refers to “appreciate”, but because the last syllable has sounds similar to that of “hate”, it is replaced with the word “love.”
<i>Babylon</i>	A system that oppresses and discriminates against the poor and vulnerable in a society. Previously, it was attributed to white people and the oppressive system white society used over the black population. However, it is now attributed to institutions and organizations that have the power over the people, such as police, government, military, church, and to “the west” in general.
<i>Binghi</i>	A shortened form for Nyabinghi
<i>Bobo Shanti</i>	One of the main Mansions of Rastafari. Its full name is Ethiopia Africa Black International Congress (EABIC). In short, it is known as Bobo.
<i>Bredren</i>	A male Rasta

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<sup>1</sup> Dread Talk, or I-talk, is the language of Rastafari, a dialect of English consciously created amongst the adherents of the Rastafari movement.

<i>Bredren/Sistren</i>	'Brother(s)', 'Sister(s)'; commonly used by Rastafari to refer to one another.
<i>Downpression</i>	Replaces "oppression" as, according to Rastafari, this is not something that keeps humanity up, but rather, oppression is holding human beings down. Therefore, they changed it to downpression.
<i>Dread</i>	In Rasta vernacular, the word stands for and is used to refer to another Rasta (Dreadlocks) or to describe negative events.
<i>Earthday</i>	Birthday
<i>Ganja</i>	Refers to marijuana; also called "holy-herb"
<i>Haile Selassie-I</i>	Instead of Haile Selassie the First, the Rastafari pronounce it as Haile Selassie-eye. Also they use it in short as Haile-I, Selassie-I, pronouncing the Roman numeral I as eye. Haile-I and Selassie-I are also used for greetings.
<i>H.I.M.</i>	Abbreviation for His Imperial Majesty, pronounced as HIM, and referring to Haile Selassie I.
<i>Houses and Mansions</i>	Different groups of Rastafari . The words are adopted from the Bible. "In my Father's house are many mansions" (St. John 14:2). The main and larger houses are Nyabinghi, Bobo Shanti and Twelve Tribes of Israel.
<i>Bredren and Idrin</i>	Used to refer to Rastafari men or non-Rastafari . They are used interchangeably.
<i>Empress/Queen</i>	An endearment for a female indicating that she is your wife/girlfriend. Sometimes Rastawomen use it to refer to another Rastawoman.
<i>I-Man/I-Sista Me</i>	Allude to male and female respectively referring to themselves while talking.
<i>Ini/IandI/I and I</i>	An important term referring to oneness with Jah (a Rastafari name for God, who is the Emperor of Haile Selassie I), who is

believed to be present in every person, thus reinforcing the fact that everyone exists as one people, unified in Jah. The term “InI” can be used in three manners: to replace “you and I,” to say “me, myself, and I”, and in words such as “I-man” for “inner man” “Inity” for “unity.” ([www.wiki.how](http://www.wiki.how) viewed on 07/21/2018).

<i>Itinually</i>	Substitutes continually. It has a sense of everlasting as well.
<i>I-tiopia</i>	Ethiopia
<i>Inity</i>	Used to replace “unity.” In general the word and sound “you” is replaced with “I” coming from “InI.”
<i>Irie</i>	Positive feeling. High emotions and peaceful vibrations.
<i>Ital</i>	Ital food is one of the practices Rastafari requires. It is vegan food. Rasta diet includes drinking no alcohol or soft drinks and avoiding other things, such as salt, that may cause health problems. However, not all mansions or adherents follow this practice.
<i>Ites</i>	Refers to “heights” meaning “joy”
<i>Jah Rastafari</i>	Another name for Haile Selassie-I or Selassie-I.
<i>Kingman</i>	A blandishment for a male Rasta indicating that he is your husband/boyfriend. Sometimes it is used for another Rastaman whom you have no relationship with.
<i>Livity</i>	The basic philosophy of how to live life.
<i>Nah Bow</i>	Means not to bow. For example, “mi nah bow to Babylon” means “I don’t bow to Babylon.”
<i>Natty Dread</i>	Rastafari term for a member of the Rastafari community. It combines the terms natty (as in "natural") and a style of dreadlocks, which have formed naturally without cutting, combing or brushing.
<i>Nyabinghi</i>	One of the main Mansions of Rastafari. It is spelt Nyabinghi or Nyahbinghi.



<i>Overstand</i>	Replaces the word “understand.” It is also called “innerstanding.” In Rastafari, word and sound have power, so one should be careful what to speak. Therefore, as “under” has a negative connotation, it is substituted by the positive “over”.
<i>Ras/Rases</i>	Rasta/Rastas. The Rastaman also use this as a title of their name taken from Ras Tafari Mekonen, known as Emperor Haile Selassie I.
<i>Rastafari /Rasta/ Returnee/Repatriate</i>	These words are used interchangeably in this thesis. The word Rastafari refers to the movement, the belief, and the follower without plural marker.
<i>Repatriation</i>	For Rastafari, Repatriation is Black Nationalism and unification. Not all African slaves were Ethiopians but the destination of repatriation is designated to be Ethiopia because of Emperor Haile Selassie I; the way he is viewed by them and the land grant he gave for those who are coming home to Ethiopia.
<i>Reason/Reasonings</i>	This is one of the great treasures of Rasta <i>livity</i> . In reasoning, members of the Rastafari express their feelings, sometimes in a fiery way, but with the intention of brotherhood. Topics vary from what happened new in town to religious, political, and social issues.
<i>Spliff</i>	Another word for ‘joint’.
<i>Sufferation</i>	Used to describe hardships.
<i>The I</i>	You- singular and plural.
<i>Trod/trodding</i>	To walk or make a move.
<i>Twelve Tribes of Israel</i>	One of the main Houses/Mansions of Rastafari.
<i>Wha’ gwaan?</i>	A very common greeting that replaces “What is going on?”
<i>Yard</i>	This includes not only the space external to the house but also the house itself.

*Yout* Youth, referring to a young person or people, e.g., Rasta yout, Rasta children.

*Zion* Refers to the Promised Land, Ethiopia. Sometimes it alludes to the continent, Africa.

### **Words from the Amharic language**

*Amharic* Ethiopian national language

*Ato* Equal to the English “Mister”

*Dergue* The Derg, Common Derg or Dergue (Ge'ez: ደርግ, meaning "committee" or "council") is the short name for the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987. Officially known as the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, it took power following the ousting of Emperor Haile Selassie I (wikipedia, viewed 07/25/2018). The 1987 Constitution of Ethiopia was the third constitution of Ethiopia. It went into effect on February 22, 1987, after a referendum had been held on February 1 that year. Its adoption inaugurated the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) (Wikipedia, viewed on 07/25/2018).

*Faranji* Refers to a white person. It is considered to be a transliteration from the Persian, Arabic and Hindi word “faranji” as it equally means “foreigner.”

*Habesha* The etymology of the term “Habesha”, also known as “Abesha”, refers to the Semitic peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea. But currently the meaning of the word extends to the people of Ethiopia in general, from highlands and lowlands alike. However, with the prevailing ethnic federalism, people have become sensitive and non-Semitic people, like the Oromo, do not like to be called Habesha.

*Kantiba* Means Mayor

*Kebele* The smallest governmental administrative unit in Ethiopia  
*Mikir bet* “House of Representatives.”

*Qes* priest

*Tsom* Fasting, commonly religious fasting, i.e., the fasting held by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, with meat, fish, and dairy products being prohibited for a certain period, according to the type of fasting.

### **Words Used Interchangeably In the Thesis**

Ganja/marijuana

Guideline/directive

Local/local/native

Kingman/husband

Ras/Brother

Rastafari /repatriates/returnees

Religious/spiritual

Sistren/empress

Shashemene/Shash

Spliff/joint

## Abstract

Inspired by personal experience, this research analyzes the challenges and paradoxes of belonging of the Rastafari returnees in Ethiopia. With a biblically and historically built identity, the Rastafari have formed a strong identity and view Ethiopia as Zion. However, the whistle that signaled repatriation is the 500 acres land grant given by His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I to the black peoples of the world, mainly those in the west, as a token of gratitude for reaching out to Ethiopia and its people during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The Rastafari people returned to Ethiopia, the Promised Land, fulfilling their “homecoming.”

The research examines the multi-dynamic facets of the Rastafari community’s confrontations on their journey of striving to make a home and feel at home, thereby unravelling the consistent conditions that facilitated the contradicting relationship of the community with Ethiopia and Ethiopians.

In order to do so, the research identifies the challenges and investigates how these are manifested and how the paradoxes of the community are demonstrated. Capitalizing on the opportunity of meeting the global Rastafari, the research curiously inquires whether the challenges faced by the community in Ethiopia are shared by Rastafari elsewhere. Furthermore, the study cross-examines the applicability of the directive issued by the Ethiopian government. In the absence of full integration, the research investigates whether the community in Ethiopia is leveraging on its international connections. To respond to these questions, the study makes use of Horst Moller’s theories on identity of (MacLeod, 2014), Nyamnjah’s belongingness (2006), the homeland-diaspora relationship examined by Wingrod and Levi (2006), and the zones of transit identified by Akinyoade and Gewald (2015).

The research was conducted through an ethnographic approach in the Rastafari community in Ethiopia, with the researcher being a quasi-member of that community. Open interviews and participant observation are what the researcher immersed herself into in order to collect data. The personal experience and some specific quotes of the informants are compartmentalized to form the themes of the subjects included. This research-at-home also brings the personal experience to the text with the intention of enriching and deepening the experience of the reader. Unexpected events gave way to methods of unintended findings that perfectly and coherently suited the thesis, as it provides information on whether the experience of the Rastas in Ethiopia is shared by other Rastafari in Africa and globally. These events further helped to bring a fresh knowledge by thoroughly assessing the practicality of the directive concerning the Rastafari, which was issued by the Ethiopian government. The apparent persistence of the trans-nationality of the Rastafari cannot go unchecked. Therefore, the researcher shares the data collected in this regard.

I conclude that the post-repatriation era of the Rastafari in Ethiopia is crammed with consistent tribulations, ironies, and paradoxes perpetuated by the state, by local Ethiopians and by the returnees themselves. However, this research equally concludes that, despite the challenges the Rastafari face in their daily lives, they are determined to stay ‘home.’

*"It's never too late for anything..."*

*Ras Kawintseb*

## Introduction

### Personal Journey to Rastafari and the Research Topic

On a rainy Friday night in 2004 around 11 p.m. in Addis Ababa, my cousin and I are listening to Eddie Rabbit's *"I love a rainy night"* from the cassette player while we are driving to the famous Villa Verde reggae club to groove in the live reggae roots and dancehalls beats. Given our involvement in pan-African and African renaissance movements, going to a reggae club was our-every-Friday-ritual. But this Friday was special as I met Ras<sup>2</sup> Kawintseb Kidane Mihret Selassie, the renowned reggae singer in Addis Ababa who is also known as the barefoot Rastaman/guitarist/singer and who is often called the father of reggae in Ethiopia. As he finished his performance, I ran into him and grabbed his hand and 'whispered' to him, *I want to know about Rasta beyond reggae music.... I mean the ideologies behind it.* He looked at me, looking straight into my eyes in the dim light of the night club, and with a reassuring smile he said, *"Well, never too late for anything."* Ever since, for the past 15 years, my life has evolved under his mentorship as my reggae-organ teacher, history teacher, friend, colleague, family, godfather to my Rastafari way of life. Most importantly, he is a reason to meet the love of my life and father of my children, Jahnoch.



Fig. 1: L.t.R.: Me, my cousin Frehiwot, Bethlehem (daughter of Ras Kawintseb & Tarikua), Tarikua (Ras' empress) & Ras Kawintseb<sup>3</sup>

Picture by: Ras' collection

<sup>2</sup> Ras is taken from Ras Tafari Mekonnen, Emperor Haile Selassie I, meaning duke.

<sup>3</sup> The picture was taken in July 2004 at Ras' previous house in Shashemene (during one of my pilgrimages to the celebrations of HIM Haile Selassie's birthday on July 23<sup>rd</sup>).

That introduction in the night club led to a visit at Ras Kawintseb's (Ras, I often call him) place. I keenly called on the next Monday following our first meeting and set up an appointment. When I arrived one afternoon, he was sitting on a mattress on the floor of a very tiny mud house, reasoning with his Rasta brethren and sistren. Originally from the Caribbean, all come from the west. Everyone spoke reggae Jamaican patois holding some kind of musical instrument in their hands: bass guitar, lead guitar, shaker, and a big piano in front. Ironically, this little mud house was located in the middle of the most cosmopolitan suburb of the capital city Addis Ababa – Bole area – where all of the luxuries of the city can be found. As I sat down by the filthy wooden door too many questions came to my mind. *Why did they rent such a cheap place? Don't they have money? Aren't they earning money here?* In the back of my head, I thought that a person from Europe or North America should have money and, to say the least, these Ethiopia-loving people cannot live like this in Ethiopia. They must have some challenges. My thoughts were interrupted when Ras told me that he was ready to talk to me.

Our friendship continued, even when he moved to Shashemene, the Mecca of Rastafari repatriation. At that time, our weekly meetings were reduced to only a few times a year, when he comes to Addis for one of his gigs and during the pilgrimages I make to Shashemene (Shash, as it is often called) twice a year, for His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie's birthday on July 23<sup>rd</sup> and for his coronation celebration on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, to attend the reggae festivals and the Nyabingi *groundation* (chanting and drumming). There is an unavoidable cliché expression that we hear frequently, *"Things happen for a reason."* In my case, Ras has been playing a significant role in my life. What I learned through him about Rastafari *livity* (way of life) and about the culture and history of the movement was later backed up by books he gave me to read. Being close to him allowed me to witness a wider Rastafari community experience in Ethiopia. I came to realize that their daily life is hindered by the challenges of not being able to move freely in and out of the country, facing unemployment and the lack of integration, all of which stem from lack of recognition by the Ethiopian government. Coming from a pan-African point of view, I easily embraced the Rastafari culture. It seemed to me that the unity of Africa can only be realized by such a pan-African (or radical, as some may say) conscious movement. However, as an Ethiopian I was embarrassed and disturbed, to say the least, by the negligence of my own government, but slightly doubted if anyone of the returnees at that time had tried hard enough to talk to the right government officials. I wanted to do something, do my part in ending their tribulations, if not for the benefit of the whole community, at least for the sake of Ras. The activist side of me prompted me to do the following: One random afternoon, Ras and I visited the Immigration Authority and, acting as a kind of diplomat, I said to the officer:

*"This is not good for the image-building campaign that the country has embarked on and, ironically, the Rastafari are the only people who, as opposed to mainstream media, are creating a positive image of Ethiopia vis-à-vis the international society through their reggae music, and yet the state is maltreating them. Can you please do*

*something for this barefoot Rastaman whose cultural expression says a lot about his love for Ethiopia and who in fact identifies himself as an Ethiopian.”*

We had a long discussion, but there was no sign of hope that the Immigration authority would grant the returnees a resident permit. Nevertheless, the immigration official revealed one important piece of information when he told us that they can apply for Ethiopian citizenship, which Ras opted for. But the paradox is that one must have stayed in the country legally for a minimum of five years before applying for citizenship. With nothing else left to do, we left the premises of the Immigration Authority.

The Rastafari continued to face the same challenges. Two years later, I wrote my senior essay of my undergraduate studies, dedicating it to the new way of life I had embraced and writing about Bob Marley’s “Zimbabwe” song and its contribution to the independence of African states. Reflecting on those times flashes a glimpse on the genesis of my own life (r)evolving in the Rastafari realm.



*Fig. 2: Ras Kawintseb Kidane Mihret Selassie. The picture was taken during the second round of interviews  
Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha*

Fast forward to 2014: It was not until I came face to face with the challenges through my own personal experience that the gravity of their challenges became clear to me. My husband and I have two sons, seven and five years old, who are growing up within Rastafari culture. In Addis Ababa, where we are based, when my eldest son turned three we took him for school registration. He passed the assessment, but the school rejected him because we refused to cut his long hair, which was not even hair-locked at the time. Since cutting his hair was out of the question, he joined another private school owned by a Rastafari man. But that school was not for free and it was far away from our home. That was when I asked myself, what about those Rastafari kids in Shashemene whose parents cannot afford to send their children to private school? What happened to multiculturalism and Ethiopia’s diversity propaganda in the



media? This incident surely agitated me and it triggered my decision to address the issue. Only the how and when remained unanswered for a long time. Apparently, this research has completed the cycle.

As complicated as the Rastafari's situation is, Ras Kawintseb's case is unfathomable. Before his repatriation to Ethiopia, he had been assured by the Ethiopian embassy in Canada that he could get an Ethiopian passport upon arrival. Up to now, after living in Ethiopia for 21 years, Ras still does not have no legal status, yet he is famous among reggae lovers in Ethiopia, known as the father of Reggae in the country and typically referred to as "the barefoot Rastaman". He has not worn a shoe ever since he first set on Ethiopian soil because he believes that Ethiopia is the Promised Land, hence, God's place. He is a musician, singer, English and French teacher, married to an Ethiopian woman, father of three. All these professions cannot generate any income for him because he has no legal status and thus cannot work in the country as a registered professional. I know Ras as a committed repatriate whose goal is to get an Ethiopian passport and abandon his Trinidadian passport. Without thinking twice, I was sure that such misery would make Ras leave the country once he got status. Well, I was wrong, as I learned from my reasoning with Ras, and his musical lyrics explicitly illustrate that his happiness entirely depends on becoming a Zion person.



*Fig. 3: Ras Kawintseb Kidane Mihret Selassie, the barefoot Rasta. Picture from Ras' collection and taken in Shashemene in the compound of Ras' residence.*

*Picture by: Ras' collection*



## **The Thesis**

During my field research, I was surprised when I got a question from my Addis Ababa and foreigner friends inquiring, “Do the Rastafari have challenges? Aren’t they legal until now? So how did they manage to live in Ethiopia this long? How do they survive?” The last two questions alerted me to the fact that this is indeed an unanswered question and a potential research subject for those interested in the subject of Rastafari in Ethiopia. Luckily, the first two questions are the focus of my research, and thus I was able to share more information than what my friends had asked for. However, I learned that most people’s knowledge about Rastafari is limited to reggae, marijuana, Haile Selassie, and Bob Marley, whereas the Ethiopian local population in Shashemene noticeably remarked the difficulties returnees encounter in their daily lives. Differently, some commented, “Oh, this must be easy - doing research in the community you know as you are one of them.” Unequivocally I thought so too. In fact, I even thought I knew the finding before conducting the research, but that changed quickly in the first couple of weeks of the research on the ground as my assumptions were not consistent with the reality. Preceded by the above personal account, in this part of the thesis, I introduce the research questions; referred existing literary works related to the study; and outlines of the chapters.

The less than 1000 returnees living in Shashemene, the Mecca of the Rastafari, have so far attracted authors, international journalists, documentary makers, researchers, and singers from all over the world. Several studies from within the Rastafari movement and outsiders have analyzed the Rastafari movement in Shashemene in terms of its historical, political, cultural, and socio-economical points of view. Recent researches on the Rastafari community in Shashemene have recorded their challenges owing to lack of recognition by the government. What is unique to this research is that it extensively dwells on the challenges of the community and refreshingly records ethnographically the challenges shared by Rastas on and outside of the continent. It also records the consistency of their tribulations as the community, notwithstanding the declaration of the Ethiopian government to issue them a national ID. In addition, it unwraps the contradictions that surround their lives and that became increasingly noticeable as the researcher delved in.

After the first month of my research, while transcribing some of the recorded data, I knew I had to focus not only on the challenges in terms of cultural expression of the Rastafari but also on their everyday confrontations that kept popping up during data collection and, even more importantly, on what is the motive behind their endurance as Rastafari in spite of a myriad of difficulties they deal with on a daily basis.

### ***Reflection on the thematic trajectory change of the research***

The initial research proposal, which is geared towards “challenges”, made a thematic trajectory change in that the doom and gloom were appended to it. Besides, this section provides a better understanding on the change of research before and after the fieldwork. It

is composed of personal accounts of flashbacks on research proposal against the reality and first engagement with Rastafari in Ethiopia that molded the course of the research.

At the outset, the research assumed that the Rastafari returnees in Ethiopia are facing challenges of cultural expression, for example wearing dreadlocks, use of marijuana, religious freedom and language. It also argued that the root cause of the challenges for the repatriates in Ethiopia is the absence of recognition of the community by the government. Though these assumptions are not wrong, the empirical study proved there is more to it

It is a known fact that research proposals are largely altered after the analysis of empirical data. However, the case of my research is different because the change started right from the beginning. A week before my departure to the field, the Ethiopian government decided to address the long overdue case of Rastafari. The state announced that it would issue national identity (ID) cards to the returnees. That was literally a shock! I thought that the semester-long work I had put into the research proposal would be overtaken by this announcement. At that point, I started to consider alternative topics for the study. Nevertheless, I was saved by a call! Ras Kawintseb informed me via phone that the government announcement had come without much detail about the requirements for said national ID, *"This is our main concern right now and we know this will have another challenge. In fact, it is the beginning of another challenge,"* he said.

This gave me the green light to continue packing my bags and stop cracking my head with a new topic to replace the old one. Later on, I got more updates that the community was disturbed by the state's failure to address the question of the 500 acres of the land grant by the Emperor. The land is the hot bedrock of tension between the Ethiopian federal government and the Oromo regional government. It was in the wake of this that I hit the ground wondering what more the field could reveal to me.

### *Flashback*

More than a decade of friendship with my mentor and key informant, Ras Kawintseb; being married to a Rastaman; my own subscription to the Rastafari way of life; and bringing up my children within Rasta culture, has exposed me to the multiple facets of the challenges of the Rastafari that birthed the topic of this research. I have witnessed the difficulties that my family – as well as the community at large – went through. It is, therefore, not only natural and logical, but also my obligation to use this opportunity of doing a research to address the challenges of the Rastafari in Ethiopia.

At the inception, I assumed that conducting the research at my home and given my relation with the community, the work would be a piece of cake! You know, that kind of I-am-close-enough-and-so-I-know mentality. In my mind, everyone [the members of the community] would open up to share their stories about their tribulations in Ethiopia. The shocker was yet to come.

With mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety over the research, I left The Netherlands with my children in the beginning of August 2017. Addis Ababa welcomed us back with rain. We were down with the flu for the first two weeks. I felt like a stranger in my own home. Strikingly, this was symbolic to my research. In the third week I hit the road to the Mecca of Rastafari, Shashemene. Situated in southern Ethiopia, Shashemene is 250 km from Addis and the Rastafari are settled on the outskirts of the city, even though the space between the locals and the returnees has slowly been occupied by an increasing number of local residents. After a five hours' ride on a hot and overcrowded minibus, I reached there at about 8 p.m. Although, I always say that Shash is my second home, there was no way I would set foot outside after sunset because of the horrible stories I have heard of theft and murder targeting particularly the Rasta community and strangers in Shashemene. At the bus stop of the Jamaica *Sefer*<sup>4</sup>, as the area where the Rasta reside is called by the natives, I stepped out of the minibus at about 8 p.m. to wait for Ras and his son Adam, 13, who were coming to accompany me. As I was anxiously waiting for their arrival trying to befriend a *khat*<sup>5</sup> trader in a small shop at the roadside, I constantly watched left and right, on the one hand looking for them, and on the other ensuring that no one was getting close to me. After 15 minutes that felt like 55 minutes, Ras and Adam finally arrived. Relieved at last. His wife Tarikua and daughters Bethlehem, 18, and Eden Genet, 11, welcomed me warmly at their home with a *buna* ceremony<sup>6</sup>. That first night was dedicated to catching up on each other's family over the past year that I had not been in Ethiopia. As we sat talking around a charcoal fire in the room, we could hear hyenas crying and laughing. That is typical Shashemene! Whenever the door opened, a strange stinky odor filled the room and when I asked what it was they told me that the city administration had relocated the city garbage center to where they live and that this is a new challenge they are facing. I noted that down.

### *First engagements that molded the thematic trajectory change*

The next morning, it was the weekly Nyabinghi chants [see chapter 1] at Ras' yard, *Moblissa mesk*<sup>7</sup>, as he often calls it. Nyabinghi preaching and drum sessions are normally performed in a tabernacle, but now, due to the maintenance work it is going through, the adherents like Ras Kawintseb are continuing the sessions at their own homes. Six children and seven adults, including myself, took part in the worshipping ceremony. It was something my soul had been missing for one year. The power of the drums and chants has a mysterious energy that makes me rejoice in my whole being. After four hours of drumming, the session ended with a late

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<sup>4</sup> *Sefer* means area in Amharic.

<sup>5</sup> The leaves of an Arabian shrub, which are chewed (or drunk as an infusion) as a stimulant. It grows in mountainous regions and is often cultivated. In Ethiopia, this started in the Eastern part, Harar. Now, khat or chat, as it called in Amharic, is chewed in all parts of the country.

<sup>6</sup> *Buna* [coffee] ceremony is widely practiced in Ethiopia. The ritualized preparing and drinking of coffee is practiced on a daily basis in almost every Ethiopian household for the purpose of getting together and having a little talk with family, relatives, friends and neighbors. Coffee is served with burning of traditional incenses, accompanied by *kolo* [roasted grains of barley, chickpeas, sunflower, and peanuts] and bread.

<sup>7</sup> *Moblissa mesk* refers to the birth place of Ras in Guyana and *mesk* means field in Amharic.

lunch served by Tarikua, the vivacious wife of Ras, with Ethiopian *buna sinesire'at* (coffee ceremony). It was here that I kicked off my first data collection with group discussions.



Fig. 4: Ras Kawintseb's place, also known as Moblissamesk

L.t.R.: Sister Isheba, Ras Jah Danny, Ras Jah Pillar; Ras Kassa, and Ras Kawintseb; standing: Eden Genet  
Picture by Sister Oana Baloi

Ras Jah Danny, an elder from Bermuda, repatriated to Ethiopia 13 years ago. He recalls getting a call from His Majesty at the tender age of seven, when His Imperial Majesty visited Jamaica and stopped over in Bermuda. Talking about challenges, Jah Danny says: *"I [I in Rasta dialect also means my] challenge is within I-self. I had a lot of challenges in I-life, single paren,t 3 children, ... we get help from our extended family ... we want to use our skills and strengthen I-self."* He added that, living in Shashemene, language is one of his main problems, but assured me that this is not the case for his children, taking into account that they are born and raised here. Legality, not having permission to work, health problems, and the city administration dumping off of trash in the area where the Rastafari are settled constitute some of the major problems he lists, among others. Nevertheless, he points out:

*"If we always look to blame or consider somebody is giving you the challenge.....it is what it is. You must receive it within yourself to go forward in all the challenges that confront you. If you have excuse you will never be able to make that next step in life to get the victory of what is needed to escalate yourself, your children, your family, your nation. As a Rastafari nation we are trodding<sup>8</sup> through the challenges for twelve years and the living example. Haile Selassie I is a living example. He went through challenges*

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<sup>8</sup> To walk or make a move.

*during his reign...the country was going through drastic starvation, war... But he stood up and took out his nation out of that. Good over evil!”<sup>9</sup>*

It was hard for me to understand Jah Danny. He did not go deep into his challenges, insisting that challenges must be fixed within self, rather than being blamed on someone else. I know that he is going through a lot in Ethiopia, but I did not really expect him to open up about his challenges and emotions at first conversation or in a group discussion. At the least, I was sure that those who are facing the challenges on a daily basis will not maintain the notion of Ethiopia being home as before. *“Faith is the substance,”* he highlighted the reason for his strength.



*Fig. 5: Ras Kawintseb’s place, also known as Moblissa mesk  
L.t.R.: Ras Jah Danny, Ras Jah Pillar, Ras Kassa, and myself  
Picture by Sister Oana Baloi*

Jah Danny is proud to say that, in spite of the challenges, he is moving forward and fixing the challenges within himself, rather than making excuses. When I asked him if he still calls Ethiopia home despite the difficulties he is going through, he smiled and replied:

*Ethiopia is Mount Zion! Ye Egziabher bota (God’s place). It is in the scripture. Ethiopia is mentioned numerous times. I can’t deny the prophecy. Even though I am going through the I-challenges I know that there is a great reward coming of the Christ, redemption for the healing of creation more than just the people. All problems shall be fixed. Everything shall be fixed. I speak that way. I can make a great effort to fix the I personal problems and that is through education. Fundamental for all man-kind, because it teaches everything that is going on in creation. So what other way you ask*

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Ras Jah Danny, August 2017.

*for when your driveway is life and it educates as you go through? Everything shall be fixed by Haile Selassie I.<sup>10</sup>*

This discussion that I had particularly with Jah Danny was a revelation for me, like a slap in the face. I know Jah Danny and so do does my husband and Ras Kawintseb and his family. We know that he has been through a lot to the point where he wanted to leave the country but did not do it only because his legal status - being in the country without resident permit, visa expired and no documentation prevented him from doing so.

The next day I went to his home to reason with him personally. The kids were gone to school and he was doing a little farming in his yard. He shared with me some of his challenges: theft, corruption, not being able to work, limited movement due to lack of documents, and health problems caused by the garbage. He also told me that he had sold a big chunk of his land that year to sustain life. As a man who has no right to earn from his skill, he has to find a means to sustain his and his three children's lives. Notwithstanding, the message he puts across again and again is that he is determined to move on with life and his endurance (a lot of it coming from his faith) is mind blowing. That same night I decided that if my next three or four informants held the same view as Jah Danny, I knew my proposal (focusing on the challenges) was in jeopardy and I had to do something. Who am I to talk to about challenges while their endurance is as heavy as their burden, if not heavier. It is paradoxical, but under no circumstances to be swept under the rug.

Ras Kabinda Haile Selassie, an elder from the Dominican Republic, repatriated to Ethiopia 26 years ago. He declares that he came out of the Mau Mau movement of his island where he and his brothers fought against white supremacy, where in the town where he lived, out of a population of 20,000, only 16 families own the land, whereas the rest of the people are left in poverty. He reports that in 1974 the island put up a new law to hang those who declared themselves to be Rasta and praised His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie as God. As a result, he was sent to death row until he and other prisoners escaped from prison due to a hurricane breakout. Between 1974 and 1979, a total of 37 people were hanged by the government in the Dominican Republic, he reports. Ras Kabinda left for England where he lived for five years working as social worker. While living there, he was able to visit Africa, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia. He visited Ethiopia in 1991 where he repatriated to the following year. He admits that his imaginations are totally opposite to the reality on the ground. His experience in Shashemene for the past quarter of a century is filled with tribulations and he believes that Ethiopia has to be awakened.

*"When I came here I had 3000 Care meter land including a land by the river side in Shashemene. But now I have only 500 care meter. All the rest is taken. As a Rastaman our life is based on land. We are farmers. We want to set up ourselves as commercial, residential houses, agro industry... The land grant is on boil right now! We can't be*

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



*stagnant. Because the land grant cannot be taken away. It cannot be appropriated by the state. It is illegal under international law. So the government is obliged to give us a new land. So we need to change our plan. Right now, to be a Rastafari nation in Shashemene is impossible [with anger]! We have to negotiate with the government, but then we need to have our legal status. That is what they have been using against us. It is a great disadvantage that we don't have the legal status. The Oromo people who surround us are taught that Emperor Menelik oppressed the Oromo people, so the elders are teaching the youth... so I-n-I who praise His Majesty [Haile Selassie I] are the enemy. They think that to take advantage of us is a good thing. .... we should be on the banks of the Nile River...so we could plant throughout the year, irrigate our land...we could set up ourselves in agro industry and farming, make ourselves self-sufficient in food..."<sup>11</sup>*

Ras Kabinda has summed up all that confronts the returnees; the turning of the land grant to a land grab, legality, and being caught up in conflicts that are not even theirs - the Oromo attitude to the monarchical rule of Ethiopia and their conflict with the current regime as well. Remarkably, his comment of readiness to negotiate the land grant to another place was a blitz for me. But on no account does his commentary represent the community's view.

Moreover, the adversity of the returnees manifests in their everyday life in the form of: misperception by the local, discrimination, corruption, theft and being targeted for cultural expressions such as having dreadlocks, dietary and religious practice like the use of ganja.

In respect to challenges of cultural expression, Ras Kabinda confidently remarks that, *"I don't have a challenge in that level. I live as a Rastaman. I lived as an African, even though I was in the Caribbean."* However, he did not hide his bafflement by the Ethiopians with their *"love of eating flesh,"* because, according to him it contradicted his imaginations of Ethiopians as religious people. *"How can you fast for 40 days and end your fast by killing everything to eat!?... How can you eat sheep and goats when they only eat grass?"* He asks. In this case he is referring to *tsom* (fasting) of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) where more than two thirds of the year is observed with *tsom* refraining from all types of meat, milk and dairy products. The fasting ends with a feast of eating meat and all that was prohibited. *Fasika* (Easter) and *Genna* (Ethiopian Christmas) are the major *tsom* among others.

Challenges of cultural expression are deeply rooted with the denial of recognition by the state or failure to have legal documentation. This is true mainly when it comes to land ownership rights and the everyday confrontations such as corruption, theft and misperception. Appertaining to some of the challenges such as dreadlocks, religious practice, ganja ritual and dietary habits, the community has devised a mechanism to conserve their cultural expressions. For instance, they have established their own community school called the Jamaican Rastafari Development Community (JRDC) School, which receives Rasta youth with

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Ras Kabinda, 20 January 2018.

dreadlocks including the locals in the city. Effectively, this has led the newly opened private schools into competition and eventually to accept children with dreadlocks, as a matter of fact, most of the Rasta youth in Shashemene go to the new local private schools. In Ethiopia, except for Ethiopian Airlines, banks and insurance companies, there is no dress code (by law) for employees; however, as a 'customary law' persons with dreadlocks are not hired, unless it is in an international organization or artistic work: music, acting and art. Years ago, Ethiopia approved by parliament for Muslim women to work and go to school with religious headscarves, however the issue of dreadlocks was not addressed.

For Ethiopian Rasta youth in Addis Ababa, it is a completely different story. Me and my family are based in Addis Ababa. As mentioned earlier, my son, who was three years old at the time, with long hair (which was not even hair-locked then), was rejected by private schools in Addis Ababa. If it had not been for a school owned by a Rastafari that accepted him along with other Rastafari youth in the city, we would have been forced to cut his hair. However, this does not include the handful of international and high tuition fee schools in the capital that accept children from all cultural backgrounds.

Concerning ganja smoking, it is a criminal act as per Ethiopian law. Owning any amount of the herb will lead to jail. The majority of the Rastafari community grow it in their yard and smoke it in private. They all say, "Your behavior is your savior." The only place where it is used outside of their residence is in the tabernacle. The city police are aware of their growing of ganja and whenever they feel like it, they can break into their compounds and harass them. Many locals have started to grow the plant and sell it to Rastafari or other retailers in Addis Ababa and other cities.

Ever since their repatriation, the community has only one prayer place located in Shashemene. This shrine, or tabernacle, has been under threat of demolition in the name of development over the past 15 years. A couple of months ago, while I was in the field, a group of people came from the city mayor's office and warned the community that the tabernacle had to be dismantled for a new road construction, but there was no mention of providing alternative land to relocate the community's only place of worship.

### *The Turning Point*

As mentioned above, I had started my fieldwork with a heavy heart and with the intention of identifying challenges of cultural expression within the community. Thus, it was hard for me to let the research flow freely. Findings like the above specially related to dreadlock confrontations do not apply equally to Shashemene and Addis Ababa. Routine confrontations experienced by returnees who live in Shash appear to include language, corruption, theft, and garbage being disposed in the residential area, along with the major challenges based on lack of legal documentation, land-grabbing exercised by locals and regional administration officials alike. Despite this, the community is high-spirited and resilient. Their endurance outweighs



the challenges and they still call Ethiopia home. However, instead of recognizing this, I continued to quarry for challenges relating to cultural expression. Nevertheless, all of this prompted me to reflect on how I had arrived at my hypothesis? Insofar, the above illustrations signaled the need to focus my investigation more on Ethiopian Rasta youth and their challenges, in contemplation of finding a challenge they share with my son. The best place in Ethiopia to reach as many Ethiopian Rasta youth as possible was Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, the only art school in the country, which is located in Addis Ababa. Thus, I visited the campus and made friends with the students. After all, it is the most beautiful campus in Addis Ababa, particularly for those who love art.

My first meeting at the Art school was with Alex. He underlined that those who hate a Rastafari or are against the movement should be looked at categorically as institutional enemies, family, society, police or government, and religion. He clarifies:

*“When I say the society, in my experience, I am referring to the school. I was dismissed from high school for the way I look. In fact, I was admitted back because of the free artistic work I contributed for the school banner. And the police always associate dreadlocks with ganja. I get stopped by police every now and then.”*

Alex lit another cigarette and after a minute or so of silence, he continued, *“You know what is funny? The only advantage of having dreadlocks is getting jobs as an artist in a theatre or a film to play the ‘bad guy’ role. These are some of the factors for the distorted perception that our society has about Rastafarians.”*



Fig. 6. Interview with 4<sup>th</sup> year students at Alle School of Fine Arts and Design  
L.t.R: Elias Genene( 24), myself, Santa (26),and Alemayehu ( 27)  
Picture by Birhan Asmamaw

Rasta and art are deeply connected and the irony is that, when these artists, that is the writers and directors, should have been more understanding and creative in using their platform to

narrow the gap between the Ethiopian society and the misunderstood Rastafari people, they keep on fueling the fire instead. Other informants from the university confirmed that they have suffered and “paid a price” to keep their locks and many left home at an early age. Santa, 26, also a fourth-year student with short hair, confessed that he cut his hair because of family influence. He kicks off his conversation quoting verses from Morgan Heritage’s song lyrics, “*You don’t have to be dread to be Rasta. This is not a dreadlock thing but Divine conception of the heart.*” However, Elias’ experience is slightly different. Elias is an Ethiopian youth from Shashemene. He acknowledges that, unlike his Ethiopian Rasta friends, he did not have to face any confrontation for picking Rasta as his way of life. He believes that his parents being from Shashemene and himself growing up there, gave his family an opportunity to get familiar with the Rastafari repatriates and their culture and to eyewitness Ethiopian youth growing locks and living in the Rasta way of life. This indeed interestingly reveals why there are more and more private schools in Shashemene that welcome Rasta children.

### ***Literature Review***

Rastafarians or not, historians have recorded, researchers have studied, travelers have visited, journalists have reported, filmmakers have produced documentaries; and reggae musicians have plotted their clip around Rastafari. As much as the topic is more researched, there is an obvious gap in the research. Previous studies predominantly stress on historical accounts of the creation of the Rastafari movement; its connection with and repatriation to Ethiopia, its ideology with respect to their way of life, their spirituality and repatriation. However, even though relatively recent works by MacLeod (2014) and Bonacci (2015) have investigated the community in Shashemene and its relation with their Ethiopian hosts, I have not found any study that thoroughly investigates what happens after the returnees settle in Ethiopia.

In his book *Rasta and Resistance: from Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (1987), Horace Campbell recognized that the Rasta movement for repatriation should not be carried out under any illusions. He notes that contemporary Africa is going through various changes, particularly Ethiopia given that the revolution in 1974 has ousted Emperor Haile Selassie I, who is all but the center of the entire Rastafari movement. Campbell's literary piece focused exclusively on challenges that arose due to the revolutionary times in Ethiopia in 1974, which defied the Emperor, but it does not discuss the cultural resistance of contemporary Ethiopia.

The volume of Murrell et al (1998) *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader* is a collection of various works by different authors that thoroughly explores Rastafari religion, culture and politics in Jamaica and in other parts of the African diaspora. The work apparently not only fails to address the contemporary conditions of the community, but also lacks a chapter or section dedicated to the Rastafari community in Ethiopia.

In his book *Rastafari in Transition: The Politics of Cultural confrontation in Africa and the Caribbean 1966-1988*, a collection of academic works spanning 25 years, Rastafari scholar, Dr. Ikael Tafari (2001), put together his creative imagination of the view of the pan-African world in three countries on both sides of the Atlantic, i.e., Ethiopia, Jamaica, and Grenada. The

author connects “seemingly unconnected events” in the three “seemingly unconnected countries” in recording the evolution of Rastafari, including its second cycle, and the pan-African movement. In his book, he contends that the revolutionary political conflicts of the considered period across the black world were essentially the outcome of a cultural confrontation between local African tradition and the inexorable western civilization. Nevertheless, the experience of the repatriated Rastafari in Ethiopia, let alone their challenges, was not the focus of the book (2001; 50-55). Brother Ikael Tafari, as he is known especially among the Rasta community, is a sociologist Rastaman originally from the University of West Indies in Jamaica. His book *Rastafari in Transition: The politics of cultural confrontation in Africa and the Caribbean* (1966-1988) is the result of gathering relevant works produced over 25 years.

Erin C. Macleod’s book *Visions of Zion: Ethiopians and Rastafari In Search for The Promised Land* (2014) is based on fieldwork exploring the Ethiopian perception of Rastafari culture. In her research, the writer mentions that she had difficulties in getting the trust of respondents due to her ‘non-belongingness’ either to the repatriated community or to the host society. Moreover, she states that language was a barrier for her.

In her book *Exodus* (English version 2015) Giulia Bonacci discusses how the African diaspora is forced to shape itself in fulfillment of the return. In doing so, she engages in the discussion of the origin of the ideology of the ‘back to Africa movement’; the process of the movement; and the views held by those who made it and their experiences of their new social relations. But she attests that the discussion omits other, equally important factors, such as the Ethiopian community’s perception and the government stance on the situation (Macleod, 2014:5).

In terms of the selection of reference works, the research selectively used a mix of insider and outsider researchers’ findings relating to the Rastafari community in one way or another. By doing so, the research is able to benefit from the insider writers’ deeper connection with the subject by balancing their views with those held by writers who do not belong to the community. Bonacci (2015), Tafari (2001), and Jalani (2007) are Rasta academicians from the west and from the Caribbean, while writers like MacLeod (2014) are outsiders to the community.

Writers have chronicled the history of repatriation of the Rastafari to Ethiopia, the cultural confrontation the returnees faced in Africa and in Ethiopia at the time of the ousting of Haile Selassie I and the coming of *dergue* (the socialist era 1974-1991) as well as the prevailing perception of the relations between Ethiopians and the Rastafari . Existing scientific works apparently lack a detailed research on the challenges that the community faces on a daily basis. Therefore, in pushing the work of Horace Campbell that shed light on the cultural struggle the repatriates confronted in earlier times, this research opts to delineate itself to give emphasis on the broad challenges of the returnees and assesses the circumstance that catalyzed to the challenges and paradoxes of belonging of the community in contemporary Ethiopia. Equally, the other factor that makes the present research a fresh breath to the study

on the Rastafari community in Ethiopia is its rigorous analysis of the directive issued by the Ethiopian government with regard to providing a national identity card to members of the community. As an Ethiopian who is part of the community, I enjoy the fortunate advantage of being able to look at the subject under study from the perspectives of insider and outsider alike. In addition, I reflect on myself and my family's experience, which allowed me to delve into the subject and elucidate the challenges of the Rastafari in contemporary Ethiopia.

Seizing the opportunity to take part in the *All Africa Rastafari Gathering* held in Ethiopia in November 2017, the present research expands our knowledge and understanding by turning to the challenges from the perspective of African as well as global Rastafari. Following the Ethiopian government declaration of the decision to reward the community with a national ID card, the research offers a rigorous analysis of the government directive by investigating its privileges and shortcomings. Additionally, it offers observations and suggestions based on demonstration in the field that needs further research on the Rastafari movement in Ethiopia and their relation with the global Rastafari diaspora.

The data that informs this study was collected within Ethiopia, largely in Shashemene and to some extent in Addis Ababa. More than one hundred interviews done with members of the Rastafari, locals in Shashemene, and government officials, both on federal and regional level, are mostly unstructured interviews and one close interview with state bureaucrats. The composition of interviewees includes elders, members of the younger generation, women and men, entrepreneurs, artists, representatives of Rastafari NGOs in Ethiopia, and members of the global Rastafari community that came to Shashemene for the first All African Rastafari Gathering conference. Due to the dynamic nature of the topic, the study includes a number of follow-up interviews conducted online with informants. In the course of my fieldwork, through the vast amount of data collected, I became aware of the plethora of adversities Rastafari are facing in the Promised Land; the perceptions of the locals; the stance of the government; the similarity of the challenges confronted by the universal Rastas; difficulties of implementation of the directive when it is supposed to end the long standing quests of the community; and a new phenomenon regarding the transnationality of the movement that I have witnessed and that evolved in the home-diaspora relationship of the Rastafari.

This research uniquely differs from other studies in that it adopts visual documentation as one of its methods to exhibit its findings from the field. The documental visuals produced on the Rastafari community in Ethiopia are mostly those produced by news agencies like Aljazeera (December 2, 2015), CCTV (Faces of Africa: July 7, 2014) and Press TV (2014). Filmmakers and individuals have endeavored to record the life of the returnees in the heart of Ethiopia, Shashemene, from various points of view. Tikher Teferra's *Man of the Millennium* (2007/2008), opens with the arrival of a repatriated Rastaman in Ethiopia and mainly accentuates the 'strange voices' of the Ethiopians with regard to Haile Selassie I. Since 2016, two documentary motion pictures were produced with plots and settings based on the Rastafari community in Shashemene. *The Barefoot Rasta* (2016), written and directed by Andy

Siege, revolves around a young man who traveled from Canada to Ethiopia. In continuation of his Rasta journey in the Promised Land, he meets his teacher Ras Kawintseb, a.k.a. the barefoot Rastaman, and with his teacher his journey “ultimately leads him to shed his Babylonian ways and to understand what it means to be Rasta” ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com), December 14, 2016). The beautifully shot “Shashemene” documentary by Giulia Amati centers on the Rastafari returnees and their recovering of their African identity ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com), March 20, 2017). Nevertheless, the film’s emphasis was not on the challenges the community faces as the presumed Promised Land fails to make them feel at home. The visual not only attempts to present the findings of the research concurring with the write-up but also contributes a great deal of input for a documentary that the researcher plans to produce on another thematic trajectory similar to that of the writing.

The theoretical framework of this investigation builds on concepts of Identity constructed through collective memory, belongingness, zones of transit, and home-diaspora relationship. Ethnographical research is what is found to be the most appropriate choice for approaching an investigation of this nature that ultimately endeavors to understand and describe how the challenges of the Rastafari in Ethiopia manifests thereby unfolding their ironies and paradoxes. I offer a synopsis of the people I met, places I went, and my personal position, all of which collaboratively informed the subject under study. Descriptions of informants and methods used and reflection of my insider position are used to introduce the process and methods through which I conducted the fieldwork and navigated my own experience as a researcher and quasi-member of the Rastafari community.

This study broadens the current discussion on Rastafari who repatriated to Ethiopia by presenting the lived experience of the community and the perception of the host and by engaging in a dialogue about challenges, paradoxes, mutual challenges amongst the international Rastas, and the persistence of their misery even after recognition by the state. To understand this, the research provides a historical background of the Rastafari movement. Delving into what unfolds when the real and mystically fed identity meets with reality on the ground after repatriation gives a way for the investigation of the viscous tribulations the community is living in. In doing so, the research develops queries that shed light on the research focus.

### **Research Questions**

As I fully embrace and grow in the Rastafari way of life, and living with my Rasta *kingman* [husband], I become more concerned with questions about the community’s situation in Ethiopia. If they came upon invitation extended by the Emperor of the state, Haile Selassie I, why are they now neglected by the government? When my Ethiopian folks always say *your husband is a foreigner* I shut them down saying culturally *he is more Ethiopian than you and me*. But I ask myself, has he actually become one? Is he equally treated like me in Ethiopia, which he calls his home? The Rastas wear Ethiopian attire while most of us (Ethiopians) wear imported clothes. They study Ethiopian history more than any averagely educated Ethiopian.

The Rastafari returnees have abandoned their life in developed countries and repatriated to live in the villages of Ethiopia, whereas hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians migrate illegally to Europe ([www.ethpress.gov.et](http://www.ethpress.gov.et), 05/04/2017). They have reversed south-north migration to north-south. While the Rastafari insist on Ethiopia being their home, they are constantly called foreigners. Most of the Ethiopian people seem ignorant to the challenges the Rastafari community is going through. One striking fact is that most foreigners who come as expats or diplomats live at a high-class standard earning substantially more than the vast majority of Ethiopians and, thus, are the better-off people. In contrast, the Rastafari are noticeably the poor ones, even compared to Ethiopians, but subscribing to high moral standards they are the most humble people. Therefore, attempting to know why the Rastafari repatriates, who call Ethiopia the Promised Land and convey that message to the world through reggae music, are maltreated in Ethiopia and catalyzed by a personal experience, I was set to direct this research.

With this object in mind, I set out the research inquiring, “Is the Rastafari community belonging to Ethiopia contested? If so, what are the challenges that the Rastafari face? How are these challenges manifested? What are the underlining reasons for these challenges? As a result, are they coping or excluded? Did the challenges prevent them from integrating? These inquiries lead to the core of the study. To elucidate where their belonging (ness) or identifying as Ethiopians is derived from, the study asks why does the community claims Ethiopian identity? How is this Ethiopian identity constructed? Furthermore, the Rastafari community’s persisting quest for belonging in the contested state of Ethiopia, in the view that calling Ethiopia home while it does not feel like home demonstrates the paradoxical situation. To find out, the research questions; are the imaginations of the Rastafari returnees to Ethiopia consistent with the reality on the ground? If not, is the destination considered a zone of transit as a result? While this depicts the definitive paradox, the research also further questions how the paradoxes of the Rastafari in Ethiopia are evidenced. To lay a foundation for the reader of this research result, it provides a historical background of the Rastafari movement and brings forward the Ethiopian government’s perspective towards the community. While these are the questions that ran through my mind when I decided to conduct this research, there are also other questions that arose during the fieldwork.

As an Ethiopian Rasta woman living in Ethiopia, I was invited to attend a conference of the All Africa Rastafari Gathering in Shashemene. Blissfully, I joined and had a chance to meet with Rastafari brethren and sistren from all over the world. Wondering to know if challenges faced by the Rastafari community are common in other places, I held interviews with the different nationalities of Rastafari partakers. The statement of the Ethiopian government about granting national IDs came close to the time of my departure for the fieldwork. The statement added that the national ID grants rights and privileges provided to foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin. The disclosure by the state was perceived as the end of their tribulations in the Promised Land, particularly by the international news media ([www.qz.com](http://www.qz.com) [www.africa.cgtn.com](http://www.africa.cgtn.com) [www.africannews.com](http://www.africannews.com) viewed on 07/19/2018). Thus, the researcher decided to examine the directive. Consequently, the study enquires, whether the directive is

directive applies to all community members. Are there differences between the proclamation issued for foreign citizens of Ethiopian origin by birth and the directive issued for the Rastafari community? If so, how are these stated and what is the consequence? What does the experience in other African countries who host Rastafari look like? Conclusively, I investigate the options for and actions taken by the community in the absence of the Ethiopian government's obstinacy for the majority of who does not qualify the mandatory requirements? Are they trying to reach out to the international Rastafari community? An attempt of knitting together the results to these questions have interwoven the structure of this research, hence answering to the questions that I had in mind before I set out this research. Whereas the interplay of the stories shared by participants combined with my own personal experience and the monologues here and there have embroidered and gave a final touch to the research.

### **Theorizing the Rastafari in Ethiopia**

This research conceptualizes the challenges and paradoxes of belonging of the Rastafari in Ethiopia through the theoretical lens of identity (Macleod, 2014, pp.4-7; Tafari, 2001, p.3; Price, 2009, pp.3-4) in order to explain how the Rastafari repatriated to Ethiopia and constructed an Ethiopian identity. It also considers a homeland-diaspora relationship (Weingrod & Levi, 2006, PP.691-716) to elucidate the bond between the Rastas at home (Ethiopia) and abroad. Significantly, this investigation frames on the belongingness hypothesis (Nyamnjoh, 2006; 3 & 228-229) to shed light on the challenges of the quest for inclusion in Ethiopian society in the midst of the local Ethiopian pursuit for land reform, fair economic distribution, equal political participation, and human rights. Akinyoade and Gewald (2015) introduce the concept of "Zones of transit", which I use in this study to explain the paradox of reaching and not reaching home at the same time. Though the returnees have reached home physically, they remain unrecognized by the state, thus, making their home far from being home politically and socio-economically.

For many, the back-to-Africa movement is regarded as an allegory for victims of slavery that provides them with the sense of belongingness to motherland, Africa (Prah, 2012, p. 7). Nevertheless, for the pioneers of the leaders of the return-to-motherland phenomena, such as the Afrocentric Marcus Garvey, the movement was both spiritual (Erskine, 2007, p.120) and political in which Ethiopia forms the source of identity and an actual destination for the repatriation of Africans (Chevannes, 1994, p. 34). The contemporary historian, Horst Moller, offers the foundation for the sense of belongingness and identity. He writes "[I]dentity is constituted by collective memory, not only real events but also myths and legends" (Macleod, 2014, p.7). Moller explains that the way these real events, myths and legends come to create collective memory is through stories. Correspondingly, the Rastafari in Ethiopia built their identity on historical and biblical accounts. What is intriguing is the reason why the same challenge exists in the premises of the host having the Rastafari community.

Central to the formation of Garvey's *Universal Negro Improvement Association* (UNIA) was the question of race because he (Marcus Mosiah Garvey Jr.) believed the race led to lynching and burning of the black people including the Rastafari. In other words, UNIA was formed against the backdrops and the need to unify black race against imperialism all over the world, making "Back-to-Africa" movement one of the objectives of the organization (Martin, 1976, pp.22-37). Race formation was especially important for the development of blackness in Jamaica. Racial category imposed by the white Europeans on black people was Black (and Ethiopia), which had a derogative connotation, but gradually embraced by the black people who started to claim identity with it. Such identifications were attained through collective memory believing in a shared homeland, ancestors and experience (Price, 2009, pp.3-4).

In support of the above hypothesis, an insider<sup>12</sup> to the subject, Brother Ikael Tafari (as known by the Rasta community) was a Barbadian from the University of West Indies in Jamaica. Ikael's chapter "The politics of cultural confrontation" (2001, p.3) offers a clarification for the "convergent radical/revolutionary" in the pan-African world on both sides of the Atlantic, namely Africa and Caribbean- Ethiopia, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. He asserts that Ethiopianism was the ultimate identity for the black people of the world who more and more identified themselves from an international perspective. This belongingness to and identification with Ethiopianism is not conceived in areal terms. It stemmed from the racial consciousness of black people who chose to see themselves as "one people-from one source-Africa-belonging universally to a suppressed culture and an exploited, yet especially chosen, race" (2001; 4-5). To understand the Rastafari counter-culture, it is important to comprehend the historical significance of Haile Selassie and the mystical image of Ethiopia (Psalm 68, Tafari, 2001, p.5).

Edward Chamberlin proposes that seeing or perceiving inseparably from imagining is grounded on what we consider as true in our lived experiences (Macleod, 2014, p.7). Informed biblically and historically, the Rastafari imagine Africa, particularly Ethiopia, as home. On the other hand, Weingrod and Levi (2006) in their article entitled "*Paradoxes of Homecoming: the Jews and Their Diasporas*" explain "homeland and diaspora" explain that the relationships are paradoxical in the absence of what is imagined, perceived or seen as 'home.'

The research also places the Rastafari zooms in a broader notion of citizenship. Nyamnjoh (2006) in his book "Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa" contends the movement of people in Africa (as elsewhere) is effecting questioning of nationality and citizenship (ibid, p.3) from the host. He demonstrates the paradoxical deadlock of the national citizenship and globalization under his case study, South Africa. According to him, both national citizenship and globalization are ranked and unequal processes affecting individuals and communities. Furthermore, a flux of migrants and uncertainty amongst nationals tends to create tensions fueled by those in peripheral which gives a way for the government to collaborate with the disaffected ones in order to direct their

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Ikael Tafari was a director of Pan African Commission in Trinidad and Tobago.



resentment against immigrants or ethnic minorities because they are considered as 'social ills' (ibid, pp.228-9). Today, in many countries, migration and belonging are a contentious political issue because they are mainly linked to crime and highly to terrorism (ibid, p.229).

In what appears to be a research work that strikes a balance with the-much-studied south-north migration, Akinyoade and Gewald (2015) sought "to understand more of the histories and present-day realities" in the south-south migration. Concurrently, they shed light on the emergence and transformation of certain places in Africa that became marked as spaces of transit for people in search of better socio-economic prospects (ibid, p.3) thereby introducing concepts of "zone of transit", "zones of transference", and zones of transit and transference." The authors contend that when people move from a certain location to their place of destination, they become "stuck-halfway" either on their way to the planned destination or on their way back to point of departure (ibid, pp.3-4). For the Rastafari repatriates in Shashemene, home is in Africa in general and Ethiopia in particularly. This claim is based on their lived experiences as construed by the real events, myths and legends such as slavery, the crowning of Emperor Haile Selassie I, and the emperor's lineage to the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. Initially, the returnees assumed to pick their relation with the supposed distant relatives of Ethiopians, from where their enslaved ancestors left, but, in the course of time, they were considered 'others,' called *faranji* [foreigners] and Jamaicans for the past five decades. The practical reality on the ground has traumatized them and put their demand for inclusion as Ethiopians in jeopardy. This has led to the severed the Rastafari dream of becoming Ethiopians, and generated a homeland-diaspora relationship with the international Rastafari community. In this respect, belongingness and citizenship quest of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia has not received a response yet, mainly, it seems, due to the politics of ethnicity which has led to closures and exclusions citizens. Paradoxically, home does not feel like at home for the Rastafari, but still they call it home. Or perhaps, they are stuck in Shashemene. As the Rastafari say, they are endured by their faith, which is the very reason that brought them to the Promised Land.

These theoretical concepts have laid the foundation for the discussions included throughout this thesis.

### **Outlines of the Chapters**

"Challenges of the Rastafari in Ethiopia" was originally the title of this research. In fact, initially, I went to the field with a hypothesis that the lives of the Rastafari community are full of challenges. I also assumed that if the community's legal issue is resolved, I contended that they would all leave Ethiopia. However, the findings are completely the opposite. I was blown away by their determination and endurance. Thus, I decided this research should not only draw the readers' attention to the vast records of challenges but also to throw light on the endurance and resilience rendered between the repatriate and the host as well. Upon my return from fieldwork, I had a conversation of my fieldwork report with my advisors, and the

word “paradoxes” emerged as a catchy word to be added in the topic. The organization of the chapters of this research, therefore, is as follows:

Chapter One reasons out the methods employed in order to show from where the hypothesis emanates and events that shaped the approaches to the participants and the data collection. The methodology part offers a detailed overview of the people and places in Shashemene and Addis Ababa that shaped my research. The methods are scattered throughout the chapters as the experience and the manifestation of each chapter have a distinctive story to tell. Moreover, the chapter presents an overview of the people, the city of Shashemene, and the historical overview of the Rastafari movement.

Chapter Two provides background information for readers. Included are the historical account of the Rastafari movement consisting the pan-Africanism and religious dimension and a contemporary history of the movement. It offers explanation on the different mansion of the Rastafari to expand the knowledge on the Rastafari in general and on how these mansions operate on the ground in particular. The chapter looks at the way the Ethiopian government has approached the Rastafari community since the collapse of the monarchical rule in 1974. Moreover, it illuminates Ethiopianness and repatriation as perceived by the community. Though this chapter depends heavily on previous works on the subject, it also includes ethnographically collected data.

Chapter Three, through the stories of the lived experience, unravels the paradox of the lives of the returnees. Indeed, the experiences painted in this chapter overlap with the issues in the following chapter in view of cases discussed in deconstructing the paradox of the challenges but not all challenges are paradoxes. Thus, to avoid duplication, challenges like land grant, the issue of “them and us” which are also paradoxes, and analyzed in this chapter are not discussed in the following chapter.

Having established the backdrop of the Rastafari movement by answering the what and how questions and its connection and Exodus to Ethiopia followed by uncovering the lenses used to approach the community, Chapter Four embarks on a broader view of the challenges of the Rastafari . It takes on the intimate journey of the lived experience of the repatriates, particularly in Shashemene and in Addis Ababa. The discourse includes men and women of both the old and young generations from all Rastafari households. The individuals paint their stories deviating from how they envisioned coming to Ethiopia, how they arrived, and their trials and tribulations in the Promised Land. These include the key challenges, misperception by the returnees and the host, legal issues, and the land grant, daily confrontations such as corruption, theft, bureaucracy, and challenges in establishing business among others.

Chapter Five takes the reader to the continental and global Rastafari challenges. This chapter was materialized by an event that I turned into an opportunity. The All Africa Rastafari Gathering crashed by the diaspora Rastafari community from the Caribbean and the west was convened for the first time in the Mecca of the Rastafari , Shashemene, Ethiopia, on November

1-7, 2017. Participants of the conference volunteered to partake in this research and the result revealed that their challenges remarkably had universality.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia disclosed that national identification card issuance for the Rastafari community members. Moreover, the state has issued a directive that guides the implementation for official use. Curious to know if this brings an end to adversity of the community and a happy-end the research with some cheering news, Chapter Six examines the guideline ("A Guideline to facilitate conditions for the Rastafari community in Ethiopia to get the Rights and privileges provided to foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin" No. 21/2009) juxtaposing with proclamation No. 270/2002 "A proclamation to provide Foreign Nationals of Ethiopian origin with certain Rights to be exercised in their country of origin," and "Immigration Act", 2000 (Act 573) of Ghana that provided "Right of Abode" for African descendants. The chapter contends that it is a no-win dilemma for the majority of returnees as they do not fully meet the requirement. The lack of official documentation puts the Rastafari in a vicious cycle of misery. Not only this. The core of their repatriation to Ethiopia, the land grant, remains unaddressed.

In the absence of an all-inclusive resolution by the state, the research try to look at what other means the Rastafari community in Ethiopia are looking at. From in-depth and follow up interviews I learnt that there is a tendency and some steps taken in approaching continental and international organizations to legalize their existence in the country. In the view of this, Chapter Seven of this study culminated. In doing so, it analyses depth conversation with this regard. Congruently it brings the view of the International Organization for Migration. The chapter briefly discusses the observation made during the All Rastafari Gathering conference under the theme "Intra-trade between the global Rastafari communities".

The conclusion part of the thesis thematically provides a brief core points and the final word on the topics discussed throughout the research. It offers the reverberance of the challenges of the community nationally (Ethiopia), continentally and internationally, and the measures taken that print its foot-step as to where the Rastafari are moving particularly in the African continent. Prior to the conclusion, recommendations for further research is provided.

This research, as the first exhaustive investigation on; the challenges and paradoxes of belonging of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia, a detailed discussion on the challenges that the community face, the practicability of the directive issued by the Ethiopian government in acknowledgment of the community, and the home-diaspora relationship of the Rastafari, renders those who wish to study the movement an in-depth contemporary study with indication of future phenomenon of the Rastafari movement within Ethiopia and Africa. Recognition by the state is considered the ultimate goal of the community in Ethiopia. However, this study uncovers that this is not what is actually sought by the group members and what the Ethiopian government granted them. The findings of this research not only help us broaden our understanding on the current predicament of the Rastafari community in

Ethiopia and worldwide, but also assist individual Rastafari wishing to do the journey of repatriation to the Promised Land.

*"The map is not the land"*<sup>13</sup>

*Yirga Gelaw*

## **Chapter One: Ethnographic anecdotes**

### **Introduction**

This chapter layouts the methodologies blended together to collect data during and post fieldwork in order to reach to the findings of this research.

This study was conducted for six consecutive months from August 2017 to January 2018. This narrative of the Rastafari in Ethiopia is an account of extensive informal and closed interviews and observation. This section precedes its discussion with anecdotes that introduce the reasoning culture of the Rastafari that simplified the interview method.

Part of the excitement of this research is the employment of visual documentation. I discuss why I decided to apply visual method in view of shedding light on the subject under study.

In this chapter, I outline and reflect on how my personal background and lived experience in the Rastafari culture expedited the data gathering and my connection with the research. In order to show how I balancing the bias can be created, the methodology section consists of a discussion on my reflexivity. For more explicit and rigorous analysis, I use introspective reports as sources of information. Since the legal issue of the Rastafari is an ongoing one, upon my return from the fieldwork, I made use of social media to follow up the progress in order to include relevant issues in this thesis. Why and how I collected data through the social media is explained as well. Limitation and ethical considerations are also part of this chapter followed by conclusion. Descriptions of methods used to collect data are provided; however, anecdotes that demonstrate how the information was collected are found spread throughout the chapters.

### **Narratives on Method**

*Rastaman in Shashemene: "Greetings Empress! Wah gwaan? Everythin' irie?"*

*Me: Greetings bredren... Give thanks, Rastafari!*

*Rastaman: "You need help sistren?"*

*Me: Yes Rastaman, I'm here to do a research on the challenges of the Rastafari in Ethiopia*

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<sup>13</sup> This quote is taken from a facebook page of a good old friend of mine who used to explain that what we get on the ground when conducting a research is always different from the theory of methodologies that we learnt theoretically. Since this research is typically built on the lived experience, I found it a suitable epigraph for this chapter.

*Rastaman: "we are amidst of it Empress. Grab a chair and let's reason!"<sup>14</sup>*

Kebede et al. (2007, p.324-7) underscores that the Rastafari movement can be identified in two ways. The first fold is the "conspicuous marks" consisting of the dreadlocks and the dress-code. The second one is the "intellectual marks" visible when they start to talk and perform. These are the Rasta language or the "dread talk", Nyabinghi drum session and reasoning. The reasoning meeting provides to the members to democratically express their mind, a symptomatic analysis of social reality, builds self-confidence, and contributes to reinforce collective identity.

The Rastafari community in Shashemene meets officially at least once in a week for a reasoning session either at a fellow Rastaman residence or in a community center. In this session, from a single story to stories like "What is new in the community to familial, social, political issues and biblical verses?" are made equally open for discussion. The reasoning can also be informal, for instance two or more people meet to reason out what happened in the neighborhood. During my fieldwork in Shashemene, I was hosted by Ras Kawintseb and his family. He has a weekly gig in Addis to where he leaves every Thursday and comes back on Sunday. The first thing he says on the following day of his arrival, after a good rest and family catch up, is *"Let me go and reason with Jah Dani"* who is his neighbor. In this case, the reasoning with Jah Dani is updating what happened in the area during Ras Kawintseb's absence and Ras Kawintseb doing the same about his gig in Addis Ababa.

The reasoning assembly usually opens and is accompanied by ganja sacrament throughout the discussion. Ideas and holy herb are shared amongst the participants...smokes and utterances come out of their mouth one after the other. For researchers like me, one can learn and take advantage of the community's reasoning culture to conduct a research. The reasoning can be in groups or on a one-on-one discussion. Reasoning is one of the greatest treasures in the Rasta *livity*. On the other hand, it can also be the greatest test as whilst reasoning, feelings can get burning, but since the primary intention is brotherhood, it always ends up with understanding differences, strengthening similarities, solving problems, sharing information, getting bible verses demystified and human relation reinforced. I have been part of a number of Rasta reasoning, but it is only during this research that I realized their culture of reasoning is indeed a great opportunity for a qualitative based study. Thus, while in Shashemene, I attended reasoning of the community, be it in someone's house, the shrine of Rastafari, or under the tree shade. The participation in such events heightened the importance and effectiveness of interview method because of their articulateness and outspoken experience regardless of the nature of interview (structured or semi-structured).

Conducting a research at home and particularly on a community that my family belongs to and I certainly have some allegiance to, has certainly some advantages to my methodology due to the cultural intimacy we share. The consequence is that it helped me to gain trust

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<sup>14</sup> A random conversation with a Rastaman, August 2017

effortlessly from my informants. The subjects feel less pressure in explaining themselves and in being easy to take me for granted as their advocate. Indeed, the way I see myself in this research is as a sympathizer of this community. However, being an insider researcher has also its own disadvantages because the inquisitor may assume that all her/his assumptions are right. Like McCurdy and Uldam (2013) pointed out, one, as well as the other positions, has their own benefits and ill effects. For an outsider, having direct access may result in the creative of a 'hegemonic discourse' in the absence of a shared cultural experience, whereas the insider position may entail taken-for-granted observations. As a result, the writers suggest combining the two approaches and reflecting their role as a participant observer.

A case in point is my own experience. The hypothesis of challenges of the cultural expressions of all Rastafari in Ethiopia was wrong. It took me some time to let go of the assumption because I was in a deep I-am-close-enough-and-so-I-know mentality. The matter of fact is that it is my assumption, but not their truth, particularly for the Rastafari in Shashemene. Apparently, there were more challenges even to the extent of hindering their day-to-day activities. This was unexpected for me, and even made me frustrated for a while until I was able to accept the awe of the field as it flows.

Differently, Van Ginkel (1998; pp.251-2) affirms "anthropology at home has no special epistemological position compared with anthropological research abroad" though he admits such type of research has its own problems, relative advantages, and disadvantages. I opt to slightly differ from him as I believe those relative advantages of the insider (or rather the "endogenous ethnographers" as he calls the insiders), may lead to a different finding than a researcher from abroad as a result of the difference in executing her or his methods in the field. Below, I provide an account of my personal research experience for this study in Shashemene and Addis Ababa.

### **Episodes that shaped the methods**

14<sup>th</sup> of August 2017, I hit the road to Shashemene, about 250 kms South of Addis Ababa, to make my first formal field experience in Ethiopia. For the past 15 years, I have traveled to Shashemene (Shash, as often called by the Rastafari) at least twice or once in a year. In the beginning, around my 'baptism' days to the Rastafari way of life, at least I made sure to attend His Majesty's birthday on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July and occasionally the coronation anniversary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2017. Mostly, I attend reggae concerts at Twelve Tribes of Israel Head Quarters (see Chapter 1) with reggae artists amongst the community in Shashemene and those coming from all over the world to celebrate the birthday and the coronation, and conduct Nyabingi drum session and reasoning. But this particular travel was different. I was never there as a researcher; so, I was anxious as to how all it manifests- being a researcher at home, practicality of the method and the like.

Traveling from Addis to Shash in a mini-bus packed with 20 people including the driver and his assistant tuned me up for the field. I sat in the middle of the back seat. The only reason I did not wait for the next bus was to avoid late arrival to my destination. Only a year passed since

my last trip, but a lot of changes happened: construction on the left and right side of the road, that only road that stretches close to 800 kms to the border of Kenya is under reconstruction. Out of the 250 kms to Shashemene, we traveled more than half way on the rough road. Whenever the bus accelerated dust penetrated into the mini-bus from left and right which made me continuously cough from the flue I caught in Addis and now the dust makes it worst. When we immediately were on the tarred road, I was still coughing. Then, I made a sign to a passenger near the window to open the window, but he refused in fear of cold. His refusal got the support of other passengers easily. The passenger enquired me in English “*Are you a Rasta or Ethiopian?*” I answered in Amharic: “*I am an Ethiopian*”. After a pause, I added, “*The Rasta are Ethiopians, too.*” He laughed at me. I often get asked this question traveling to Shash, but now it resonated in my head and was a kind of foretelling to my own research. The Rastafari in Ethiopia say, “We are Ethiopians who left the country due to slavery,” but the reality is different. I guessed my loose dreadlocks from the headscarf led the passenger to question. But it could also be my request to open the window. Most of Ethiopians, and particularly people from the village, have this persistent fear of getting cold when windows open on public transport. It is quite an issue. Often, I hear the repatriate Rastas complaining how it is difficult to convince the Ethiopian passengers to open windows in the bus on their way to and from Shashemene. Interestingly, one of my classmates who conducted a research in South Africa told me that the case of the window-opening is the same there. I wondered if this is an African thing. I remember my husband and a friend of the family, Ras Kawintseb, faking it as if they were sick whenever they have to travel and, thus, manipulate to open window. Ruminating on this, I reached Shash around 8 pm.

Shashemene is my second hometown, but I do not move around in the town alone after the sun goes down. Since I am based in Addis Ababa, I don’t know every Rastafari member in Shash; besides my *kingman* is not in Ethiopia. It was obvious for the purpose of this research I need Ras Kawintseb’s assistance in introducing me to some of the prominent community leaders and other members of the community.

On the second day, after the Nyabinghi session at Ras place, we sat together to list out potential key study participants. He made his first call to Ras Alex from France, originally from Guadeloupe, the owner of Zion lodge in the city. The first thing he told him was “I have a sister with me, her name is Mahlet and she is Ras Jahnoch’s *empress* [wife]; she is here doing a research....” He checked the name of the second one on the list, and made the same introduction. First, I am a wife of my husband, then a researcher. However, at the back of my mind, I spoke, “*Come on Ras! Just introduce me as myself and the topic of the research I am conducting....*” However, later it became clear to me that it was important to make that reference that I am married to a Rastaman belonging to the community so I can have easy access. Having done that Ras looks at me cautiously, and says “*I believe you brought with you enough skirts and head wraps? A real Rastaman will not be willing to talk to you let alone to reason with you if you are not dressed like them.*” I am not anymore strictly following the Rastafari dress code, but I knew where Ras was coming from and gave him a wink, assuring



that I was prepared. Among many other things, personas such as ethnicity, religion, residence, marital status, and appearance affect the researcher's fieldwork (Van Ginkel, 1998; pp.254). My marital relationship to one of the community members gave me the right of entry.

In the pursue of Marcus Garvey's dream to create a self-reliant one Rastafari nation, the first *All Africa Rastafari Gathering* under the theme "*Intra-Africa Trade for a Self-Reliant Rastafari Nation*" was held in Shashemene. The conference brought more than 170 Rastafari participants from around the world and was comprised binghi session, reasoning, networking, and reggae concert. On the morning of the first day of the gathering, I went to Lilly of the Valley Hotel, owned by a Rastafari elder couple, where the conference was held. The women were dressed mostly in white with their heads covered and their dresses decorated with Ethiopian flag colors (green, gold (as the yellow is called by the Rastafari ) and red) and Ethiopian *shammas* (shawls) and shoes with African colors on completed their look. They looked so royal, majestic and beautiful. I felt embarrassed because I was in my green linen costumes with my camouflage jacket, my-regular-field-fit-type-of-look with my dreadlocks half wrapped, which quickly alerted to throw a shawl on top of my head.

I introduced myself to a group of sisters who were sitting and chatting in the lobby of the hotel. None of the faces looks familiar to me. As they were busy with their conversation, I felt reluctant to state my purpose of being there. But then, I thought it might make them anxious, so as humbly as I could, I told them my intentions. Quickly, I made a special point to inform them that I was the empress of Ras Jahnoch. Instantly, I got their attention and they started querying to ensure it was the Jahnoch they knew. After confirmation, we arranged an appointment to talk at the end of the conference, and I left.

The conference had interesting issues of discussion for the participants, including myself. In fact, the research left me in a bit of a bind, on the one hand, and my role as a 'researcher,' on the other hand, my somewhat quasi-membership as Ethiopian Rasta.



Fig. 7. Conference participants in a group photo  
Picture credit- Rasta United Front (RUF), South Africa

On the third day of the conference, I introduced myself to the outspoken *sistren*, Queen mother Moses and I reminded her that we met years back in one of Africa Unite projects that brought young Africans to Ethiopia worldwide. It seemed to me that she did not remember me. However, I used this genuine introduction as a bridge for my request for an interview. We arranged to meet in the evening around 9 p.m. in her room on the third floor that she shares with other *sistren*. First, I was amazed that she did not have her own room given her status as an expert on the Rastafari but then I appreciated her humbleness. As we discussed, the reggae music was pouring in the background from the fifth floor, a special reggae party for conference participants. At the beginning, we talked about family, kids, and I learned she grown up children in their twenties from different *kingmen*. Although based in the U.S.A, originally, she was from Jamaica and had a massive experience on the whole Rasta phenomena. In the middle of our discussion, the music in the background began to fade away, and another kicked of with a higher volume, which made the empress instantly jump and yell “*That was husband number two!*” She grabbed her jacket, put her shawl to cover part of her long dreadlocks and ran to the party room. I quickly put my notebook into my bag and followed her. The venue was decorated with Rasta colors. The DJ with his locks flowing almost to the floor spun the reggae tunes and the audience on the dance floor start to groove in the roots reggae, and in an attempt to overlay the spinning music, she whispers, “I look forward to reading your thesis.” Some were dancing in the room, some chatting, meditating while holding their *spliff* in their hands on the

balcony, and some chatting on one-on-one and in small groups. At that point, I knew we called it a day and I needed to head home to sleep, but it was too late to walk to Ras' place or take a tri-wheel vehicle. So, I shared bed with one of my *sistren*.

Another incident that created doubt and confusion was the code of dressing in Rasta gatherings. In the conference, as I lined up for lunch, one Rastaman came to me and shouted on my face *"Sistrene!? This is not a dreadlock thing, u need to cover your hair up..."* Only then I knew I forgot my headwrap in the *sistren's* room that I slept in last night. At that point, I felt torn out between just doing the research without caring for the Rasta rules and regulation of dressing codes or trying to abide by the rules and regulations. The reality was the former cannot be done without the latter. They supplement each other.

In the first few months, I was mostly collecting data from the two mansions of the Rastafari Nyabinghi, Ethiopian World Federation (EWF) and the *Bobo Shanti* (see chapter 1). It was time to shift the gear to one of the biggest mansion in the Rastafari, the Twelve Tribes of Israel faction. One of the elders in Nyabinghi, Sister Ijahnya made the first contact for me with one of the active members of the organization, Sister Wendy. Similar to Ras, I remarked the way Sister Ijahnya introduced me *"I have a sister here with me, she is Ras Jahnoch's empress"*. That particular reference was again essential. After a number of cancellations, I managed to meet with Sister Wendy at the Twelve Tribes Headquarters. I arrived earlier and waited for her sitting next to four elderly Rasta men who were reasoning. I did not want to disturb; so, I went for a quick eye scan of the vast land this headquarters acquires, the neatness of the compound, the paintings on the concrete fence and the office villa. At the far edge opposite to the main entrance, there is a stage strategically built for Reggae concerts. Regardless of their division of mansions during events such as His Majesty's birthday, coronation and Bob Marley's birthday, here is where the reggae artists in the community come together to perform.



Fig. 8. Head Quarters of the Twelve Tribes of Israel in Shashemene

Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha

While deep in my thoughts, one of the elders woke me up asking me “*What is your tribe sistren?*”. I detest being questioned of my tribe though it is usually a question one gets from foreign expats in Ethiopia who apparently think that they have to ask her or his tribe in order get to know with the locals, whereas it is enough for them to say only the country where they are from. I see myself as an Ethiopian and even in the bigger picture as an African who was born in Ethiopia. I answered to the elder Rastaman, “I am an Ethiopian”. He explained his question is not from the politics point of view rather it’s from the bible. Only then I remembered the 12 Tribes refers to each other by the tribe name of their birth month, so born in November, I was the tribe of Prophet Gad. I was told that that is the tribe of the founder of the organization. For a second, I entertained a thought to erase the awkward question-answer session I just had with the elders and to see if it could grant me access to all their members for data collection. Then I quickly dived into the thought of how this community was too small in number but so divided and with contradictions in religious ideologies and their ways of life. The Nyabinghi believes in the divinity of Haile Selassie I and equally in the divinity of Empress Mennen I; the 12 Tribes believe Haile Selassie I is the kingly character of Jesus Christ, and not to mention that now they are shifting to Prince Zera Yacob, the grandson of Haile Selassie I as the kingly character of Jesus Christ; and the Bobo Shanti view Prince Emmanuel Charles as God in fleshly character with no mother and father. These are the few factions amongst others. Once again, I considered my own contradiction- my status in terms of religion. I grew up in Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), then for the past decade embraced the Rastafari way of life easily because of my pan-African background, but I have not accepted Emperor Haile Selassie I as God even if I have detached myself from the EOC. For me, he was a great leader and international figure with all the imperfections as a human being whom all Ethiopians, regardless of our political, ethnic and religion differences could have been proud of.



Fig. 9. Painting on a wall- ZaraYacob AsfaWossen Haile Selassie I, grandson of Emperor Haile Selassie I, inside the Twelve Tribes compound, Shashemene.

*Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha*

I went into the field with a heavy heart and with a sympathetic feeling towards the Rastafari movement, assuming that they face challenges of cultural expression. The unexpected findings made in the first couple of weeks had me frustrated and flagged the need to examine the causes effecting the above postulation. As regards cultural expression, I had argued in my research proposal that these challenges relate primarily to wearing dreadlocks, freedom of faith practice, religious use of marijuana and dietary requirements. To my dismay, the former, which was supposed to be one of the main challenges, was found to be not that much of a confrontational issue for the community in Shashemene. Notwithstanding, it remains a major conundrum for members of the Ethiopian Rasta community who are largely based in Ethiopia. It turns out that my argument prior to the field work was essentially based on my son's experience where he was rejected by a school for wearing dreadlocks, even though he had passed the assessment. Thus, the month of December was dedicated to collect data from young Ethiopian Rastas. I swallowed my shame for not having checked him for a long time as I turned to my long-time artist (painter) humble friend, Brihan Asmamaw for a simple reason of finding an interlocutor. Birhan is doing his first year Masters in Abstract Art at the Alle Ethiopian Art School, the only art school in the country. Besides producing artists of the state, the Art school is also known for having students who mostly if not all are disciples of Bob Marley or the Rastafari way of life. I found it very 'emblematic' for a school that is founded by HIM Emperor Haile Selassie I to have students fond of the Rastafari one way or the other. As per my friend's advice, I went to the campus to make friends. I visited the beautiful campus and I fell in love with the artistic site and the calmness it brings to one. I wondered why I did not visit it in my 20 plus years of my life in Addis Ababa. I asked myself, "Why don't we have such arts in the handful of parks in the capital city of Africa?" Art seemed not important for a state with a full plate of boiling politics for years.





Fig. 10. Inside the compound of Alle School of Fine Arts and Design  
Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha

The first afternoon I arrived, my eyes were caught by a young man with uncombed hair who was sitting under a tree and smoking the homemade *nyala* cigarette. I said to myself after all, the plan was to meet that kind of person, so this should be the first contact. I approached him and introduced myself. He was calm and watching the smoke coming out of his nose and mouth and sometimes giving me a side look. But when he opened his mouth, my job was to listen. Alemayehu, Alex for short, 27. He kicked out of his house and his high school when he was 19<sup>15</sup>. He is often stopped and searched by the police in search of ganja. He furiously states *"Look at it this way; there are four institutional enemies of the Ethiopian dreadlock youth: family, society, police or government, and religion. Do not underestimate the latter! Hmm....they are the one who shape people's mind. They say the devil gets through your hair (smile)."* As I stood up dust off my trousers and tell him that I will be in the campus in the next couple of weeks to meet Rasta youth like him, he looked at me and cautioned *"You cannot come to Art school and leave without talking to Professor Ras Getch. He is a person that we look up to as an Ethiopian Rastaman who is successful in life and living a true Rasta livity."*

<sup>15</sup> In Ethiopia, men and women leave their parents' house when married. Thus, if one is not married, he or she can live with her or his parents as old as in their 30s. (You need to indicate which part of Ethiopia because what you generalize here may not hold true in every Ethiopian society.)

Finger-pointing to one of the sculpture on the side he said, *“if you come early morning at 8 a.m. you will find him lecturing his students over there.”* The chatter in my mind went *Yas Mahlet, Artist that lectures outside in the garden surrounded by the beautiful sculpture works must be interesting!* When I left the compound, I was rejoicing with my first-day achievement and imagining some brighter data collecting days ahead. That is exactly what manifested in the coming weeks.



Fig. 11. Group discussion with Prof. Getachew Yosef (or Ras Getch, as often called by his students) Alle School of Fine Arts and Design students  
Picture by Birhan Asmamaw, December 2017.

Prof. Getachew (Ras Getch, as his students called him) is in his 70s, but the spirit and energy he had were similar to his students who were in their 20s. One can tell that he was the irreplaceable kind of professors whom students don't want to miss. The school obviously could not let him go even after his retirement. Unconscious how seductive would be my story for my informant, I narrated from birth till the moment I was sitting with him in less than 15 minutes and took a pause sipped my *bunna*<sup>16</sup> and told him I was ready for him whenever he was. He sipped his *bunna* too and took a long pause I can see tears struggling to come out of his eyes. He was captivated by the fact that I was born in Assab, a port city in Eritrea<sup>17</sup>. Ras

<sup>16</sup> Bunna means coffee in Amharic.

<sup>17</sup> Eritrea got its independence in May 24, 1998.

Getch loved his mother so much. He told me that he lived with her in Assab for some time. Sadly, she had passed way a year before we met. Places that he mentioned in Assab are all in my memories. For quite a good amount of time, we talked mostly about Assab. My attempts to divert the conversation to the research subject failed. This led to arranging another appointment for the following day before his class. In our next meeting, he honored me by presenting his biography book written by a Swiss writer Elisabeth Biasio (2013). In the next four weeks, Alle Art School became my temporary campus; Ras Getch, my key interlocutor, shaped my research and its method. His dreadlock and non-dreadlock Rasta students became my good friends and informants. As it turned out, the rest of the weeks in December became history as discussed in in detail in Chapters Four and Five.

### **Reflexivity**

While I did not realize it at the outset, conducting this research became my testimony of what position I had years ago in the Rastafari *livity*, what values I am still holding and how the presumption made prior to the field is created and affected the field process. Reflecting on the applied methods to collect data, I ask, have I really become an insider? What are the advantages I used that can possibly differ me from foreign counterparts? Did my identification with the community yield me a deeper understanding?

To begin with, I came to face with the tailor-made theories of social movement and the lived experience in the field and as a result, I have to disregard the former. On the basis of my personal encounter related to challenges of cultural expressions, notably dreadlocks, I generalized it as a confrontation that every child of the Rastafari returnees in Shashemene and the Rasta youth in Addis Ababa come across. Forget the insider in me, I had to unlearn my assumption and find out the reality just like any foreign counterpart does in my shoe. On the other hand, my insider position as an Ethiopian along with a personal network of friends has facilitated to gain information from the top (right) government officials. Despite my allegiance to the Rasta *livity*, my key informants kept on referring to my marital relationship to the community member to gain trust. This was coupled with my appearance and personal identification with the Rastafari, permitted a direct access to data collection and established trust.

Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) preserve the understanding that a larger social phenomenon is embedded with human activities, events, and action. Thus, forms of writings like narratives, autobiographies and life histories serve as bedrocks to bridge cultural history. This explains why I reflect on my position as I meet my informants and the events, activities, and actions surrounding while collecting my data and the events that gave birth to some of the chapters in this thesis. Doing so, not only allowed me to self-present but also to understand the process of fieldwork as an academic, practical and emotional accomplishment.



## **Introspective Report**

Introspective reports are in general used as sources of information from minds of people in everyday life, though whether they are verifiable is another question. According to Piccinini (2003, pp.1-2) there are two categories of introspective reports. One is the skeptics of introspection. This category reports should not be treated as special source rather than as observable, while the others encourage scientists (researchers) to assume the introspective reports as true, and, thus, endorsing their usability for scientific work (ibid, p.3). Disassociating from the two, Piccinini (ibid, p.1) declares that none of them are reliable. The author opts to have another alternative approach: "I consider on everyday, commonsensical reliance on each other's introspective reports" (ibid, p.4). What he means is that when we hear people talk, before we accept or refuse, considerably, we weigh the information provided based on the specific person and circumstance that generated the report, and believe the modified version (ibid). This research investigates the circumstances of the Rastafari by carefully analyzing the collected data. A suitable case for introspective method is, for instance, the fact that the majority of the Rastafari community members stress on challenge of being undocumented in Ethiopia. A few argue that regardless of the legal status issue, there was no case of deportation, and, thus, legal issue is not a major problem. Examining their position, I found out that they have their resident permit through Investment or a non-governmental organization they represented. Therefore, it was important for me to look into their background and understand them so that those who said legal issue is not a major problem, are not taken for granted.

## **Social Media**

I left Ethiopia amidst a political turmoil that the country has been witnessing since 2014 mainly caused by the infamous Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan (locally known as the Master Plan) introduced by the federal government. The unveiled master plan details how the capital city gradually confiscates land from the surrounding Oromia provinces with minimum compensation. This was coupled with unfair economic and power distribution giving a rise to the political unrest in the country.

The pursuit of Rastafari for belongingness is deeply rooted in the land grant given by HIM Emperor Haile Selassie I to the black people of the world. Apparently, the country has gone through political, cultural and socio-economic changes after the fall of the monarchical rule. As a result, the land grant is not approved by any of the regimes including the current one. Consequently, the Rastafari's quest for belongingness through the land grant in the place they call home overlapped with the growing nationalism by the citizens from within and this has led to a conflict of interest between the Rastafari in Shashemene located in the heart of Oromia region and the local. Following the political unrest, then Prime Minister HaileMariam Desalegn stepped down on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018, and yielded the new Prime Minister-elect Dr. Abiy Ahmed on 30 March 2018. On the day the previous PM stepped down, I read on social media how this would affect the returnees. I contacted Sistren Ijahnya Christian, one of my key informants, an elder Rasta woman from Shashemene, via facebook.

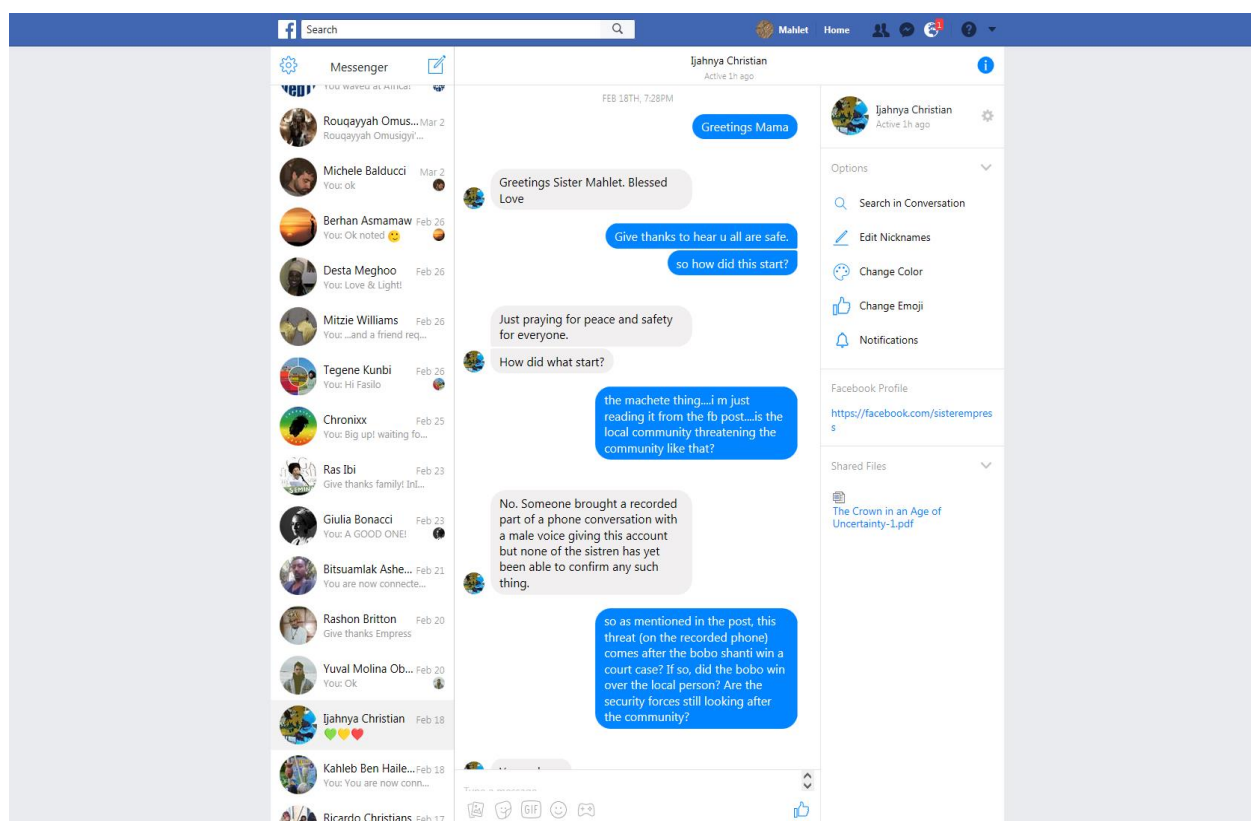


Fig.12. A screen-shot copy of my chat on facebook with key informant Sister Ijahnya Christian on 18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018.

This method proved appropriate to gather information on the subject from distance and to provide up-to-date information. I have given the above illustration to demonstrate my first engagements with informants as an academic researcher (or perhaps as an ethnographer) with Rastafari members in Shashemene that eventually crafted the approaches of the investigation. I arrived in Shashemene unsure of how my intentions would be perceived by the Rastafari and wondering how all fall in place. Thanks to the anecdotal events in the field, I left Shash and Addis feeling good about my progress.

### Informants and location of Research

The selected research locations in Ethiopia are the city of Shashemene and the capital Addis Ababa. Specific locations in Shashemene are residential places; gathering places of the mansions of the Rastafari such as Nyabinghi, Twelve Tribes Headquarters, Bobo Shanti camp, and events like Reggae concert. The research was blessed to witness the first of its kind All Africa Rastafari Gathering conference as explained earlier. This conference has created the opportunity to identify informants in the community and facilitated to collect the data on one spot and saved my time from chasing some door-to-door basis. I have also used the opportunity to gather data from Rastafari participants from the African continent and the diaspora which is one of the great findings of this research that unfolded shared challenges of Rastafari in the continent (see Chapter 4).

Informants to this research comprise three categories of the Rastafari society in Ethiopia based in Shashemene and Addis Ababa: the Rastafari returnees, local people, and government

officials. The former two are classified as elders and younger generations. Along with the generational gap, participant selection is categorized. The selection is based on their length of engagement in the Rasta *livity*, their position in the community, personal experience in Ethiopia be it a successful businessman's or a teacher's story or a repatriate in a destitute status, leadership position in the community and affiliation with government offices related to land and other issues. In addition, the informants of this study stretch to the community members in Africa and worldwide. Considering their residence location, priority is given to those who live in Jamaica [Rasta] *sefer* (area). The government officials who deal with legality issue of the Rastafari in Ethiopia were selected based on their position. Per the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these officers are the Legal counsel of the ministry and Department of Foreign Affairs in the Ethiopian Immigration Authority in which particular informants are selected by the recommendation of their supervisors. In pursuance of what the Rastafari community can benefit from this research, I approached the United Nations International Organization for Migration (UN-IOM) office in Ethiopia in the interest of getting the UN's opinion on the situation of the Rastafari in Ethiopia.

### **Data collection and Analysis**

In the light of the Rastafari reasoning session and hence its instrumentality to my own research, interviews of any form- mostly semi-structured and informal formed the core of evidence collected during my fieldwork. Focus group discussions and participant observation have contributed significantly to this investigation. Whenever consent was granted from the informant, the interviews were audio- and videotaped; in the absence of such consent, field-notes were emulated. Field-notes were also contributory to the supplementary methods of focus group discussions and observations in the market, tabernacle, music concerts, conferences and any random views that are relevant to the research topic. Aside from the above primary methods, the study has included literature, scholarly articles, newspapers and archival records, and online social media other sources of data. Embracing the various format of the interview was mainly to understand the life histories of the informants and contexts of the demonstration of the challenges that the community experiences. Espousing the informal and open-ended interview allowed the stories to flow and lead the trajectory. Coequally, the standardized questions to governmental officials and international organizations made the process efficient as it allows the respondent to give detailed responses.

As I transcribed the audio and video tape recordings and the field notes, I constantly re-read the notes, listened to and watched the recordings back and forth looking for themes, ideas, similarities and differences, consistencies and inconsistencies gathered from the interviews, group discussions and the observations I have conducted. Additional themes and informants have emerged from the (semi-) structured interviews and from the field notes. Details were transcribed on the field notes as unrecorded observations, conversations and events came to mind. The visual recordings, in addition, helped me to analyze the non-verbal language performed by the informants. Sometimes I found myself overawed by the amount of data I have collected- over a 100 pages of field notes, 10 hours of audio and 27 hours of video

recordings. While collecting data, regardless of theme order, I looked for and tried to engage the informant to thematic areas. After much pondering and feedbacks, I decided to present differently from what I planned initially. I let the interpretation of the data guide the themes, ideas, similarities and differences, and consistencies and inconsistencies sprouted from the writing process. In doing so, I self-questioned how my own bias affected the decisions I made throughout that process (see below in Reflexivity Section).

Joining African Studies Centre of the University of Leiden comes from my Pan-African passion and background. In my mind, one does a higher-institution-study-thing to prepare for future career. Mine was to create a visual media platform where African issues are presented and discussed. I was missing that link until I was introduced to the try-out module “Cultural expressions and knowledge production” which is part of the course “Theories and the Empirical in African Studies” that was given halfway through the first year study. This try-out course injects visual method as a tool for qualitative-based research combined with visual data but it has gaps in enabling the student to equip with necessary theoretical and practical matters for those who have no background on filming.

Unquestionably, visual based research is becoming widely accepted to elucidate outcomes of social science research (see, Emmel & Clark, 2015). Certainly, its accessibility, affordability, creativity, and preferability by the researchers have enabled the method to gain popularity. Championing this, Kara (2015) asserts that visual method has the potential to capture moments that are uncomfortable, sensitive and difficult to discuss through. In the same vein, my decision to use viewable evidences alongside texts was in the interest of throwing light on the broader sense of the Rastafari culture, analyzing the unspoken behavior of the participants, expressions of Rastafari norms and values, and illustrating the expectations and confrontations abreast their endurances. From this perspective, this research attempts to write the thesis combined with the visual. However, the principal purpose remains to produce a documentary that endeavors to tell the same story like that of the text.

Humiliation and determination of the Rastafari are what the visual unveils. The agitated body language of the bobo shanti caused by the delay of the promised national ID issuance; the vexation of another Rasta brethren against the ill-priced visa expiration penalty- 10 US dollars per day; the humbleness of the barefooted Ras even after 21 years of the state negligence; and the calmness in the voice of the Rastafari *sistren* as she reassures Ethiopia is home and challenges are better faced at home; the strong, vivacious and gracious Rasta sister Ijahniya who tells it like it is and the Rasta youth’s urge to get answer for “where is home?” ... and many others would not better be captured elseways than visually. Furthermore, the study projects the Rastafari voice in order to bridge the gap between the researcher and the activist in me.

## **Limitations**

*There are frustrations we face. So one of the things we are trying to do is to approach the AU to make them understand. Not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You cannot say the diaspora*

*is the sixth region, but nowhere in the constitution of the African Union or any other African country can we say that we can get citizenship when we arrive [in the continent] or [acquire] legal status or capital and negotiation with government. Those things are not in the constitution of either the African Union or in African country.*

Perplexed by the above information, I was given by Ras Faya [name changed], I endeavored to set an appointment with the Civil Society Division and the Diaspora Division of the African Union Commission in view of the fact that in the absence of their Ethiopian citizenship if there is a room for them to include them as an African Diaspora. Regardless of the number of phone calls and emails, I did not get any response. Acclaiming Ethiopia is a seat of African Union Commission, I believe, this research not only should examine the attitude of the Ethiopian government but also the position of the African Union (AU) on the conditions of these technically state-less returnees. Furthermore, considering the ongoing meetings of the recent development of 20 African states signing for freedom of movement ([www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com) viewed on 11/9/18), it is relevant to find out the fate of the Rastafari returnees as they are part of African diasporas and given the commission's recognition of the Caribbean as the Sixth region of the continent in addition to North, South, East, West and Central Africa. However, bureaucracy of the African Union did not allow to get its staff for interview.

### **Ethical considerations**

This research is informed by all voluntary participants. I have developed a relationship with the informants in the way that I can continue to contact them back for any clarity at the time of writing. During my meeting with the participants, I obtained a verbal consent before proceeding to the research and discussed the ways in which their information would be shared. In conformity with the subjects, I have avoided the use of unacceptable languages like Rastafarianism and Rastafarian during the fieldwork and the write up. Some of the informants have requested me not to refer to them as a community as they believe it is discriminatory and alienates them from Ethiopians. However, I have heard some of them quite often using the same word blatantly stating their intention that the aim of repatriation is ultimately to form a community of their own in Ethiopia. Thus, I decided to maintain the use of the word *community* interchangeably with words like Rastafari, returnees, and repatriates. More than 98 per cent of participants from the Rastafari returnees were interested to share their views for the sake of individual as well as group benefit. Apart from the few participants who inquired for anonymity, several of them focused on getting their voice heard. Thus, synchronously the same informants who agreed to be identified by their names (as called by their fellow community members and the locals) are the same group that consented for visual recording of their experience. The names of the participants from the Rastafari members are not necessarily passport names since many of them adopt a different name adhering to their African roots. The new names mainly stem from baptismal names given by Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and biblical tribe names. The adopted names are used in real life (e.g. when introducing oneself), and on social media. Their 'real names' remain useful only in formal documents such as passport and other government related paper works and identifications.

## **Conclusion**

I have shared my personal story with regards to my positionality in the Rastafari movement. My insider and outsider position helped me out to navigate my way in collecting data. This chapter has laid out the stepping blocks for building the results of the research in the discussion part (see Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7). As to the approaches of the Ethiopians in the capital in which I was surprised by the lack of knowledge about the Rastafari community, this research addresses a range of anecdotes discussed above; from the relationship between what is presumed and what is tangible to the neglect of the state and the paradoxes of the Rastafari in Ethiopia. The ethnography as a method is a central tool to shed light on the findings. Reflecting on entering in the field with a heavy heart somehow unsure of how the research goes, overwhelmed by the paradoxes and now struggling behind a computer to get a sensible write-up, it is indeed the action in the field that motivated me initially and now keeps me going. Before delving into the case study, the research provides a historical background on the Rastafari movement and its connection to Ethiopia.

## Chapter Two: Historical Overview of the Rastafari Movement

### Introduction

In this study, entitled “The Rastafari in Ethiopia: Challenges and Paradoxes of Belonging,” the terms *Rastafari*, *Rastas*, returnees and repatriates are used exchangeable. The term *Rastafari*, with or without the definite and indefinite articles, stands for the movement. Similarly, “Jah Ras Tafari” refers to Emperor Haile Selassie I, the deity; and the followers both in singular and plural form.

Before discussing the main focus of this research, this chapter outlines the foundation of the general understanding of the underpinning of the Rastafari and its movement. Expanding on this it offers a background how the Rastafari returnees’ journey back to the continent, whose ancestors left the land 500 years ago due to slavery.

Primarily, for a better understanding, the chapter bids the scenes by answering the questions: what and who is Rastafari? Why the connection with Ethiopia? How did they reach Ethiopia? And so on. Thus, alluding to the theme of repatriation; is Rastafari limited to class and race, referring to its comprehensiveness in membership in universality in the movement. Finally, look into if homogeneity is the character of the movement. The chapter also looks at the themes of the movement. In doing so, it contends that it is an integrated movement of pan-Africanism and spirituality.

The third section puts forward the major ethos of the Rastafari followed by a detailed account of the trajectory of Ethiopian World Federation (EWF).

Finally, the study takes a close investigation into the attitude of the Ethiopian regimes towards the repatriated Rastafari community in Ethiopia for the past half a century. Brief conclusions are delivered in each chapter.

### Setting the Scene

#### *What and Who Rastafari is*

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1930, Ras Tafari Mekonnen was crowned as Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. His full title was “His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, King of Kings and Elect of God” (Ullendorff, 1976, p.171). The ceremony was attended by world leaders and their representatives. Thus, the name Rastafari emanates from Ras Tafari Mekonnen. The coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie for African peoples and their descent further signaled freedom, justice, sovereignty, and redemption (Hutton et al, 2015, p.9). The agent force to the movement that broke about in the same year of the emperor’s coronation was Rastafari movement. At the time of its conception, Rastafari was an anti-colonial, cultural, pan-African, and religious movement centered in the deification of Haile

Selassie I. (Hutton et al., 2015, p.9; Murrell et al., 1998, p. 2). As mentioned earlier as well, Rastafari represents the movement, the belief, and the followers including the divinity.



Fig 13.- Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip bowing before Emperor Haile Selassie I and his wife, Empress Menen I.<sup>18</sup>

The term Rastafari refers to the way of life and the person who lives the *livity*. Rastas who focused on the pan-African ideology separate its religious cult label and argue that every true black person is a Rasta (Murrell et al., 1998, p. 2). But others who emphasize on the religious idea define a “true Rasta” as one who believes in the deity of Emperor Haile Selassie I and his lineage connected to King Solomon of the Hebrew, and who see Marcus Mosiah Garvey as their prophet. In addition, for the latter, a true Rasta represents those who wear dreadlock, does not shave or cut hair, rejects Babylon customs and adopts African culture, close to nature, and eats healthy- vegan (ibid). Amongst them, one should not also forget the young generation that listens to the reggae music for its popular culture, but do not feel the “reggae pain,”<sup>19</sup> that the messages in the lyrics convey. It also includes those who dread their hair only for the purpose of style but not for what it means, or cut it after a certain time when the “Babylon system” forces them such as when it is time to get a job (ibid). These are also the ones who carry a “ragamuffin”<sup>20</sup> appearance and have no commitment for the Rastafari

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.google.com/search?q=Queen+elizabeth+and+prince+philip+bowing+down+before+emperor+HaileSelassie&tbn=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=ItP8jxchWx6TYM%253A%252Cr5pri1iHB2Wa8M%252C\\_&usg=AI4\\_-kSmfQmhryhh364pDqT-i0ShfOL9og&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiA54nq2qneAhXBjqQKHZusD2UQ9QEWAHoECAMQBA#imgrc=ItP8jxchWx6TYM:](https://www.google.com/search?q=Queen+elizabeth+and+prince+philip+bowing+down+before+emperor+HaileSelassie&tbn=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=ItP8jxchWx6TYM%253A%252Cr5pri1iHB2Wa8M%252C_&usg=AI4_-kSmfQmhryhh364pDqT-i0ShfOL9og&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiA54nq2qneAhXBjqQKHZusD2UQ9QEWAHoECAMQBA#imgrc=ItP8jxchWx6TYM:)

<sup>19</sup> Conversation with my husband, Jahnoch.

<sup>20</sup> According to Urban dictionary the term ragamuffin is derived from the Middle English personal name “Ragamuffyn,” which was usually employed in an insulting manner towards street children. The word later came to mean a person who is shabbily clothed and dirty, often applied to orphans. It was used in this way to describe Kingston ghetto youth, and the youth themselves took on the term to describe their new music. “Reggae is the



teachings. The true Rastas refer to them as “wolves in sheep’s clothing” or “impostors” who adopt Rasta likes to smoke marijuana. Therefore, a committed Rastafari is one who believes in both its pan-Africanism and spiritual ideology (ibid, p.3).

Rastafari is a holistic movement of pan-African, cultural and religious movement. Although the two kinds of movements are inseparable and conceived in the 1930s in Jamaica, its pan-African movement traces back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ideologically, the movement is informed by biblical and historical accounts that center Ethiopia. Hence, Rastafari identity is based on Ethiopianism. Horst Moller, a contemporary historian, writes that identity is a constitution of collective memory informed by real events and myths and legends (Macleod, 2014, p.7). Historically, the prophecy by Marcus Garvey: “Look to Africa where a black king shall be crowned, he shall be the redeemer” was met by the Ras Tafari Mekonen ascension to power as Emperor of Ethiopia (1933-1974) under the baptismal name “Haile Selassie I”, which means “Power of Trinity”. Subsequently, Garvey’s prophecy was fulfilled. This is further substantiated by the Majesty’s call for all the black diaspora in the west to come and live in Ethiopia. Haile Selassie addressed the people of Jamaica as brothers and sisters of Ethiopia, and told them to come back home<sup>21</sup>. Another important figure in the history of Rastafari is the king of Reggae, Robert Nesta Marley. Marley in his songs preached the divinity of Haile Selassie in more than a dozen of songs, mythologically referring to the emperor as God.

There are important developments ingrained in biblical and historical events. These are: Garvey’s prophecy, the title of the emperor given by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as lord of lords and conquering lion of Judah apparently given to all emperors of Ethiopia and their lineages from King Solomon and Queen of Sheba (Brooks, 1998, p.22-49). This claim is also substantiated by quoting a verse from the bible: “For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; as astonishment hath taken hold of me” (Jeremiah 8:21). With this, the stories they witnessed and heard for generations, the Rastafari have created a specific Ethiopian identity and consider themselves citizens of Ethiopia. The first generation of leaders of the Rastafari movement includes Leonard Howell, Joseph Hibbert, Robert Hinds and Archibald Dunkley who formed a four-man foundation for Rastafari (Hutton, 2015, p 53). The answer to the interrogation of who is the first Rasta differs from one scholar to another. According to Michael Barnett, the man who started to preach about the divinity of Haile Selassie I was essentially crowned as the “first Rasta” (ibid.). According to him, these were Leonard Howell and Joseph Hibbert. He further states that Hibbert was the most likely candidate given his familiarity with and for being a master mason of the Ethiopic version of the bible. His arrival a couple of years earlier than Howell in Jamaica and his preach about Haile Selassie’s divinity in the church of Jamaica added to his candidacy. Nonetheless, Barnett undoubtedly agrees that Leonard Howell was the most successful Rastafari leader (Ibid, p.63-

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short form of ragamuffin, a term holding its present musical connotations since the late 1980s or beginning of 1990s.

<sup>21</sup> Emperor Haile Selassie made a speech for the people of Jamaica on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1966, and told them that Ethiopians and Jamaicans are blood-bonded.

4). Howell is also known for his achievement in the formation of a Rastafari commune in Saint Catherine Parish in the island of Jamaica. On the other hand, Chevannes argues that Robert Hinds is one who should be credited for being the “First Rasta” (Chevannes, 1994, p.124.).

### **Ethiopia as a symbol**

Tafari (2001, p.3) states that Ethiopianism was the ultimate point of reference rather than an identity for the black people of the world who increasingly see themselves in a more international perspective. This belonging to and identifying with Ethiopianism is not conceived in geographical terms. It stemmed out of racial consciousness of black people who chose to see themselves as “one people from one source- Africa- belonging universally to a suppressed culture and an exploited, yet specially chosen race” (ibid). The Rastafari movement’s reference to Ethiopia traces back to the teachings and instruction of Leonard Howell to his followers:

*The irony was that there was a type of deficit that the non-European had suffered at the hands of “civilized” humans, who, in their efforts to advance Europe, had robbed non-Europeans of their human dignity. Howell was seeking to eliminate this deficit through knowledge of Africa and leadership which was connected to this continental homeland of the majority of Jamaicans. The consequent assessment, therefore, is that Howell was part of the inauguration of a counter-hegemonic tradition of African American male leadership steeped within an Ethiopianist teacher-preacher aesthetic.” (Hutton, 2015, p.133).*

Some of the chants by Leonard Howell’s followers were the following:

*Once they painted Christ white  
But he’s a Negro  
And he no more shall be white  
Jesus Christ is an E-thi-op-ian Negro  
Born and grown up in Africa  
The white man told we  
That he came from heaven  
But that “heaven” was  
Kind David’s royal Throne  
He’s the Father of ev-ry nation  
Who the white world must obey...*

*Ras Tafari is our King  
He is our mighty King  
We are marching onto vic-to-ry  
...with the King of Kings. (Hutton, 2015, p.135).*

Tafari (2001, p.161) further argues that Haile Selassie’s political programme of “Modern Ethiopianism” was “The spiritual, ideological and symbolic center,” making the Rastafari movement one of the outcomes. However, in this research, I argue that it is the collective

memories construed through biblical and historical accounts of events happening in the country that led the Rastafari to shape their life around that. Haile Selassie I never regarded himself as a God nor did he adhere to Rastafari ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) viewed on 16/6/18) despite the Rastafari's insistence and claim that he is a deity nourished by teachings of their ancestors through collective memories. For instance, The Black or Native Revivalist Baptist movement led by Alexander Bedward in Jamaica was a stream that fed Garveyism in 1914 and Rastafari in the 1930s (Murrell, 1998, p.45).

In the 1970s, to adopt Rastafari identity, a ritual of baptism by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was seen as the only way to obtain the Ethiopian identity. This is evidenced from the fact that when the first EOC church was opened in Jamaica in the 1960s by a religious mission sent by His Majesty. About 800 elders were baptized that very day<sup>22</sup>.

The Rastafari in the Caribbean, particularly the Jamaicans not only have strongly attached themselves to Ethiopia but also believed they were bonded by blood with Ethiopians. In July 1950 when the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF) broke the news of the land grant provided by Emperor Haile Selassie as a token of appreciation for their work done to support Ethiopia during the Italo-Ethiopian war (1936-1941). Following this, the EWF was prepared to dispatch all its members, amounting 350, of the local group. Based on this, they requested a financial assistance from the colonial governor of Jamaica. A demonstration affirming to the Rastafari belief in their strong bondage with Ethiopian is, when the colonial secretary asked if the repatriates are all Ethiopian descendants, Richard A. Brow, the charge of administration of local 31 at that time, confirmed to the governor that they all were descendants of Ethiopians (Bonacci, 2015, p.160).

## **Repatriation**

Before analyzing Back-to-Africa movement, it is important to say a word on how the Africans left Africa. Prah (2009, pp.1-3) looks into the matter thoroughly. He asserts that what brought Africans scattered outside Africa should be seen from three dimensions. The first one is the Arab slave trade prior to the rise of Islam; the second is after the rise of Islam in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. The third one is the transatlantic slave trade that dates back to 1441-1888 taking one-third of Africans out of Africa. The aftermath of slavery was not limited to human loss but also expanded to the sociological dislocation, the psychological effects and its legacy of racism (ibid). However, I disagree with Prah in the view that he fails to mention that Black people did exist in different parts of the world before the brutal execution of slavery, such as the Mayans and Olmecs in North America (Imhotep, 2011 and van Sertina 2003).

The first resistance of African slaves broke out in Bahia, Brazil, in 1807. It persisted for three decades. The increasing number of resistances triggered the first repatriation of freed slaves back to Africa (Prah, 2009, p.5). Back to Africa's departures is linked to places where a large number of African descendants settled. These include the Afro-Brazilians, West Indies, and

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<sup>22</sup>ibid.

African-Americans. Like the Jews, the West Indies or Caribbean African descendants repatriation phenomenon deviates from the sentiment taken from Psalms 137 (Prah, 2012, pp.1-2). For Rastafari, in addition to the bible, songs, like “Exodus, and By the rivers of Babylon”, of the king of Reggae and advocate of the Rastafari movement, Marley, have catalyzed the movement. In the Back-to-Africa movement, there were two main traditions in the United States supported by individuals and groups. The first and most influential is Garvey who believed in actual physical repatriation to Africa whereas his opponents such as W.E.B. Du-Bois advocated for Africans to fight for their right in North America (ibid, pp.5-6).

The repatriation of the West Indies or the African descendants from the west eventuated on the individual level in lieu of government level. Some repatriates underline the phenomenon saying that this made some Rastafari repatriates have the challenges to integrate. For instance, Ras Tages from Ethiopia remarks:

*You see, the Repatriation to Shashemene is a spring board for Black people from the West coming to Africa on a government level. This is a nation building exercise. This is not for individuals to try to attempt repatriation. That is not even repatriation, it is what I would call it migration.*<sup>23</sup>

No one agrees with his view other than Dr. Desta Meghoo from the U.S, originally from Jamaica. When I asked her to tell me what made her decide to repatriate, she told me first to correct the word “repatriate” to pre-repatriate and she continues:

*“Repatriation should be carried out in mass through government to government. But what we are doing is Pre-repatriation, which is people to people. We are here preparing for those who are coming home and for those who are already here.”*<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, for them, repatriation is yet to be executed in mass with the involvement of governments.

### **Internationality of Rastafari**

Currently, the number of the Rastafari movement followers is expanding in every corner of the planet Earth: from Jamaica to the Caribbean, USA, Europe, Africa and Asia. The Rastafari symbols and reggae songs have become international chants. For Instance, in South Africa, since 1994, the Rastafarian movement has grown into a popular movement not only amongst the black uneducated youths who were facing rejection from society and searching for some identity, but also the educated ones. Membership included school and university students, adults, whites and professional people (Chawane, 2012, p.183). However, in all these, the Rastafari ideology is hardly understood well (Murrell et al, 1998, pp.153-89). Moreover, the Rastafari context of resistance has expanded to all aspects of life introduced by colonialism such as organized religion, capitalism, biomedicine, and formal education (Philander, 2018,

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ras Tages King, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Mama (Dr.) Desta Meghoo, December 25, 2017.

p.27-8). This has come to being as a result of the longstanding Rastafari culture of the right to think, know, interpret, and define their essence and existence in relation to this world and the events happening in it as mostly reflected in voice, reggae music. A current instance is that, following the recent saga of cannabis legalization in the world, the renowned reggae singer Kabak Pyramid featuring Julian Marley from Jamaica has versed it in his “Kontraband” song as follows:

*“Kontraband*

*Is it the master plan? [Kontraband]*

*It taking up the farmers land [Kontraband]*

*How it pass the borders skank [Kontraband]*

*And end up in your daughter hand [Kontraband]*

*Now what’s in that recipe? [Kontraband]*

*That giving me the stress relief [Kontraband]*

*Sell more than rice and peas [Kontraband]*

*Feel so damn good to me”*

*“I’m been searched by a squaddy named Tiffany*

*The way she hurt me, me supn get stiff on me*

*Still me slide through smooth like the Shiffon be*

*As they done searching the Pyramid*

*They turn their attention to the Grammy Kid*

*Dealing with the Rasta like invalid*

*Demonstrating how Babylon wicked”<sup>25</sup>*

Rastafarians have been scorned for their smoking ganja (cannabis) for ages. However, now in the new world of legalizing cannabis, herb has become the most expensive cash crop in the world selling approximately 20 euros per gram ([www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com) viewed on 9/6/18), while foods like rice are sold for less than 1 euro per kilo ([www.numbeo.com](http://www.numbeo.com) viewed on 9/6/18). The singers also question what is added in the recipe of ganja sold by the government or medical institutions in the name of stress relief.

### **Rastafari: “A New Race”<sup>26</sup>**

Rastafari movement is entrenched in cultural, religious, and pan-African movements. Through time, the movement has grown larger and become more accommodating than ever. For example, the term Babylon now refers not only to the colonialists or the western system but also to a white or black *downpressor*<sup>27</sup> of the people in the world. In terms of who is Rastafari,

<sup>25</sup> “Kontraband” song track is also the album title of Kabak Pyramid released on May 25, 2018. In this song, Kabak featured Damian “Jr Gong” Marley ([www.reggaereflection.com](http://www.reggaereflection.com) viewed on 9/6/18).

<sup>26</sup> This phrase is taken from the interview with Jonathan Dyer.

<sup>27</sup> *Downpressor*, in Rasta vocabulary refers to oppressor

it has expanded from only a black race to a “new race” where Caucasians, Asians and all colors have subscribed to the Rastafari way of life leading the movement to an international phenomenon.

### ***Homogeneity***

There is some ambiguity with regards to whether Rastafari is a homogenous group. Rastafari is not homogenous in its spiritual or religious dimension. For instance, some see Emperor Haile Selassie I as a living God, the messiah, a black Christ, hence waiting for His return to earth for judgment (Murrell et al, 1998, p.72). A Rastafari scholar from the University of West Indies, Dr. Jalani Niaah, in a workshop about Rastafari answers the following to the question of whether Rastafari is homogenous:

*I would say that at its core Rastafari is one central and solid movement with some key signifiers; the inspiration and linear-ship that His Majesty [Emperor Haile Selassie] signifies. That is where everything starts. ....It is homogenous to the extent that I think it is a core and centralized pan-African voice with key inspiration. .... You can't say you are a Rastafari and you can't hold a high honor and regard to His Majesty and study that Emperor. Because it is from him, the foundation of understanding pours. We draw our inspiration from his life example in the same way Christians draw their inspiration from the bible<sup>28</sup>.*

A Rastaman in Shashemene tells the same story: “Regardless of the different houses of Rastafari we all have in common His Imperial Majesty, he is our foundation. But the way we look at him might be different<sup>29</sup>.”

## **Rastafari Movement**

### ***Pan-African [Black] movement***

Ethiopia and Ethiopianism play the central role in inspiring the Rastafari to the pan-African movement aspect. In the post 1900s, the mystical image of Ethiopia, coupled with its rich and romantic history resulted in “The start of the transformation of (this) pre-political, religiously inspired myth of Ethiopianism into the more politically-oriented notion of pan-Africanism.” Ethiopianism, by no means, is dead amongst the Rastafari people (Tafari, 2005, p.5).

The long history of black resistance to colonialism precedes the Rastafari movement (Murrell et al, 1998, p.36). Reggae music is one effective instrument the Rastafari movement used to convey its components (Pan-Africanism, black liberation, repatriation and the like) where Africa is the center of the message. Long before Marley’s song of Exodus became the psalm of the Rastafari, and hence, theirs and Africa diasporas’, Garvey has paved the way by

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<sup>28</sup> This is taken from a youtube video where Dr. Jahlani Niaah addresses the question “If Rastafari is homogenous?” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ2BVEkP1\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ2BVEkP1_8) viewed 12/6/18.

<sup>29</sup> Conversation with a Rastafari participant from Shashemene, November 2017.

impregnating the impoverished black slave descendants of African Americans, Jamaicans and elsewhere with his “Back-to-Africa” mission. In addition to Haile Selassie I, Garvey was an influential figure in the life of Bob Marley. This is clearly reflected in Marley’s use of the speeches of both the Emperor and Garvey in his songs. While the song “War” is taken from the famous HaileSelssie’s speech in the United Nations, his powerful lyrics of “Redemption” song, “Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds,” was taken from Garvey’s speech Garvey’s speech in 1937 ([www.aaihs.org](http://www.aaihs.org), viewed 6/6/18).

Pan-Africanism is the breeder/birther of the whole saga of Rastafari movement. In fact, if there is no pan-Africanism there is no Rastafari (-anism). Africa is considered a place to return home, to escape from the western capitalism, colonialism, racism and economic impoverishment.

Repatriation is the core of Rastafari movement, particularly in accomplishing its pan-Africanism mission. This can be proved in that, albeit, there are several sects or orders of the movement. There are no Rastafari houses left out of repatriation from its missions. Even the Twelve Tribes of Israel, who believe that the Promised Land is Israel, fulfill the first “back-to-Africa” mission. In this regard, Ethiopia is seen as a stepping stone<sup>30</sup>. Repatriation to Ethiopia, therefore, is preceded by African Americans and the Caribbean since 1930s, the Fords in the 1930s, the Tablots and the Pipers in the 1940s and 1950s (Gebrekidan, 2005 p.151). The latter are African Americans, the first settlers in Shashemene.

To Rastafari, Africa is, as it was in the beginning, the center of man’s strivings, origin, civilization, and future reconciliation (Tafari, 2001: xxi). In the same vein, Gebrekidan (2005, p.152-153) calls Africa a black man’s refuge from slavery and racism enabled by pan-African movement. The movement founds its passionate advocate, Marcus Garvey whose philosophy of economy and industry ideology established the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Harlem which focused on self-reliance and independence from the racist western-capitalism. In light of this, Garvey established his shipping company Black Star Line to transport black people to the independent African country, Liberia<sup>31</sup>. However, the ambitious project of Garvey failed due to financial misfortune, conflict of interest within the organization and the bitter rivalry between Garvey and Du Bois<sup>32</sup> which resulted in the detention of Garvey and his deportation to Jamaica. What happened after that answers the question of why and how the African descendants in the North and the West Indies turned their face to Ethiopia.

Gebrekidan (ibid, p.152) underlines that long before Marcus Garvey “Back-to-Africa” movement the Battle of Adwa in 1896, the Italo-Ethiopian war, where Ethiopians led by

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with the Rastafari members in Shashemene, November 2017 and January 2018

<sup>31</sup> In 1847, it was the USA government who first facilitated the return of free slave in fear of losing white supremacy. The returned free slaves instead of uniting with the native people started to convey the colonial legacy by segregating the natives that assured they stayed on top (en.lisapoyakama.org, viewed 9/6/18).

<sup>32</sup> Du Bois, unlike Garvey, believed in the development of the black nation in the west without repatriation.

Emperor Menelik II achieved victory over the colonial invaders, the Italians. The victory played a great role in creating a symbol of race pride changing the compass to Ethiopia.

Every mobilization needs organization with a charismatic leader. Garvey's Black Nationalism met the African Americans who realized that their quest for social equality is a delusion and, thus, self-emancipation is possible only in Africa. Consequently, in the ruined case of Liberian operation of "Back-to-Africa" movement, the uncolonized territory with a Black kingdom where Garvey's prophecy is realized, Ethiopia became the ultimate place to migrate to. Explaining further, the Rastafari love affair with Ethiopia (ibid, p.152-153) puts forward the racial romanticism and pan-African idealism as the pulling factors. In addition, long before the term Afro centricity became popular, the Rastafari embraced the concept and were claiming their heritage by adopting African God, culture and hair style, African names and so forth.

Rastafari movement is essentially a pan-African movement engaged in restoration of black pride by raising consciousness of African heritage, religion and black pride by unfolding the hidden African history in various literatures and the continent's contribution to the world's civilization (Murrell et al, 1998, p.5). The Rastafari movement being birthed out of pan-Africanism continued not only to being a historical and cultural ambassador to Africa but also a voice for the oppressed in the world condemning the Babylon system.

In general, Ethiopia is regarded as a symbol of black liberation and discussions in this chapter reveal that Ethiopia's connection to the diaspora- black people of the world, namely, black Americans and the West Indies, Jamaicans and Trinidad and Tobago. Ethiopia's connection to its neighbors in the continent Africa appears to be 'non-existent'<sup>33</sup>. Joseph Harris (1994, p.19) observes that pan-Africanism acquired its international structure in 1900 in a conference convened in London organized by W.E. Du Bois of the United States and Henry Sylvester Williams of Trinidad. According to Harris, the conference continued in 1919 and 1920s, but Ethiopia was absent. He reasons that Ethiopia's absence was because of its independence.

### ***Spiritual movement***

#### ***Before 1975***

The hard core Rastas prefer to use the word spiritual to religious saying that the term religion is institutional and given its association with the western belief system. This research endeavored to stick to the word "spiritual", but sometimes the word "religion" is used interchangeably while quoting other works and interviews.

Depending on whom one asks regarding the nature of Rastafari movement, the answer could be religious, way of life, cultural, and pan-African movement which are also referred to as the basic tenets of Rastafari. Maria Stratford in her PhD research of "Rastas' journey to Home" records that it is difficult to list the basic tenets of Rastafari since it is a very open movement with many sects within (2017, pp.41-44). But still she agrees in the view that, though there are

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<sup>33</sup> Conversation with the late Prof. Abiy Ford, October 2012



many factions of Rastafari and a variety of different beliefs, the basic tenets of the movements are allegiance to Haile Selassie's divinity figure and viewing Ethiopia as a promised land. Of core interest of this section is the spiritual aspect. Studying the spiritual movement of the Rastafari can be seen in two categories: before the 1970s and after the death of Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1975.

African tradition and bible are where the Rastafari movement stemmed from in the view that bible interpreted as a book of and by ancient Africans (Murrell et al. 1984, p.72). Rastafari emerged from the poverty stricken shanty town in Jamaica in 1930s which at that time was under the British colony. Jamaica at the time was a home for religious groups like the Anglicans, Baptists, Afro-Christians, and Revivalists including African religions such as Obeah and Voodoo (Barrett, 1968, 1977). Informed by collective memory through real events, myths and legends the Rastafarian has built Ethiopian identity by adopting the king of Ethiopia as God and the place as the new Zion. The poor African descendants from slaves in the Jamaica were informed about Ethiopia through biblical accounts of the Old Testament stories referring to Ethiopia and the orator Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement teachings. The crowning of Ras Tafari as Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930 for a faithful Rastafari group was also a fulfillment of prophecies found in the bible in Revelation 5:5, and Garvey's prediction of a black king coming out of the East. Psalm 87:4, the King James Version, reads:

*I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me; Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Ethiopia; and will say, this one was born in Zion.*

Rastafarians believe that the above verse speaks definitely of Haile Selassie. Haile Selassie I, the deity in Rastafari religious sect, is first introduced as God by Leonard Howell who is said to be the first to express the deification of Haile Selassie I in 1933 in Jamaica when he returned home after twenty years exile in the United States and Panama (Hutton, 2015, p.10). Another difficulty to enlist the basic tenets of Rastafari movement is its openness with with many subjects. The 1955 revised constitution of Ethiopia, the brain child of the emperor, in article 2 states:

*The imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of Haile Selassie I, descendant of King Sahle Selassie, whose line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, Queen Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem."* (Murrell et al, 1998, p.166-7)

In spite of the Rastafari's persistence not to categorize it as a religion, it is observed as another Abrahamic religion practiced by the Rastafari. Murrell et al (1998, p.5) looks at the belief of Rastafari in two periods. The first one is the period before 1970s, and the second one is the period since 1973. According to the authors, the period before the 1970s is characterized by the fact that the Rastas' major themes and doctrinal tenets: belief in the beauty of black people and African heritage, the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie I, belief in repatriation to

Ethiopia and the true redemption of black people, and the view of Babylon (white) man is evil., Once Babylon fell, the world was in a reverse order- Black ruling the world, principally referring to Jamaica given its intense relationship between slaves (blacks) and their master (white).

1973-1975

Elucidating the Rastafari belief since 1973, Murrell et al (ibid) recites Joseph Owens' brief publication of ten point summary of Rastafarian theology wherein the Guyanese clergyman Michael N. Jagessar recapitulated in 1991. These are: the divinity of man "God is man" or "God lives within man." However, God exists eminently and completely in one supreme mind and that man is Rastafari Selassie I. In 2011, while attending a Nayabinghi drumming ceremony and reasoning in Shashemene, I remember a Rasta youth reading a chapter from Psalms and explaining how that specific verse stipulates God being within man. He asserted that human body is a temple and we should keep it clean and be conscious enough of what we eat-meaning explaining why Rastafarian follow *ital* (vegan) dietary. Moreover, "God lives within man" stipulates that God is not to be forsaken up in the sky but rather He is on earth and lives within man. For Rastafari, ultimately man is God. Such belief is played by Bob Marley in his song "Get up Stand up":

*Get up stand up  
Don't give up the fight  
We sick an' tired of- a your ism-skism game'-  
Dying' 'n' goin' to heaven in a Jesus' name, Lord  
We know when we understand:  
Almighty god is a living man  
You can fool some people sometimes,  
But you can't fool all the people all the time  
So now we see the light (what you gonna do?)  
We gonna stand up for our rights!<sup>34</sup>*

The second point on the Rastafarian theology, according to Joseph Owens, is historicity of the experience of God's workings. According to this dimension, historical facts must be seen in light of the judgment of workings of God, salvation is earthly, supremacy of life, efficacy of the word spoken as a manifestation of the divine presence. Owens adds that power can create and bring destruction; sin is personal and collective- corporate and economic powers like the IMF must be held responsible for Jamaica's fiscal problems. Sacramentality of nature such as conserving energy and eating natural food, the priesthood of Rastas, are the chosen people of Jah to manifest God's power testifying a typical patriarchy of Rastafari religion like its ancestors the Judeo-Christian religions. These all define what Rastafari *livity* is.

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<sup>34</sup> "Get up Stand up" song is from the 1973 album of the Wailers "Burnin'" and the song has become not only one of the hundred signature songs of Bob but also an international human rights anthem ([www.pastemagazine.com](http://www.pastemagazine.com) viewed on 10/6/18).

## *After 1975*

Joseph Owens (1982, p.237) and Gebrekidan (2005, p.181) looks at the Rastafari repatriation a phenomenon in three strata: cultural, physical, and messianic or spiritual stratum. He further explains that returning to Africa physically and embracing the African cultural identity are resonant of back-to-Africa attempt. However, for the Rastafari brothers and sisters return to Africa was principally a “divinely inspired” process, expecting exodus guided by God like Moses led Israelis out of Egypt. Nevertheless, in the absence of logistic facilitation for their repatriation, the number of returnee was minimal. Furthermore, Ethiopia’s transition from monarchial to the communist *Dergue*<sup>35</sup> in 1974 widened the gap of repatriation from the West Indies to East Africa. This was agitated by separation of Church and state which ran contrary to the Rastafari belief of Ethiopia as a theocratic kingdom or the new Zion. Moreover the news of the death of Emperor Haile Selassie I eroded the Rasta’s belief of the emperor as a Christ, but only as a human manifestation (Gebrekidan, 2005, p.182). With this, physical repatriation to the Promised Land became a psychological transformation, hence, a “spiritual sojourn to the past” and embracing the culture of Ethiopia from where they are without crossing the Atlantic Ocean (ibid, p.183). Not only was the “Repatriation is a must” motto eroded but also the idea of “Babylon is foreign or white is evil” became less prominent (Murrell et al., 1998, pp.6-10). Less migration to Africa and repatriation became more of mental rather than physical. Therefore, they conclude that the Rastafari brothers and sisters loyalty to the Rastafari movement is only in its pan-African length. This is, indeed, true in the case of many reggae singers who preach about repatriation, exodus- out of Babylon, going to the Fathers land and about Shashemene but they have not made one step to realize that. These artists are not walking the talk or living what they preach. Let alone to repatriate, they do not even come to Ethiopia for a visit. Those who made it to Ethiopia came only to perform concerts, hence, absolutely business.

When my husband first introduced me to the album of Chronixx’s “Here comes Trouble” from the album “Dread & Terrible” in 2015, I was so in it that for months all his songs went on repeat on my playlist. He is a young promising ‘dread’ artist who became famous shortly. In June 2016, I had a chance to see him performing in Addis Ababa. A close friend of mine who was one of the organizers told me that the singer with his Zinc fence band would stay for three days in Ethiopia after their concert. Naturally, as a hardliner reggae singer, I assumed that Shashemene to be in his and his band’s schedule. When I learned that the visit to Shashemene was not in their program, with my event organizing experience and my link with the Rastafari community, I proactively arranged with the organizers a trip to Shashemene. Sadly, the group left without travelling there. I was disappointed and wrote my reflection about it with the titled “A Letter to Chronixx” published on Pambazuka news (retrrievable from

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<sup>35</sup> The *Derg*, Common *Derg* or *Dergue* (Ge'ez: ደርግ "Committee or Council") is the short name of the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991. Officially known as the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, it took power following the ousting of Emperor Haile Selassie I (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derg> viewed on 13/6/18).

[www.pampazuka.com](http://www.pampazuka.com)). In the letter, I discussed about how I came to know about his album, my expectation and disappointments with reference to not giving time to his fans, not making a visit to the pioneers of repatriation in Shashemene, who do not have the financial capacity to come and see his show in Addis Ababa.

On the other hand, there are some groups of Rastafari that called the media report of the death of the emperor in 1975 as the Emperor's 'disappearance', refusing to believe he died. ([www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk) viewed on 12/6/18). This sentiment was shared by the devoted Rastafari returnees in Shashemene from the mansion of Nyabinghi and Bobo Shanti ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) viewed on 16/6/18). The believers still fly 8,000 miles from Jamaica to Ethiopia and revere Selassie and consider him as their God. In this regard, emotionally Ras Kawintseb expresses:

*The Dergue was notorious for lies, and there was no corpse so it never even occurred to me to think the King of Kings had died. That claim only strengthened my faith and direction. Saw Bob in concert first in 1975. Then heard from Rastaman who'd visited Ethiopia that Dergue was searching for HIM, arresting anyone who resembled Janhoy<sup>36</sup>. In the 80's heard of disappearance from Kiddus Stefanos [Saint Estefan's Church], and later on with disproved bones [Referring to Haile Selassie's skeleton that the state said found and re-buried].*

This view from Ras Kawintseb does not come out of the blue. There is a lot of conspiracy information about the emperor after his death. For instance, there are youtube videos that show that the emperor is alive and in the 1980s he was seen in England. There are monks in Ethiopia who told that Haile Selassie I was with them and he became one of them. Amongst the study participants, there is a common word heard here and there, "vision." Nearly every adherent recites a vision they got either in life or in their dreams that His Imperial Majesty is alive and assigning them for a mission. Ras Chubby<sup>37</sup> who relatively is a recent repatriate attests that initially he came for a visit, but with a vision manifested to him, though unplanned, he decided to stay and serve the Nyabinghi in Shashemene. Related to this Ras Kawintseb has a song that he included in his recent album, after he had a vision about Haile Selassie I.

*'LIONS OF ENTOTO' (from the album 'Touch of Tsion') by Ras Kawintseb*

*On the breeze of Coronation  
Shashemane Rasta hanging  
Addis Ababa granted a glimpse in Revelation  
On the slopes of Entoto  
Where the poor and diseased go*

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<sup>36</sup> The Emperor was referred to by the dignities of the formal code as *Girmawi* (Ge'ez: ጊርማዊ, *gärmawi* 'His Majesty'), informally as *Janhoy* (Ge'ez: ጃንዮጵ *janhoy*, "Your [Imperial] Majesty), in his own household and family as *Getochu* 'Master (plural, honorific) and addressed with *Atse* (effectively "Emperor"): *Atse Haile Selassie I*) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian\\_aristocratic\\_and\\_court\\_titles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_aristocratic_and_court_titles) viewed on 13/6/19/

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Ras Chubby in January 2018.

*Fire glory, Rasta story, it's a Visitation.  
 Riding, riding on lions in a fire on Entoto Mountain  
 Riding, (said they've seen the king) riding on lions in a fire on Entoto mountain.<sup>38</sup>*

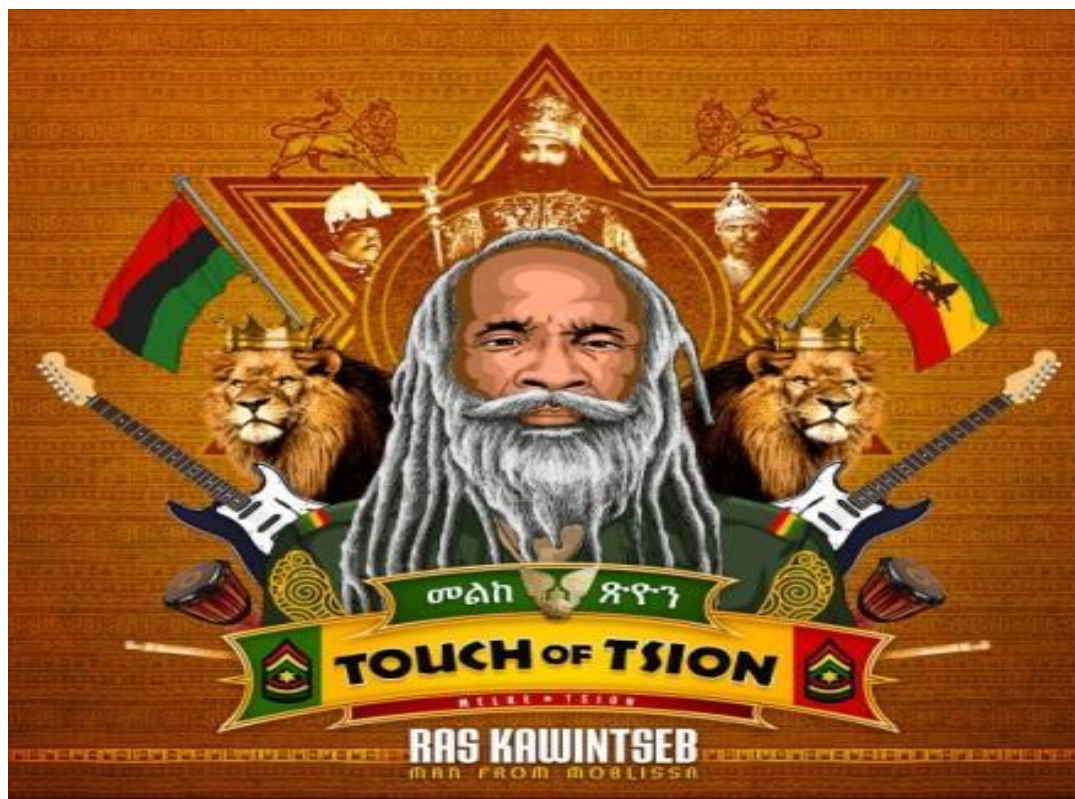


Fig. 14. Ras Kawintseb's album cover. Permission granted.

Today, though not physically, the spiritual movement continues by way of psychological repatriation rebirthed through the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the West Indies, like Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago (Gebrekidan, 2005, pp.187-228).

Regardless of the state of Ethiopia is in a fast-forward political and socio-cultural change, it still remains a pan-African country, which is a common agenda with the Rastafari people. As an example, when the Rastafari members from England left to Ethiopia in the height of the Dergue regime in 1982, one of the travelers underlined that the only reason for the Ethiopian Embassy to facilitate their trip was the common driving force of Pan-Africanism that the Rastafari and the communist regime shared.

### **Mansions of Rastafari**

The mansion alias houses of Rastafari are an umbrella term for the various groups of the Rastafari movement sects mainly differing in their belief practice and way of life. The prominent ones are Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), Nyahbinghi, Twelve Tribes of Israel,

<sup>38</sup> This album is sold only online. However this particular lyrics of the song is provided by Ras Kawintseb, who is the singer.

Bobo Shanti, and including a number of denominations: Selassie Church, Messianic Dreads and African Unity. The word “mansions” refers to Rastafari houses, sects or orders. The term mansion is taken from biblical verse in John 14:2 *“in my father’s house are many mansions.”*

One of the teachings of Emperor Haile Selassie I is “faith is private”. This being the case, the majority of the Rasta are loosely dedicated to their religion. There are, indeed, those who are strict in their *livity* like Nyabinghi and Bobo shanti that includes groundation<sup>39</sup> for prayer, whereas Twelve Tribes members are totally free from this and veneration is held as per the individual convenience. Different sects of Christianity cite biblical verses for the rules of their faith. Concurrently, the Abrahamic-Christianity religion of Rastafari for their rules and practices in their *livity* cite the speech of Emperor Haile Selassie I in addition to the bible.

The different orders of Rastafari have different symbols, beliefs and practices. The prominent orders have their offices, religious centers and followers in Shashemene. However, they all have one thing in common: the divinity of Haile Selassie I as the Messiah, a black Christ and on the rejection of a white man image of divinity. In principle, all mansions are anti-racist but black supremacy is deeply rooted in Nyabinghi and Bobo Shanti houses, though it has lessened through time. In this respect, Ras Kabinda comments:

*The way they [the Ethiopian Christians] worship white Jesus and Mary, this is a baffling to In<sup>40</sup>. How in this time Ethiopian people, knowing the knowledge of Selassie I [short form of Haile Selassie I] and Christ walked as an African in the valleys of Africa, how you conceptualize him as a white man? That was Michael Angelo who draws that picture. This is a 21<sup>st</sup> century. You cannot be so stupefy to not know that. The pope kisses the Black Madonna and child. But, here in Black Africa, the Europeans doctriate you with White Jesus and Mary. It’s an abomination. It is a racial inferiority.<sup>41</sup>*

Notwithstanding, Dr. Desta Meghoo, a prominent Rastawoman and who returned home a decade ago, appeals for a different understanding of the term “black supremacy”.

*I’m old school [declares before she start reasoning]. Black supremacy was construed and contextualized to us... Not about superiority. Never. Never. Never. But about the one on the equality of humanity, recognizing the origin of humanity. So what it does is it flips the discourse that Black people and Africans are Sub-Sahara, Sub-Serbian, Sub,*

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<sup>39</sup> Groundation, also known as Grounation, is an important holiday for practitioners of the Rastafari religion. The day is celebrated with plenty of feasting events with a drumming session from the background.

<sup>40</sup> The “I” pronounced as eye expresses the Rastafari understanding of the presence of divine positive energy in the world: ‘InI’ for the divine unity of God and humans; ‘ital’ for natural or organic foods; ‘irie’ for positive feelings or vibrations

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Ras Kabinda, Shashemene, 20 January 2018.



*being below and it flips that narrative on its head, recontextualize it around supreme. Supreme in original, when we think of Dinqnesh<sup>42</sup> ... the origin of humanity.<sup>43</sup>*

Jahlani Niaah underlines that despite the fact that drawing inspiration by the emperor is essentially the homogeneity of the movement, *"Individuals can choose their own livity because the emperor allowed us to have that flexibility<sup>44</sup>."* For instance, if we look at the dreadlock, several members have dreadlocks while some others do not; others would want to wrap up their dreadlocks with turban, alternatives use tams or do not cover them at all. Thus, it is fair to say the average Rasta agrees that faith is private.

## Nyabinghi

The Nyabinghi order, also known as Haile Selassie I Theocractical Order of the Nyabinghi Reign, is the oldest Rastafari mansion. Historically, the name Nyabinghi is derived from Queen Nyabinghi of Uganda in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who fought against the colonialists in Uganda. Ras Boanerges is the founder of the youth Black Faith Movement, and he is also considered by many the founding house for the Nyabinghi Mansion. In other words, he was the first patriarchal leader of Nyabinghi mansion (Barnett, 2014, p.8).

The divinity of Haile Selassie I is central, and Ethiopia plays a major role for Nyabinghi. The order proclaims that Haile Selassie I is the incarnation of supreme deity. The Nyabinghi order is believed to have pushed for repatriation to Ethiopia where they believe they were taken out from for slavery. Anthropologists found out that the cult of Nyabinghi is based on veneration of the goddess spirit, Nyabinghi. Today's Nyabinghi proclaims that they follow the example of the emperor and declare man and woman equal like Emperor Haile Selassie I and Empress Menen did (interview with Sister Ijahnya, Ras Kabinda, Sister Askale; January 2018). Albeit, they claim they are anti-racist, it advocates for the upliftment of black race and a Nyabinghi man should not abide by a woman who is not in Rastafari *livity*. With that, if a Nyabinghi man gets married to a white Rasta woman it is difficult to be accepted and results in having a hard time in the tabernacle during any kind of assembly. As an adherent of a Rastafari way of life, in Nyabinghi prayer sessions, I have witnessed cursing and expulsion of white Rastas from the tabernacle in Shashemene. But this has tremendously eased through time. Dr. Desta said, *"Who am I to say no, if a European wants to worship Haile Selassie, just like a South African can be a Buddha."*<sup>45</sup>

The symbol of the mansions is an Ethiopian flag. The Ethiopian flag during Haile Selassie regime had the colors green on the top, yellow (gold) in the middle, and red at the bottom,

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<sup>42</sup> *Dinqnesh*, a.k.a. Lucy is the most important and archeological finding in history. She was found in Afar, northern part of Ethiopia in 1974.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Mama (Dr) Desta, Addis Ababa, December 2017.

<sup>44</sup> The quote is taken from YouTube video where Dr. Jahlani Niaah addresses a question of whether Rastafari is homogenous or not. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ2BVEkP1\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ2BVEkP1_8) viewed 12/6/18.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mama (Dr) Desta, Addis Ababa, December 2017.

with the lion of Judah in the middle of the flag. The colors represent Ethiopia's vegetation, mineral wealth and blood of Ethiopians, respectively. Expanding on the racial issue, distinctive from the other orders, the devotees of Nyabinghi believe that the practice of Rastafari religion and the whole Rastafari movement are for black people. Similar to Dr. Desta, Ras Kabinda said it is not an issue if any kind of race worships Haile Selassie. But, he does not hide his disappointment about the discipline in the tabernacle in Shashemene. He tells:

*I built my tabernacle in the mountain [in Dominican Republic]... Right now this tabernacle [the tabernacle in Shashemene] has become a tourist attraction. A tabernacle supposed to be a secret place. Where I come from in Dominica, I do not allow any Whiteman to come to tabernacle. Impossible! Here it is a tourist resort. So, you dimistify? The tabernacle, where I come from is in the mountain, and no whiteman, unless you invite them...special visit or something.*<sup>46</sup>

This view is shared by few others of the community members as well, but the majority agrees the community should not be radical against the white people as it was in the island or in the west where they experienced the white man oppression. Nevertheless, this does not disqualify the reasoning of those who take the position that non-black people should not be allowed in the tabernacle. Considering that at the outset, Nyabinghi drum session, chants and reasoning in the Caribbean are mainly for condemning Whiteman's oppression against the black people in particular and slavery of human beings in general. The tabernacle in Shashemene, besides the diaspora Rastafari, has non-black visitors based in Ethiopia and from outside. The visitors are usually those who pass by the city on their way to the south for touristic trip. The visitors are allowed to visit the tabernacle on condition that they make some financial contribution. The few Rastafari who do not want the visit of the non-black to Nyabinghi reason it out that that the tourists pay money does not mean their motives for Rastafari or black people is good.

The drumming of Nyabinghi is one of the most powerful spiritual uplifting and meditations. The drum session is performed in a Tabernacle where the believers are seated in a circle manner, men and women separately. The groundation includes bible reading and reasoning (see Chapter One). Similarly, the Rastafari in Shashemene use Nyabinghi for discussing issues concerning their community ranging from personal issue, verses of the bible, news in their area, world politics and how they relate to it. Reggae and Rastafari faith are intertwined. Roots reggae<sup>47</sup> is more spiritual than other genres of reggae music. Members of the wailers<sup>48</sup>; Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and burning Spears have cited the teachings and drumming of Nyabinghi

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Ras Kabinda, Shashemene, 20 January 2018.

<sup>47</sup> "Roots Reggae is typified by strong vocals and devoutly Rasta lyrics; it is perhaps the most easily accessible form of reggae, and the most successful globally. Roots reggae emerged during the early 1970s, immediately following the development of rocksteady." (<https://www.allmusic.com/subgenre/roots-reggae-ma0000002836> viewed on 23/6/18).

<sup>48</sup> The Wailers began with Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Bunny Wailer. In 1974, when the latter two departed the group, Bob Marley re-created with the remaining of the Wailers, called "Bo Marley and The Wailers."



on their recordings<sup>49</sup>. The drums used consist of three types of drums. The first one is the thunder drum. It is named so because it is like a bass guitar producing thounder-like sounds. The second is Funde, also known as a middle drum, used to maintain the dominant heartbeat rhythm in the drumming session of the tabernacle. The third one is called Repeater. This is relatively the smallest and elongated bongo. It is important to the overall feel of the drum rhythm; it is also called the carrier of the spirit of the binghi session. Shaker is the only instrument that women can play in Nyahbinghi.



*Fig 15. Shashemene Nyabinghi center  
Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha*

<sup>49</sup> Bob Marley's song "Rastaman Chant" from his album "Burnin'" in 1973 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBBTitBMEMA>). This song is produced with Nyahbinghi groundation with a deepened sense of spirituality. In addition, Peter Tosh has performed live with a Nyahbinghi groundation ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=av43m\\_pFSIM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=av43m_pFSIM)) on the stage.



Fig 16. Shashemene Nyabinghi center  
Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha

## Twelve Tribes of Israel

The fragmentation of EWF gave birth to the creation of one more house of Rastafari in Jamaica, the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Bonnaci, 2016, p.6). The Twelve Tribes of Israel is referred to as the largest Rastafari mansions in terms of its size of membership subscription internationally (ibid, p.205). This sect was founded by Dr. Vernon Carrington, known as “Prophet Gad” in 1968 in Jamaica. With regard to religious practices and the Rastafari way of life, the Twelve Tribes is the most liberal of all the mansions for the reason that the members do not follow some of the Rastafari livity practiced by others. For instance, their followers eat meat as opposed to the strict *ital* dietary of the Rastafari *livity*. Women are allowed to wear trousers instead of long skirts; dreadlocks are not necessarily covered or grown. However, their most distinctive feature is that they acknowledge Emperor Haile Selassie I as Jesus Christ in kingly character but not as a deity by himself. Like the others, Ethiopia holds the special place of being their Zion. Even if they view Israel as the Promised Land, Ethiopia is their first destination of their repatriation. The most idiosyncratic character of the group is that their followers consider Israel as the Promised Land and their repatriation to Ethiopia is a fulfillment they have to do before their final departure. By some of the aficionado from other orders, they are regarded as a “joke” and “disgrace” to the Rastafari movement particularly with their view of Haile Selassie and Ethiopia. An EWF member, Ras John<sup>50</sup>, remarks: “Ethiopia is a

<sup>50</sup> Ras John is used as a pseudonym. Although this research uses the real names of study participants (with their permission), pseudonym is also used for the security of the informant due to the sensitivity of the information provided.

*stepping stone for them, I don't know why they are here on the land grant of Shashemene, because this is for those of us who stay in Ethiopia and see Ethiopia as the Promised Land.”<sup>51</sup>*

The belief system of the Twelve Tribes is based on the King James Version of the bible and their motto is “Read a chapter a day.” Related to this, the members of this sect consider themselves as the direct descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. This is even further evident in their tradition of, nicknaming the members according to the birth month. This division of twelve houses has its own color representation as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1<sup>52</sup> Twelve Tribes’ representation of the 12 months and colors.*

<b>Tribe</b>	<b>Month</b>	<b>Color</b>
Naphtali	January	Green
Joseph	February	White
Benjamin	March	Black
Reuben	April	Silver
Simeon	May	Gold
Levi	June	Purple
Judah	July	Brown
Issachar	August	Yellow
Zebulon	September	Pink
Dan	October	Blue
Gad	November	Red
Asher	December	Grey

My interview with Rasta youth from the Twelve Tribes in Shashemene at their Headquartera (HQ) reveals that the deeper layer of meaning of number twelve is signifying twelve organs in human body corresponding to the twelve faculties and Disciples of Christ (Bonacci, 2016, p.6).

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Ras John, Shashemene, December 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Data acquired from interview with Rasta youth from Twelve Tribes in Shashemene, January 2018.



*Fig 17. The gate (from inside) of the Headquarters of Twelve of Tribes of Israel in Shashemene (Source: the author).  
Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha*

Bonacci (ibid, p.16) explained that the Twelve Tribes, more than any mansion, contributed to the eruption of reggae music in which they are known as the “House of Reggae.” Researchers like van Dijk (1982, pp. 188-9), Campbell (1997, pp. 225-34) and recently Bonacci (2016, p.3), scholars who pass by the historiography of the Twelve Tribes, have recorded some of the unique nature of the mansion. Characteristically, this group is divergent from other houses in that it offers its members the freedom of religious practice based on individuals to pray the way they want and whichever church they want to attend. They have Headquarters used for performance amongst other things, but not worshipping centers. Bonacci (2016, p.3) suggests that the Twelve Tribes have a unique social composition that deliberately distinguishes the mansion from others by selectively subscribing the middle class society. She also adds their distinct character of being difficult to interview them. I myself have encountered the same problem in arranging an appointment with the members of the mansion in Shashemene. Even after their availableness, it is arduous to engage them in a conversation (See Chapter One).

Religious-wise, like that of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, they believe both in the Old and New Testaments of the bible. However, they are incompatible with the church for the very reason that they claim that Haile Selassie I is a Christ in a kingly character. Now the title, Christ in kingly character is given to Zara Yacob Haile Selassie, the grandson of Haile Selassie<sup>53</sup>.

### **Bobo Shanti**

Bobo Shanti, formally known as the Ethiopian African Black International Congress (EABIC), is the youngest mansion of Rastafari established in 1958 (Montlouis, 2013, p.29, [www.eprints.soas.ac.uk](http://www.eprints.soas.ac.uk) viewed on 5/6/18). The name Bobo Shanti offers a murky translation

<sup>53</sup> Interview with participants from the Twelve Tribes of Israel in Shashemene. They also declare this in musical concerts. It is a must for a 12 Tribes musician to declare that statement.



in which Bobo refers to Black and Ashanti, a Kumasi tribe from Ghana where they are known for being warriors, and the place where the majority of slaves from Ghana to Jamaica are believed to have been taken from (Montlouis, 2013, p.30-1). The founder of Bobo Shanti is the late Prince Emanuel Charles Edwards, who separated himself from other Rastafari adherents in Jamaica and established his own community in the hills of St. Andrews in Bull Bay (ibid). The Bobo Shanti mansion cites “Revelation 5”<sup>54</sup> from the Bible to justify prince Emanuel as the re-incarnate of Black Christ in a priestly state. Thus, in this order Emperor Haile Selassie I is God, Marcus Garvey is Prophet and Prince Emmanuel is priesthood without a father and mother. Prince Emmanuel is also known as a priest of Melchezidek, “the black Christ in the flesh.” In principle, the Bobo Shanti advocates for repatriation of all black people followed by reparation- reimbursement for slavery. Their faith is deeply rooted in the Old Testament Jewish Mosaic Law including observation of Sabbath from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. Discretely, this group is infamous for oppressing women. For instance, during menstrual period, women are not allowed to: take part in Sabbath gathering, cook and have sexual intercourse for 21 days since they are considered unclean<sup>55</sup>. In terms of dietary, the group enforces salt and oil to be avoided from food. Ganja is ritual and reserved for prayer only, contrasting with other Rastafari mansion members who, in addition to meditation, are allowed to smoke in parties.



*Fig 18. Bobo Shanti Mansion camp, also known as Bobo camp in Shashemene  
Picture by Mahlet A.Beyecha*

Unlike other mansions of the Rastafari, the Bobos use the reverse order of the Ethiopian flag colors; red, yellow and green. They also use Red, Black and Green with Black Lion of Judah and Black stars on the first and the last color of the flag, respectively. With regard to dress code, they are stricter than Nyabinghi in the sense that they have to follow a certain rule of dressing.

<sup>54</sup> Revelation chapter 5 is about the lamb and the scroll.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Sister Martha (name changed) a woman Bobo Shanti member in Shashemene.

The women are considered the head practice of Queen of Omega principles. The researcher observed that female appearance in general: the long robes and covers are different from women of other mansions, but strikingly similar with Ethiopian women from Bale area, Oromia National Region State as shown in the following pictures.



*Fig. 19. A devoted Bobo Shanti Rasta women in Shashemene and Oromo women from Bale in Oromia regions.*  
Photo credit: Fig 8 from Sister Welete Itegue Facebook photos<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Permission acquired from Sister Welete Itegue.



*Fig. 20. Oromo women from Bale in Oromia regions.*  
*Photo credit: Internet<sup>57</sup>*

All men are seen as priests and prophets and their duty is mostly to reason at their prayer place, called Bobo Camp, and conduct religious services. They tightly wrap turban and, unlike most of Nyabinghi and the Twelve Tribes, use tams to cover their head. Another finding is the extraordinary similarity between the dress code, particularly the tightly wrapped turban of Bobo men and Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) priests. They also use priest instead of Ras preferred by the Nyabinghi men. However, particularly the Bobo priests in Shashemene have adopted the Amharic word *qes* for priest instead of the English one.

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.travelblog.org/Africa/Ethiopia/Oromia-Region/Robe/blog-116686.html>





Fig. 21. Qes Banduli and Bobo priest head at the Bobo Camp in Shashemene. Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha.



Fig. 22. A priest of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.  
Picture credit: internet<sup>58</sup>

Similar to that of the disciples of Marcus Mosiah Garvey, the goal of the Bobo Shanti is to be self-reliant and independent of the “Babylon system” (see Glossary) and as much as possible to be able to have self-reliant service providers, such as midwives, and enterprises for economic independence. Nathalie Montlouis (2013, p. 262) who conducted extensive research on the women of Bobo Shanti concluded that due to the dynamic cultural changes in the world, the mansion is forced to create a new identity, particularly with regard to gender and women controlling their own destiny. During the fieldwork, it came to the attention of the researcher that women are generally down played in the Rastafari movement as a result of its patriarchal formation. This, is even more so within the Bobo Shanti mansion as

<sup>58</sup> Picture taken from the Internet. <http://tribaleye.com/ethiopia/riej4cznlee2ri5x7bncjwbx4fyi3l>



anonymous informants in Shashemene revealed that they are more abused. One of the female participants, who were in a relation with a Bobo Shanti Rastaman, was forced to leave him due to his maltreatment and his desire to practice polygamy. The order rules require that women respect their menstrual period with a purification period of 21 days in each month, during which women and men are set apart. During the fieldwork, I learned that the head priest is based in the Bobo camp, apart from his wife and children, visiting his family for a few days, though he could not reveal at what intervals. Since it was not one of the objectives of this research, I did not dwell on the relationship of women in Rastafari *livity* but observed that there is an ‘interesting’ relationship of Rastawoman and Rastaman in their Rastafari way of life. There is a big fish to be caught for those who want to conduct further research on the relationships between men and women, in fact, in any given Rastafari community.

Reggae and Rastafari culture are tangled. Reggae music is what comes to mind when thinking of Rastafari movement because it is the voice of the movement (Murrell et al, 1998, p.232). Nevertheless, the Bobo Shanti mansion criticizes listening to reggae music and attending reggae parties. Paradoxically, many reggae artists have emerged from this mansion, the most well-known being Sizzla, Capleton, Antony B, Lutan Fyah, Turbulence and Ras Shiloh. Among these artists, Sizzla Kalonji is banned from entering a number of countries for a concert due to his condemnation of gay people ([www.northcoastjournal.com](http://www.northcoastjournal.com) viewed on 5/6/18). In reality, in many ways this community separates itself from the rest of the orders.

### **Ethiopian World Federation (EWF)**

Further to its contribution in adding more houses of the Rastafari movement, a broad research of EWF is necessitated given the organization’s key role in representing the different mansions of Rastafari in the face of Ethiopian government and facilitating any requests of the community notably the land grant with a project plan to develop the Rastafari community and the city of Shashemene and other administrative works. Amongst the houses of the Rastafari in Shashemene, EWF’s representation includes the Nyahbinghi and Bobo Shanti whereas the Twelve Tribes of Israel is delineated by its own representative. This has to do with the ongoing conflict between the two that traces back from the formation of the organizations (Bonacci, 2015, pp.186-208; interview with Ras Reuben Kush September 2017; and Ras Tagas King, December 2017). In this respect, this section presents the historical background of the EWF formation and its relation with the Rastafari and what the duties and responsibilities of the organization’s branch in Ethiopia are. For the birth of the organization, the research has looked at William Scott’s “The Sons of Sheba’s Race,” which lengthily records the formation of the organization in New York in 1937 and acclaimed by other authors for doing so. The organization is represented by a number of local groups in Jamaica before it stretched its leg to Ethiopia. With regard to EWF’s branches (also known as locals), the research put forward literatures mostly cited from Giulia Bonacci’s (2015) “Exodus: Hiers and Pioneers, Rastafari return to Ethiopia” which has exhaustively recorded about this. The two works were suggested by different participants and EWF members for the detailed accounts of their work. Finally,

the section exhibiting how EWF set its footprint in Ethiopia and its current engagement in the country is discussed with ethnographical account.

### *The Birth of EWF*

Following the Italian's occupation in the capital, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 1936 to 1941, and the Emperor Haile Selassie's exile to England, some African American groups started to form different organizations, but all in the name of collecting aid for Ethiopia. These organizations come together in order to acquire recognition for better coordination and exposing the crooks. Their organization was named *Menilek Club*. The determined group members from America ended up paying a visit to the exiled emperor at his residence in Bath, England. The delegation told the king that there is a fund collected in the name of Ethiopia by several unauthorized persons and stressed the need for a special emissary authorized by the king who would direct the collection of all relief donations and "help awaken flagging black support for the Ethiopian cause." Subsequently, the emperor dispatched a special envoy led by Dr. Melaku Emmanuel Bayen, a physician and cousin of the Emperor knowledgeable on the matter (Scott, 1993, p.167). Dr. Melaku is an Ethiopian nationalist, who is not new for America as he studied from highschool to college and university until he became a medical doctor, and who opposed the colonial invasions of his country. His pan-Ethiopian passion evolved to pan-Africanism through the experience of race segregation in America, particularly in Columbus University where he studied his first years of university and left to Howard University, historically a black university in Washington D.C. (ibid, pp.168-9). He explains: "My belief in Race Solidarity caused me to select Howard University for my studies in order that I might have a closer contact with my people." He himself believed that "The world black unity would help protect Ethiopia's freedom and, conversely, an independent Ethiopia would promote universal African aspirations for liberation from white rule" (ibid, p.170). Ever since joining Howard University, he was actively engaged in mobilizing support from black Americans and the West Indies and facilitating appointment of blacks and whites from America to Ethiopia to take part in the development of his country. This continued until his departure to his country in 1935. He became a hardliner of pan-Africanism and actively engaged in strategizing a total liberation of black people in the world from the white rule (ibid, 171-172).

Therefore, the visit of the black Americans from Menelik Club to the Emperor in Bath only meant to facilitate the continuation of Dr. Melaku Bayen's previous activities in the land and society that he knew for 10 years. Some noted the emperor's appointment of Dr. Melaku was because he was well aware of "his dwindling image among African Americans." But, Dr. Melaku's appointment was a right one in the sense that his records in his stay in America reveal that he was born for this. His passion for pan-Africanism and a patriot Ethiopian culminated from his childhood in the palace accompanied by training by the Emperor (ibid, p.174). Although, no evidence to support the claim, it is speculated that the emperor in exile and Dr. Melaku in his return to America, during the mission assigned by the king that they showed estrangement in that they avoided blacks in the west. Garvey who was living in

England after his deportation by the U.S. government during the emperor's exile was denied to see the king. While some hypothesize that "probably the emperor saw no worthy to see Garvey" others analyzed that perhaps the king in exile was advised by the imperial advisors that it would be "unwise to see Jamaican radicals" whom at that time were under the British colony (ibid.).

Dr. Melaku continued to address a record amount of thousands of blacks in different in the U.S. In his return to the States there were some tensions observed between him and the West Indies following the allegations by news media that the emperor 'refused' to see Marcus Garvey. In one gathering in Philadelphia, He was quoted blaming Garvey: "It was Garvey, who was responsible for news that spread over the world that Emperor Haile Selassie had refused to meet a colored mission when he arrived in London" (ibid, 174-175). According to him, the money collected is to support Ethiopian refugee and also to win diplomatic support, but not to the armed Ethiopians. The president of EWF in Ethiopia, Reuben Kush's comment echoes with that of Dr. Melaku's in the way that both of them underline the collected fund was to the victims of the war.

*"The black people in the west were upset when Italy tried to occupy Ethiopia, the only state that has not been colonized. Thus different decentralized groups centralized by EWF raised fund that went to the war refugees, to buy medicine, and sending working staff to Ethiopia. As a result of the work done by EWF, His Imperial Majesty gave us 500 acres of land in Shashemene to say thank you to Black people of the world to be administered by EWF."*<sup>59</sup>

Dr. Melaku was disappointed by the response to his call for fund raising. For this, he had to come with a different mechanism. He developed "Haile Selassie Fund Drive" which was from every contribution of 10 cents to receive a stamp of the emperor. With the limited number and resources, the doctor calculated at least \$800 per day from the people in Harlem (ibid, p.175). While he is lobbying, the fund collection was heavily relied on the United Aid for Ethiopia for developing projects, and to keep the concern on Ethiopia going among Harlemites. However, the fund raised was not enough. Those who contributed were the poor black Americans while the rich merchants of African Americans as one Harlem entrepreneur expresses: "those with liberty and full stomachs do not worry about those without." On top of the problem of collecting enough fund, Dr. Melaku's mission was troubled by the Marxists in the United Aid for Ethiopia organization, who were endeavoring to push the agenda to a communist front (ibid, p.176).

Coming next, his confidence on the relied organization waned, and "to prevent Bolshevik control of the major Ethiopian relief effort," Dr. Melaku decided to create an entirely new society aid society, to be known as EWF after one year of his arrival, on 25 August 1937 with

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Ras Reuben Kush, September 2017.

Dr. Melaku Bayen as its executive, and Dr. Lorenzo H. King, Pastor of St. Mark's Methodist Church in Harlem, as its international president.

The newly created organization heavily engaged in reaching out the African Americans, EWF used weekly tabloids; setting up local groups, known as locals (some with numbers) inside and outside the U.S.A.; and sending out staff to set up the local groups. The local chapters opened as far as Aden, Djibouti, the Gold Coast, Paris, Uganda and South Africa. The new membership reached thousands in 1940, just on the eve of the Ethiopian victory over the colonial Italians. With the organization's backbone staff; Dr. Melaku's wife, and Black and white Americans who went earlier to Ethiopia to be part of the Ethiopia development work and returned with Melaku and his family to England and then to USA. (ibid, p.177), EWF benefited from the committed leadership of Dr. Melaku Bayen whose concern was not only the refugee relief for Ethiopians, but also the independence of Ethiopians and Black people in the world (ibid, p.175).

Dr. Melaku is the unsung hero of Ethiopia, a pan-Ethiopian and Ethiopia's first major pan-Africanist who fought a war without a battlefield and killing, a kind of war that we, Ethiopians are not historically accustomed. Most Ethiopians, if they are ever aware of the Ethiopian contribution to the pan-African cause, that name will be Emperor Haile Selassie I. This was probably shared amongst those of us who are familiar with Rastafari movement and who at the same time are the last batch of Ethiopian history during our junior and secondary school since the last quarter of century, the EPRDF's education system is focused on sowing ethnic federalism instead of nationalism and demonizing leader prior to it.

Dr. Melaku was not a soft convincer in his speech to the black people; rather he was very direct. Disenchanted by the progress of the work of EWF and the Black people's engagement to EWF, in one gathering, he told:

*"Had colored America taken a more active part, the outcome of the Ethiopian campaign might have been different. But instead of playing the part you should, all of you went to sleep, are still asleep, and are perfectly satisfied with your present conditions"* (ibid, p.175).

His belief in race solidarity went to the extent that he broke his engagement to the daughter of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia and to be married to a Black American, Dorothy Hadley. The orator and committed leader of EWF became sick three years later in 1939 and 1940 and the EWF severely suffered from the absence of his leadership. Melaku Emmanuel Bayen died on 4 May 1940 one year before the Emperor's restoration of the throne (ibid, p.177).

Dr. Melaku Bayen's life was brief and the last 15 years of his life were dedicated to his pan-African leadership. Building on the earlier efforts of Worqneh Martin and *Kantiba*<sup>60</sup> Gabru

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<sup>60</sup> Kantiba is the Amharic word for Mayor.

Desta, who advocated and taught Melaku for advocating African-American emigration to Ethiopia, accompanied by his lived experiences of 13 years of residence in USA at the historical black university, Howard University, acquaintance with black associations, and his marriage to a black American augmented his knowledge on the struggle and background of race. This resulted in the need for pan-Africanism and cooperative Ethiopian and African-American relations. It was as a result of this collaboration and cooperation created more than a decade long run by Dr. Melaku Bayen that the emperor granted 500 acres of land for black people of the west.

### *Loopholes inside EWF*

The headquarters of EWF being in New York, there were many branches in Kingston, but the return of Jamaicans to Ethiopia was yet to be facilitated by the New York office. In Jamaica, the difference between Rastafari and non-Rastafari is to be paid attention. The dreadlock Rasta were not accepted by the non-Rastafari administrative in New York. They were rejected because they refused to give up the way they perceived His Imperial Majesty, also known as HIM. There was a conflict between Rastafari and non-Rastafari including tensions between locals with a membership of bearded Rastafari and locals with a membership of dreadlock Rastafari. Hence, the Rastafari locals “became insubordinate to the baldhead initial charters”

While a number of Rastafari questioned (disputed) the direction of EWF, as it was found to be a counter-productive, few grabbed the opportunity and pushed their chance. Finally, their documents were accepted in New York and the Rastafari in Jamaica received charter to open a new local in 1958 (ibid, pp.186-7). The new local is known as local 43, headed by Solomon Wolfe, known as “Strictly EWF *bredren* and a long standing Rasta.” In 1964, the local sent its first delegates to Ethiopia led by Gladstone Robinson to visit Africa including Ethiopia. Upon their return, the delegates proposed to the EWF head quarter in New York for the establishment of African Repatriation Committee, but only to be rejected (ibid, p.187). At this point, the Rastafari realized that for the non-Rastafari and non-Jamaicans EWF administrative of the New York office repatriation was not on their agenda. However, initially, the Rastafari movement did not hesitate that repatriation was what EWF was created for. “In short, to the EWF, the Back-to-Africa movement meant migration; to the Rastafari, repatriation” (Barrett 1968, 79-80 quoted in Bonacci, 2015). For Rastafari, repatriation exceeds a social mobility from point A to B. This was due to their spiritual interpretation given that the land is given by the man whom they see as God and redeemer. As a result, they preserved the idea that the land grant is specifically to them. This led the Rastafari to be divided into two: those who saw the land in Shashemene through biblical themes in which they could reach only with divine intervention like the emperor himself. The rest made the move and reached the Promised Land as opposed to waiting (Scott, 1993, pp.187-8).

When funds were raised by local 31 in collaboration with local 43 to enable the repatriation of the members, no one was ready. The Rastafari were singing “send me back to Ethiopian land” but they were not walking the talk. Like there were some touristic Rastas that came to

Ethiopia for Nyahbinghi celebration of HIM's birthday on 23 July and sang "We are going home" but did not pack and come back to Africa. Sometimes a conflict arises in the tabernacle that the already repatriated Rastas did not want to sing those hymns of Nyabinghi chant, because they already fulfilled the prophecy whereas others face a difficulty of "moving from the rhetoric of return to practice of return" (ibid, pp.190-1). Strategically, for Jamaican politicians to demonstrate their familiarity with the issue of return and thereby confirming their support was important. After independence, the question of return was sidelined. What is concluded from here is that, it was not the EWF who were sitting on the top in New York to enable the practical Back-to-Africa, but it was the locals, precisely local 43 who in spite of the discrimination of Rasta from inclusive in EWF went and established the local in Kingston and literally facilitated the return to Africa, to Ethiopia, by raising their own funds. Thus, "Rastafari won and became the first Jamaican members of the EWF to repatriate to Shashemene" (ibid, p.192).

Dr. Melaku Bayen might have also been influenced in which during his study in Columbus University in Ohio and Howard University in 1920s. In addition to this was his time in university which coincided with Marcus Garvey's peak time. It is also possible that the first seed was sown into Dr. Melaku by Warqneh Eshetu Martin, the Ethiopian medical doctor, diplomat and pan-Africanist before he arrived in the USA. Warqneh's advise to Melaku was: "To influence thousands of Black people in the USA and the West Indies was 'Let them come and develop Ethiopia'" (Harris, 1994, p.22). It was in fact following Warqneh's advise that Melaku facilitated the dispatching of several highly skilled African-Americans to Ethiopia between 1930-1936. This included the white men who were the president of Muskingum College, Frank Ernest and Everett A. Colson (Scott, 1993, p.192).

### *EWF in Caribbean*

The relation between the members of EWF among the Black Americans and the Caribbean was a tensed one. The first local of EWF was established in Jamaica in 1939, under Local 17 (Hepner, 1998, p.69). The next one was set up a year later by another Rastafari under Local 31 (van Dijk, p.1993, 113). The later prevented bearded Rastafari from becoming members of the local. The EWF in America was mostly led by church leaders who did not accommodate the Rastafari's claim of Haile Selassie's divinity. This created a tension and prevented the Rastafari members from becoming members of EWF. Nevertheless, with their strong tie with Ethiopia and Ethiopians enabled the Rastafari to have their own EWF in the Caribbean and executed the repatriation plan. It is the reluctance of the EWF in the United States that delivered the Twelve Tribes of Israel. In terms of centralization, the EWF in Caribbean faced the same problem like that in America, and, as a result, encountered the challenge of raising fund for Ethiopia's development (Bonacci, 2015, pp.159-60).

The EWF in New York always differed itself from the EWF in Jamaica in which its majority members were Rastafari. In addition to the pan-Ethiopian and pan-African elements, they added the religion's dimension of the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie (Ibid, p.161). This was

always the case for EWF in Jamaica to separate itself from, mobilize and facilitate the repatriation of its members by itself. But again the enduring character of EWF, and the Rastafari sisters and brothers, for being fragmented, and led to the repatriation down to the individuals' decision (Ibid, p.163). Between 1966 and 1991 alone, a little under 50 Jamaicans entered to Ethiopia, half of them before the emperor's death and half after his death. Efforts made for organization and centralization were crucial for their departure to realize the return to the Promised Land. Those remained finally integrated with EWF, but because of its fragility, it later on led to the birth of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Ibid, p.183). For some Rastafari, the discourse of returning to home, the Promised Land is changed to practices of returning through the catalyst of the Emperor's visit to Jamaica in 1966 (ibid.). One of the problems of the migration of Jamaicans to Ethiopia was funding (ibid, p.186).

How did the Ethiopian chapter of EWF come into existence? Once the repatriation was done, what is it doing now in Ethiopia? In order to get the relevant answers to these questions, the researcher held discussions with the officers of EWF. The discussions are presented below.

### *EWF in Ethiopia*

Ras Tages King and Brother Reuben Kush are the two officers of EWF in Ethiopia who are active in EWF branch in England and still are. Regardless of the political and socio-cultural changes in Ethiopia, EWF in the west enabled the returnees to still maintain pan-Ethiopian and pan-African claims when the organization was inactive after the death of its devoted leader, Dr. Melaku Bayen in 1940.

### *Ras Tages*

A meeting planned in the beginning of November 2017 was finally convened at the very end of the year, on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2017 around 4pm. Coming back from the trekking to the *Entoto*<sup>61</sup> Mountain that I went with a family since morning, I grabbed my bag and ran to the meeting place, at Nexus Hotel where it was conveniently located halfway from my participant's and my own residence. We proceeded to upstairs to the side room from the hall of the hotel the hotel management arranged for us. As we reached the table and I started to set up my camera, he started to take out one A4 size picture of Dr. Melaku Bayen and a thick book with a hard cover containing a picture of HIM Haile Selassie I on it. At that moment, I told myself "Oh my God, our discussion will be dominated by Ethiopian World Federation," besides seeing that he arrived with his 4x4, I was hopeless as to whether I will be able to get his personal experience and challenges as a Rastaman in Ethiopia. However, I know that as the executive member of EWF in England and being one of the founders of EWF in Ethiopia, it is a must to talk to him. I noted to myself that I should still try to tease out the information I wanted in respect to the challenges of the Rastafari. Not knowing the structure of my thesis at that time, I was not sure where the information on EWF could be used for the write-up.

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<sup>61</sup> Mount Entoto is the highest peak overlooking the city of Addis Ababa. It reaches 3,200 meters above sea level.

Interestingly, it turned out that this interview has largely contributed to this section of the thesis.

To start with, at the age of 16, Ras Tages became more knowledgeable about the teachings of His Imperial Majesty and Marcus Mosiah Garvey. Not surprisingly, as a conscious black person in the west, he became a rebel against the Babylonian slavery system and put on his covenant by throwing away from his combs and razors and let grow his *natty dreadlocks*<sup>62</sup>. His research on Black studies was to fill the void that he was purposely deprived of from the system education in South East London, where he went to school. As a result, he realized that redemption for black people was indeed only through repatriation.

Ras Tages was a hard-core Rastafari who, at the age of 24, already landed in the Promised Land, Ethiopia, to visit the pioneers of the repatriated Rastafari community and the land granted by the Emperor. In contrast to the advice of his family, friends and colleagues in England, Ras Tages and another determined Rastaman Ras Binghi Faraki set their foot in Ethiopia. His uncompromising Rastafari *livity* and determination for the redemption through repatriation was demonstrated as he travelled to the country during the height of the communist *Dergue* regime in 1982. He puts his observation in his words as *"the country was in full hot pepper administration of the dergue regime."*

*That visit was very powerful in convincing me, I should embark on research and repatriation committee of the EWF, in order for that we could find facts towards repatriation and to the land granted to us in Shashemene.*<sup>63</sup>



<sup>62</sup> **Natty Dreadlocks** (synonyms "Natty Dread", "Natty", "Dready" or "Dread") is a [Rastafari](#) term for a member of the Rastafari community. The image of such a man is often used in [reggae](#) music and elsewhere to represent an idealized [personification](#) of the Rastafari movement as a whole. It combines the term *natty* (as in "natural") and a style of [dreadlocks](#) which has formed naturally without cutting, combing or brushing (Source: Wikipedia, viewed on 19/6/18).

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Ras Tages King, Addis Ababa, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017.



Fig 23. Ras Tagas King, Executive member of Ethiopian World Federation  
Picture by Mahle A. Beyecha

The experience of Local 43 of EWF in Caribbean, where the group sent its first delegate to Ethiopia was discouraging given that the New York office decided to reject their demand of the formation of the African Repatriation Committee. As a result, the hard-core Rastafari from Jamaica independently established the committee and endeavored to fulfill the repatriation though at the end it came down to the individual level, who members like Ras Tagas in order to materialize the return, has to gather information by themselves going to Ethiopia first and later prepare themselves for repatriation or as Ras Tagas asserts, a preparation for repatriation. The individual repatriation had its long-term impact running down to the present day challenges that the Rastafari community faces in Ethiopia. Therefore, it took the courageous move of Ras Tages and his colleague to opt for being tested by a fire- to do their trip in the communist party responsible for the downfall of the monarchical rule and the death of the last emperor.

*Some of us have to come here before the mass exodus. You see, those of us who come before the mass exodus are pioneers. Now, as a pioneer coming, you need to be fully equipped. You need funds, need profession and so, so forth because there is nothing on the territory- on the land.*<sup>64</sup>

Upon return, Ras Tages embarked on a research and continued communication with the pioneers back on the land. In 1988, after six years from his first trip and 50 years from the establishment of EWF, he came to Ethiopia with his empress and small children, following the footsteps of the pioneers, but himself also a pioneer from a different generation and open the EWF local in Ethiopia. He specifically arrived with a mission under his belt, to do ground works for the mass exodus by the first registered EWF office in the land of its founders

### *EWF's activities in Ethiopia*

#### *Reuben Kush*

Originally for Jamaica, but grew up in England, Brother Reuben Kush became conscious of his own race and the need to return to Africa, soon after, he was introduced to EWF in England. He speaks, *"As a kid, I used to ask, 'What can Africa do for me?' As a teenager it was difficult to get concrete answer. But once you know about EWF, I ask what can I offer to Africa? Every question is answered. From that perspective I joined the organization."* Brother Reuben, like Ras Tages, became a Rastafari as a teenager in 1980. Upon his arrival in Ethiopia, he set up a metal manufacturing workshop in *Kality*, the industrial zone of Addis Ababa. This is a place where I held the interview with the welding machines noise in the background.

He did his first trip to Ethiopian a year after he joined EWF in 1991. One of the principles of the organization is: "The hungry be fed, the naked clothed, the sick nourished, the aged

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

protected, and the infants cared for” ([www.rastaites.com](http://www.rastaites.com) viewed on 20/6/18). Activities of local group were also in line with these principles. Reuben is the administrator of these activities. Some of the community work by the local group is to unify the Rasta, such as representing itself and other houses of the Rastafari in the face of government offices; assist the elders, for instance, assigning a professional from their own community that checks the health of elders and children once in a week. He represented the organization in these regards. He told that they rented a room in a higher clinic in Shashemene in order to use the clinic’s examination instruments and professional volunteers provide a regular check up to the community members. This service is not only about assistance but also imbued with Garvey’s code of Back-to-Africa movement with the aim of self-sufficiency.

*Our task is to make sure that we look after our community ourselves. And so far, for the last forty years you could say that we have been able to do that... we are getting better at it. The opportunity is there for us to get funding from the Rasta community around the world... The goal is for us to be able to establish a self-sufficient system.*<sup>65</sup>

After ten years of the establishment of EWF, the Emperor gave a land for the black people’s contribution during the Italo-Ethiopian war under the administration of EWF. Nothing on their decentralization and statelessness, with the land, Haile Selassie gave them a constitution to be able to govern themselves. Nevertheless, not every member of EWF was interested to come. This gave an opportunity for the Rastafari non-EWF members to settle on the land. Moreover, there is no clear line that prohibits the non-EWF members from settling on the land.

In earlier times, the first repatriated black people were the Black Americans following Dr. Melaku’s Bayen’s call for cooperative Ethiopian and African-American relations. Although the first official black Americans were dispatched in the 1930s facilitated by Dr. Melaku during his stay in the United States for a study, the first recorded repatriates goes back to 1908 where Hubert F. Julian, the first aviator from Harlem and Hattie Coffee, a Graveyites also from New York and several others (Scott, 1993, p.183). Later on, he was joined by Rabbi Arnold Ford in 1930 (ibid.).

### **Attitude of the Ethiopia State: A silent mercy**

This chapter reviews the approach of the three regimes of Ethiopia: from the 1950s when the first Rastafari settlers arrived in Ethiopia until present time. Invited by Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-1974), the Rastafari were positioned as peripheral during the socialist (Dergue) regime (1974-1991), and still (since 1991-present) their quest for legitimacy remains unanswered.

#### *Golden times*

Before World War I, Ethiopians had had no contact with the diaspora except few (Harris, 1993, p.28). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the country witnessed western influence through missionary

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Reuben Kush, Addis Ababa, September 2017.

education, skilled workers, soldiers and others. This influence was not only by those who came in but also Ethiopians who went out of the country for education bringing modern development ideologies for rapid change and criticize the country's system needed at that time (ibid., pp.28-9).

According to a report from the Secretary of State of the United States, prior to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, in the 1920s and 1930s, a Young Ethiopian movement is said to be active in influencing Emperor Haile Selassie to replace the white foreign advisors in the various ministerial offices by black skilled staff from America. The members of the young group were western educated, one of the prominent adherent being Dr. Melaku Bayen (ibid, pp.30-31).

According the State Secretary, the movement *"definitely promises to engender a national resistance to foreign influence"* (ibid, p.31).

Not all foreign educated Ethiopians were regarded as patriots. High level officials of the imperial government were suspicious as some maintained strong ties with foreign communities in Addis Ababa. In contrast, Dr. Melaku and his colleagues advocated for the imperial government's independence from foreign advisors, especially the whites (ibid, p.32). The more Ethiopia became active in the international sphere, the harder the leadership at home was challenged by keeping the national identity (ibid.).

In 1937, General Rodolfo Graziani ordered the massacre of many Ethiopians including educated ones (ibid, p.33). This event and the overall Italian invasion forced the country to reform. More students were sent for foreign education pulling them to the Pan-African orbit. Indeed Melaku and his friends have been successful in changing the government policy from recruiting white foreigners to African Americans. As a result, educators like, Arnold Ford and his family- his wife, Mignon Ford, and their sons, Abiy and Yosef Ford; pilots- Edward Eugene Jones, James Williams Cheeks, John Robinson and Andrew Howard Hester, and technician Talbot contributed to the development of Ethiopia (ibid, pp.89,90,92). Talbot was the last African American who died in 1988 in Ethiopia.

These recruited African-Americans demonstrated the relevance of black skills for African development and reinforced the ties between Ethiopia and the black diaspora (ibid, p.152). The relation with African Americans continued through the establishment of settlement by the EWF. The EWF in Jamaica became more active than those in the New York Headquarters, making the former the next repatriates to the country. But their journey, unlike the African Americans was impacted by the regime change in Ethiopia in 1974.

### *The impact of the 1974 revolutionary change*

Ironically, Haile Selassie's efforts to modernize the country's education system also contributed to his downfall. Foreign-educated students started to call for a reform. Their request was also supported by the military and discontented ruling family members. These eventually led to the ousting of the last emperor who ruled the country for about 45 years (1930-1974).

The *Dergue* came to power with a famous motto “Land for the tillers” which came to effect in March 1975, six months after holding power. Lands were taken from royal families, individuals, and churches including the land from the Rastafari community in Shashemene. Ras Tages vividly remembers his first trip to Ethiopia during the *Dergue* regime. He explains that following the downfall of the monarchial rule, many Rastafari members were afraid of the actions of the military regime. He further states that as a result of the regime’s actions, except 18 rastafari families, the rest left to the west for safety.

*“When we came first here, myself and Ras Binghi,... from England, it was the height of the Dergue regime. The rumor was that Rasta could not come to Ethiopia [laughter], but we came.”*

However, their trip was not made possible just like that. He explains that their act of goodwill allowed them to step in the country. Ras Tages and his friends, when they heard of the devastating famine in Ethiopia in the early 1980s, launched a fundraising concert called “Jamming for Ethiopia”, and donated the raised money to Ethiopian Embassy in England. Building the relationship from there, they were able to land in Ethiopia for the first time in September 1982.

*“When we came, we used to go to Meskel Square everyday and apply for a travel permit to go to Shashemene; without it, you are not allowed to travel. The government officials were welcoming us, but because of fear, they just fogged us off...we took our chances and went to Shashemene.”<sup>66</sup>*

There, they witnessed the consequence of the regime change. The land was confiscated by under the implementation of the “Land for the Tillers” slogan. However, Ras Tages underlines that there were government officials who indeed knew the history of the land grant by Haile Selassie. They listened to the complaint of the Rastafari pioneers and endeavored to reverse the decision to give the land back to the Rastafari community. However, this effort initiated by Ras Tages and his friend benefitted only two families out of eighteen. The returned land was only 2.2 hectares per family. Unfortunately, the rest of the families did not get their land back and they were left with only the land spot where their houses are built. Furthermore, he expresses his impression as follows:

*“....So for us, we found that Ethiopians loved us and expressed that love as often as they could under triumph and circumstances. In the Dergue time, you couldn’t display the picture of His Imperial Majesty; you could not come with a book about his Majesty; you could not fly the flag with the Lion of Judah. These were the circumstances until this [EPRDF regime] took over. We became freer [in the sense] that we are able to display more of our culture and philosophies. ...as is enshrined in our constitution: ‘We promote love and goodwill amongst Ethiopians at home and abroad.’”<sup>67</sup>*

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Ras Tages King, Addis Ababa, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Ras Tades' perception of Mengistu Hailemariam's administration was not totally demonized. Some things were possible to do, such as getting back a small portion of the land grant. Some participants agree that Mengistu was not a hater of the Rastafari though he was supposedly the murderer of the emperor. Some other study participants recall the information passed to them by their pioneer settlers. Once President Mengistu Hailemariam was on a work visit to the southern part of Ethiopia, the Rastafari community members were standing on the road side for courtesy. As his car got closer to them, it slowed down, the window opened, and he waved at them, and they waved back to him. Moreover, while interviewed about the Rasta settlers in the country, Mengistu once said, *'Culturally, I found the Rastafari more Ethiopian than Ethiopians'*.

The major scars of the regime were its confiscation of the land grant, and ousting Emperor Haile Selassie who was a divine being for the Rastafari. Consequently, many left the country, and the flow of repatriation greatly interrupted. However, no deportation of Rastafari case has been reported during the Dergue regime.

### *After 1991*

The Ethiopian state has had a draconian law against the Rastafari community in the country for the last five decades. Since 1974, the government has opted for a silent mercy on the issue of the Rastafari returnees. Ever since the land grant in 1948, followed by repatriation of African descendants from the west and Caribbean, Ethiopia has gone through three different political changes: from the monarchical rule to Socialism and now to the semi-socialism and capitalism.

As early as 1976, writer Jesuit Owens pointed out that the Rastafarians in Ethiopia were treated as Ethiopians who came back home after hundreds of years in exile (Macleod, 2014: 192). The change in regimes has caused the change in government's approach towards this community. The state of Ethiopia, ever since the downfall of the emperor had an unofficial approach of silent mercy to the Rastafari community. It did not allow them to have citizenship nor did it attempt to chase them away because of their illegal stay. This has been going on for the past half a century. Interview with Tebikew, an officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, revealed that the request of the community for citizenship did not materialize because the majority, if not all, prefer to keep their non-Ethiopia passport which met Ethiopia's stalemate of dual citizenship. MacLeod (2014: 95) discussed about this to some degree saying that the representative of the municipal council in Shashemene and chairman of the Shashemene African Diaspora Community acknowledged the community's interest to keep their foreign passport. On the government side, there was lack of interest in migration issues. Only 0.7 percent of the Ethiopian population is classified as immigrant, and even then, the Rastafari are the marginal group. Most of the immigrants are from neighboring countries like Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. I asked him to comment if there are any measurements taken by the state to assist the repatriation or integration. He comments:

*"There has been none. Well, they are now [referring to the state announcement for recognition in July 2017]. But before the announcement, no, there is none. The government here.... We go to immigration and they say "Just go down to Shashemene,*

*no one is gonna trouble you.” So there has always been acceptance.....[But] before that you have to be strong in mind to repatriate to Ethiopia.””<sup>68</sup>*

The first time the Ethiopian government addressed publicly the issue of the Rastas was on a telephone interview with the Ethiopian ambassador to U.S.A., Jamaica and Mexico, with a renowned Jamaican hardliner journalist and Radio and TV personality, Mutabaruka in June 2016<sup>69</sup>. The ambassador in his interview with Mutabaruka stated that ‘the main problem is that Ethiopia does not allow dual citizenship.’ Following this, at the end of July 2017, the Ethiopian government announced the readiness to issue national Identity Cards for the nearly 1000 Rastafari who long have been seen as stateless in the country. The Foreign Minister spokesman at that time told the Associated Press *“In case of Rastafarians, we have three generations of people residing here that have blended well with our citizens. But sadly they were neither Caribbean nor Ethiopians so were somehow stateless. This national ID will address this problem.”*

### *Post Recognition Announcement*

My fieldwork departure was preceded by unexpected of news just a week before that the government of Ethiopia announced to provide recognition to the Rastafari community in the country. In order to have a better understanding, I interviewed Tebikew, the legal officer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia. My first question was “What are the measurements taken so far regarding the land grant and the legal status of Rastafari?” He commented that the land grant served only during the emperor time. Following changes in *Dergue* regime, land ownership was taken away like any other Ethiopians. Land was nationalized. In this regime, ownership of land for foreigners was provided only through investment. Not even Ethiopians had this right. The land grant was not the only problem they had. Their survival was also at stake caused by lack of residence and work permit. The community repeatedly submitted their request for it, but virtually nothing came out. In order to solve their problem and taking into consideration the historical tie and their contribution in image building of the country, recently the government has reached to a consensus to grant a national Identification Card to the community members.’

Since 1992, Ethiopia follows ethnic federalism where each regional state is administered by Regional governments and some of them with their own language, administrative territory, and flags. As mentioned already, the land grant of the Rastafari is located at 250 kilometers south of Addis Ababa, the capital, in Shashemene, in Oromia Regional State. Given this, the Rastafari deals with both local and federal governments. Considering the clear cut duties and responsibilities of the regional and federal government related to the community, Tebikew confirms:

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Reuben Kush, September 2017.

<sup>69</sup> *Ethiopian influence in Jamaican Culture, Cutting edge radio programme, June 2016, and Citizenship for Jamaicans high on Ethiopia’s agenda, Jamaican observer online*

*“We do work together and most of the inputs about the community come from the regional government’s assessment.... However, on the issue of the Identification Card<sup>70</sup> issued by the local administration was a mistake and illegal, since ID is given only to citizens. Any ID for foreign residents is issued by the federal Immigration Authority.”<sup>71</sup>*

Furthermore, interview with the legal officer on the questions why it took Ethiopia fifty years to reach such a decision and analysis of the directive is discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

## **Conclusion**

The Ethiopian government has opted for silence in addressing the challenges faced by the Rastafari community in spite of a growing number of complaints from the community through international media (Press TV, 2013; CCTV, 2014). On the other hand, the community is expanding and the emerging influence it is having on the popular culture of the Ethiopian youth such as clothing fashion, accessories of jewelries with Rastafarian colors, wearing dreadlocks, and reggae beats in Ethiopian songs have made the issue too obvious to be swept under the rug. Having discussed the Rastafari movement from its inception in the Caribbean to the adherents’ repatriation to Ethiopia, the chapter examines the views of the last three successive Ethiopian governments in order to lay out the foundation for what led to their challenges and paradoxes of belonging in Ethiopia. The overview in this chapter lends a hand as well as a background for the Ethiopian government’s issuance of a national ID to the Rastafari community. Below, I discuss the case studies from the field in detail.

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<sup>70</sup> The Shashemene *Kebele* administration issued a resident ID to the Rastafari community members. Although this has greatly helped the movement of the community, it was not supported by the constitution of the country.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Ato Tebikew Terefe from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia (MoFA), September 2017.

*"It is an irony, to come to Ethiopia and be called Jamaican, when outside of Ethiopia, we are known as Ethiopians."*<sup>72</sup> Mama Ijahnya Christian

## **Chapter Three: Deconstructing Ironies and Paradoxes**

### **Introduction**

This line of topic is plotted during the course of the fieldwork as I witness that the Rastafari community in Ethiopia not merely faces problems to resolve but also that their lives are full of ironies and paradoxes of belonging (ness). This necessitated the deconstruction of the ironies and paradoxes of the Rastafari in Ethiopia. It is worth noting that not all ironies are paradoxes and not all paradoxes are ironic. However, there is a crossover that paradoxes could be ironic. This research perseveres at the later.

This chapter provides experiential accounts with reflexivity and introspectively apprehended evidences. In addition, it elucidates the empirical assessment that led to the subject matter, deconstruction of ironies and paradoxes. The unfolding of the paradoxes is presented content-wise by dividing anecdotal evidences including the contradictory attitude of the Ethiopian government. Finally, it presents the concluding remarks.

### **Manifestation of the Ironies and Paradoxes**

Lack of legal capacity has been the most instrumental tool used against the Rastafari community by the regional administration in order to deprive them of access to land, capital, and, above all, the basic human rights. After allowing them to suffer for decades, in July 2017, the Ethiopian government announced to grant a national ID to the returnees ([www.ena.gov.et](http://www.ena.gov.et), 28 July 2017). It is sarcastical because, in reality, most of the community members do not fulfill one of the mandatory requirements, which is to have a valid passport. Their situation is a catch 22 because even if they want to renew their passport, most of Caribbean embassies are neither represented in Ethiopia nor in the neighboring countries and they cannot travel due to lack of legal documents (see Chapter 6). This chapter discusses anecdotal incidents that manifest the paradoxical situation.

### ***When home doesn't feel like at home, ... it is still home***

The very nature of the Rastafari relationship with Ethiopia and Ethiopians offers a contradiction, considering that their Fifty years stay in the country encompasses notions of 'otherness and belongingness' (Bonacci, 2015: 36) at the same time. For a group of Rastafarians in the Caribbean in the 1930s, particularly in Jamaica, living in the midst of economic and social quandary, Ethiopia was seen as the Promised Land and Ethiopianness was becoming the newly adopted identity. Garvey's "Back-to-Africa Movement", the coronation of a black (God) King from Africa, His Majesty Haile Selassie I in 1930, coupled with his later invitation to all black people in the West to come and live in Ethiopia (Bonacci, 2015),

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<sup>72</sup> Quote from interview with Mama Ijahnya Christian, Shashemene, 19 January 2018.



and Robert Nesta Marley's 'Exodus Psalms' (Campbell, 1987: p.144) all together inspired and restored the hope and pride and fueled the Rastafari movement. In addition, it enhanced their repatriation mainly to Ethiopia and other parts of Africa such as Ghana, South Africa and Malawi. Currently, Ethiopia is 'home' to less than 1,000 Rastafarians located in Shashemene, Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar. Shashemene remains the heart of the repatriation.

Nevertheless, the challenges of the Rastafari are multi-faceted ones, and mind boggling-making one think the 'promised land' has turned into a 'cursed land.' The biggest challenges are legal issues, land ownership (of the land grant), freedom of cultural expressions such as religious practice, and ganja ritual. Moreover, amongst the daily hardships, they experience severe challenges such as language, corruption, theft, and misperception by the local peoples. These have led their lives to be full of contradictions.

I was fortunate to take part in the first All Africa Rastafari Gathering in Shashemene, 1-7 November 2017, under the theme of "Intra-trade between the Rastafari in Africa." Although initially, the organizers wanted to limit it to Africa, the conference got crashed by the Rastafari community from outside Africa mainly from the U.K, U.S.A., and as far as from Brazil. 13 African countries were represented in the meeting. Taking part in the conference was two for one. On the one hand, the convention gave me opportunity to learn about the Rastafari current line of thinking and the theme of the conference. At the same time, the gathering offered the opportunity to properly discover the global Rastafari community and the commonalities of their adversities (see Chapter 5). With the assistance of Adam, I organized a group discussion with the Rasta youth from Shashemene; Isaac 19, IhoJah 13 and Zion 12 and Adam himself who was 13. Isaac's family, originally from Jamaica, repatriated from England to Ethiopia when he was two years old and all the others were born and raised in Shashemene. Except Adam who has an Ethiopian mother, the rest have Caribbean parents. Regarding the way they are perceived by the local community, Isaac emotionally speaks:

*For me, I don't like to be treated as a foreigner. Because in England, I was a foreigner, over here I'm a foreigner, in America I was a foreigner. So, where are my people? Where will I be one? If the English are not my people, if Africans are not my people, if Americans are not my people, then where am I? God created me with people. I have to answer this. Over here, they don't read their history. If they want to read their history, they will understand that. Ok I may have come from foreign place, but I am not a foreigner! Over here, they teach foreign history, so they won't learn their own history. If they don't teach their own history, they will never be able to move forward. You will always stay where you stay. Stuck where they are.<sup>73</sup>*

The Rastafari movement started as cultural resistance to their slave masters in the Caribbean. In the process, they found the collective African identity which they grabbed from all parts of Africa (Campbell, 1987) in order to connect to their ancestors back home. Reality did not meet

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Isaac, Shashemene, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

their expectation- they were called foreigners in the supposedly home. When I asked Isaac where home is for him, he undoubtedly answers that Ethiopia is always home for him. Even though he is called a foreigner, he strongly maintains his belongingness to Ethiopia.

***“They become the Babylon they ran away from”<sup>74</sup>***

The first striking ironical situation is that the Rastafari in Ethiopia ran away from ‘Babylon’ [oppressor- usually referred to the west] and come to ‘home’. But they have become part of the Babylon they ran away from, as they are looked at as foreigners and their repatriation lacks integration. To begin with, those who repatriated from the Caribbean and the west assumed that they were going back to their distant relatives, their ancestors back home, and that they would be embraced and be one with their brothers and sisters. The reality, however, is that once they got on the ground they were treated as foreigners. They become the Babylon that they are running from. To understand this easily I turn to a Rastafari sister’s explanation.

One of the biggest ironies for the Rastafari community members is being addressed as Jamaicans or “*faranji*” in Ethiopia, as Ethiopians outside of Ethiopia.<sup>75</sup>

Desta Meghoo , originally from Jamaica but lived and worked as a Jurist doctor in the United States, came to Ethiopia in 2005 during the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of Bob Marley on the mandate of celebrating his birthday at Africa level in collaboration with the African Union working with Rita Marley, the wife of the late Bob Marley and her family. Ever since then, she lives in Ethiopia and is part of the Rastafari community in Addis Ababa. Dr. Desta asserts that due to the post-traumatic experience (i.e. referring to slavery, discrimination against their ideology and appearance), the Rastafari in the Caribbean practice a separate sphere from the ‘Babylon system’ when it comes to social life. She added that when they come to Zion [Ethiopia], they buy a plot of land and continue to experience the same type of segregated life: the local people perceive them as oppressor. She softly affirms:

*“If you [the Rastafari] come home and build this beautiful house on 2000m<sup>2</sup> and if I [I refers to the native] am told, who has lived here,...my ancestors, I can only have 300 m<sup>2</sup> and I cannot afford to feed my babies everyday. I’m gonna hate you! You know, it is just out of poverty, because I’m gonna feel in my heart, every night I put my baby to bed, next door this beautiful mansion and this person wouldn’t even think of me as a neighbor. They don’t ask if my baby is eating tonight. That is painful [pause] because it is our space. Jah and history shall record your judgment. How do you wanna be recorded? What is your legacy? What did you do?”<sup>76</sup>*

Adam’s experience validates Dr. Desta’s reasoning. He pointed out that even though his mom is Ethiopian which made his experience easier to cope with neighbors, the integration is not

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<sup>74</sup> This quote is from Erin Macleod (2014), *Visions of Zion: Ethiopians and Rastafari in the Search for the Promised Land*.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Mama Ijahnya, Shashemene, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Mama Desta, Addis Ababa, December 2107.

complete as *“the neighbors are jealous of us. They say to me ‘this is not your country, you should not have this big yard and we have a small yard because you got money to buy a big yard.’”*<sup>77</sup>

Another illustrative example is the Twelve Tribes of Israel mansion’s elimination of Ethiopian Rastas from membership. Ras Kesh who was an Ethiopian Rastafari who returned to Ethiopia after living in Europe for many years was rejected by this sect<sup>78</sup>. Bonacci’s (2015, p.331) decipherment of the case suits my reasoning of the Rastafari in Ethiopia. A participant in Bonacci’s research recalls the Twelve Tribes was a minority in the whole Rastafari movement in the beginning and now they are replicating that on the Ethiopian Rastas by pushing them to the margin (ibid).

### ***(New) African identity***

The new building of African identity by Rastas is ironic. This identity is not new, but it is what was and still practiced by Africans. This identity, though African ironically, has become a springboard for creating “them and us” dichotomy between the Rastafari repatriates in Ethiopia and the locals, lack of freedom of cultural expressions including their appearance and spiritual practice such as the ganga smoking (see Chapter Four).

The irony is the cultural expressions of the returnees are identities built from different parts of Africa including Ethiopia. For instance, their dietary practices are taken from Ethiopian Tewahido [Orthodox] Church; vegan dietary, their dreadlock relates to the *bahtawi* (hermit) of Ethiopia and the *sangomas* in South Africa. Albeit, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church does not acknowledge that ganja is speculated that the monks use it in the monastery and in the church mixed with incense ([www.mereja.com](http://www.mereja.com) February 2014).

The amalgamation of the African experiences that the Rastafari try to rip and build their identity is sarcastically *“off-putting to some [including Africans] because they don’t understand it”*<sup>79</sup>. During slavery, there was a prohibition of return to the motherland, separation of the slaves [Africans] by language and tribe, and interdiction of marriage so that there is no social structure and no reading. Thus, they cannot connect with the past. As a result, the Africans built this ingenuity in clothing, language, changing words and phrases of English. This is all due to the desire of the people to redefine themselves, recognize this heritage. Unintendedly, however, this African identity building becomes a new ironic identity.

The other striking contradiction is that none of the prominent figures of the Rastafari movement in whom the adherents live by their example are non-Rastafari, non-dreadlocks, non-smokers of marijuana. For instance, Emperor Haile Selassie I, though depicted as the messiah, himself was a believer of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He had no dreadlocks. Other examples are Marcus Garvey, Leonard Howell, and Prophet Gad of the Twelve Tribes of

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Adam Ras Kawintseb, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Ras Kesh Kassaye in October 2017, Addis Ababa

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Dr. Desta Meghoo December 2017, Addis Ababa

Israel. They may have been believers in the deity or mystic figure of Haile Selassie, but none of them had dreadlocks.

### ***Flawed ideology: The Paradox of Rastafari movement***

Some call the Rastafari movement contending it disengages itself from existing social and political reality but do not try to change it (Kebede et al, 2000, p.320). In this research, many of the participants expressing “Rasta has no business in politics,” affirms that the Rastafari Movement was, and still is, not a political movement. Part of the reasoning is that it lacks appropriate organization and strong leaders in the forefront of the movement. In contrast, Kebede and Knottnerus (1998, p.xx) call the movement a political-religious movement. Kebede et al. (2000, p. 322 & 327) elucidate the reason behind with the adherents continued allegiance despite the movement’s failure to bring alternative to the political system that they blame for the impoverished socio-economic status of its adherents. This is the movement’s compelling ability to provide alternative culture to reinforce collective identity so that they stay within the confines. Perhaps, the Rastafari find it hard to admit it is a political movement, but they believe they can lead their adherents independent of a government system.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, spiritually, the movement has a paradoxical approach to Christianity. It is dependent and so hostile to Christianity (1998, Murrell et al, p.2). There are contradictory spiritual practices. As an analogy, Priest Emmanuel Charles is regarded the reincarnate of Black Christ in a priestly state without mother and father. A close friend and a sistren from the Rastafari community told me that the high priest of the Bobo Shanti camp in Shashemene was actually one of the few people who witnessed the death of Prince Emmanuel in Jamaica<sup>81</sup> (see Chapter One). These priests refused to bury the dead body and waited for Priest Emmanuel’s incarnation like that of Jesus Christ. However, after three days, they could not stand the smell of the decaying body anymore. Finally, they laid him to rest. *“The same priest, who was the spectator of this whole thing, still preaches about the Godliness of Prince Emmanuel. .... I mean how foolish and insanely paradoxical is that?”* Sister Makeda [name changed] comments. She believes that the spiritual wing of Rastafari is crammed with contradictions. In search of truth, she revealed that she has been part of the three major mansions, but only found each conflicting with their basic religious ideologies. This eventually made her give up her allegiance to any of them.

### ***Contradictory attitude of the Ethiopian state***

The Rastafari community was not recognized by the state officially for about five decades. There appears to be a contradictory attitude of the state since the country grants a silent mercy to the community by not harassing them for legal issues though they have suffered from the consequence of denial of documentation. The unusual resiliency of the state is a typical example that unravels the contradicting approach towards the Rastafari community.

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Sister Ijahnya.

<sup>81</sup> He is also known as Priest Emmanuel Charles, or King Emmanuel Charles.

Ever since 1930, Ethiopia has been receiving repatriates of the black people from the West and Caribbean. However, the country's approach to the repatriates has been in absolute contradiction since 1974. African Americans, not the Rastafari, who first welcomed Dr. Melaku Beyan's call to come and develop Ethiopia. After the stipulation of the land grant by Emperor Haile Selassie and a group of Rastafari of the EWF representatives of its local in Jamaica visited Ethiopia, the Rastafari started to return to Ethiopia in the 1960s (see chapter One). As mentioned earlier, many repatriates left the country after the communist *Dergue* regime took over in 1974. However, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) removed the *Dergue* in 1992, many came back. Currently, the number of the Rastafari community is around 1000. Nonetheless, the two regimes failed to adopt any clear policy towards this community. Thus, they remain undocumented. In contrast, no member of the community has been deported because of legal issues. In July 2017, the Ethiopian government adopted a directive that enables the Rastafari to get a national identification card that provides them rights and privileges granted to the foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin. However, the prerequisites set to acquire the ID make it impossible for the majority of the members. So, the paradoxical state approach still continues (see Chapter 6 for details).

### ***Resilience of the State***

*"In Ethiopia, nothing is as it seems"* Mama Ijahnya

I left Shashemene in the middle of an ongoing protest in the Oromia National Region State. For this reason, I was following the news on social media since Shashemene was one of the hotbeds of the protest. In March 6, 2018, one of the community members posted that they are under threat. For clarification I resort to Sister Ijahnya. She explained that the threat came after one community member won a court case over land dispute he had with his local neighbor. As surprising as this is, Sister Ijahnya added that one of the Ethiopian neighbors of the Rastaman told him that she was offered a bribe of 1000 birr (approximately 37 US dollars) to testify against the Rastaman.

The Ethiopian law on land states in bold that a foreigner cannot own fixed properties like land and house. Therefore, it comes with a surprise when a Rastaman, whom according to the state is categorized as foreigner wins a court case over land dispute. Though such rare cases happened before, there is no Rastafari with a foreign passport getting a valid certificate for a land registration or a house.

One of the academic suicidal committed against the Ethiopian education system is the state's strategy of depriving its citizens of learning the history of the country, particularly the achievements of the predecessors. EPRDF makes all kinds of efforts to take every credit by demonizing everything of the past regimes. It tries to build a new history under the motto "The New Ethiopia". I remember, during my primary and junior school, the fundamental foundation of the history subject was praising Marxism, and disgracing the monarchical ruling. EPRDF also has continued to do the same: disgracing the Imperial rule and Dergue regime. In this respect, Haile Selassie has become the enemy of the successive regimes.

As Santa, the Ethiopian Rasta youth said his generation learnt about the emperor, in his word “through the back door,” through reggae music. Reggae musicians like Ras Kawintseb were told by the Ethiopian television, not to use the Ethiopian flag used during the monarchical time as the state does not broadcast visuals that contain such flags. Same was true for radio. When my husband was working as a Reggae Roots DJ for a state radio, he was told not to mention Haile Selassie’s name. It was in the midst of all of these that Dr. Desta was allowed to organize an art exhibition at the National Museum under the title, “Ras Tafari: The Majesty and the Movement” devoted to the celebration, preservation, interpretation and understanding of the contribution of Emperor Haile Selassie in February 2015<sup>82</sup>.

The above discussion demonstrates the conflicting approach of Ethiopia towards the the Rastafari community. The law of the land versus the Rastaman’s win of court case over land dispute, and the ban of Haile Selassie’s name and image on media versus allowing a world class exhibition entirely focused on the emperor at the national museum exhibit not only the resilience of the state but also the paradox of the state at the same time.

## Conclusion

“*Qine*” is an Ethiopian style of speech where one says one thing while implying a different meaning in an expression. It is usually expressed in a poetic form or in a prose containing the two parts of *sem* and *werk* (literally ‘wax’ and ‘gold’, respectively). The former refers to a denotative meaning, and the latter to the connotative meaning. In other words, the apparent meaning of the expression is *sem* ‘wax’, and the hidden or intended meaning *werk* ‘gold’ (Girma, 2010, pp.175-6). My interest falls in the exploration of the hidden meaning. In my mentality of I-am-close-enough-and-so-I-know, I assumed that their stories are nothing but full of challenges, and, hence, home is not felt like home anymore. However, my own presumption has deceived me. I got to see only the wax of the circumstance- their challenges. The gold is far deeper and can be found only by digging the mind blowing challenges and alarming at the endurance of the Rastafari community. It is far down the challenges that the paradoxes lie.

I entered in the field with a heavy heart of finding challenges of cultural expression of the Rastafarians in Ethiopia, but through the research, I was able to find out their endurance is as heavy as the challenge and their situation is full of ironies and paradoxes emanating from the state attitude towards the community, the local people and themselves.

The Rastafari life even in its most mundane manifestation is loaded with paradoxes. The repatriation itself is not easy economically; and those who repatriated do not get what they expect: citizenship, and legitimacy in the country. The community suffers from all adversities on their face in the supposedly ‘promised land.’ Zion, home, motherland, etcetera, where they hoped to be relieved from all the tribulations and live in the ‘dreamland’ as they imagined it. On the other hand, as a result of this, and the way they are viewed by the host, they have

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Dr. Desta Meghoo, December 2017.

become the Babylon they ran away from in the west and the Caribbean. The community's politico-religious doctrine serves for another contradiction. On the one hand, the movement claims for its detachment from politics, but, on the other hand, the continued preaching of scolding the political systems because of the ill socio-economic status of the people has influence on the large reproaching devotion of its adherents. The spiritual aspect of the movement lends another hand for inconsistency. The Messiah of Rastafari, Emperor Haile Selassie, never claimed he was a God. In addition, the dogmas of the mansions are disproved by its practices. The ironic and paradoxical situations are accompanied by the state's contradictory approach of silent mercy without recognition. The contradiction is furthered by the recent recognition of the state that fails to include the majority of the community members.

*"Challenges are everywhere,....so better to face them at home."*<sup>83</sup>

## **Chapter Four: Challenges of Rastafari in Ethiopia**

### **Introduction**

Ever since the 1900s, African descendants followed by the Rastafari from West Indies have been repatriating to Ethiopia (Gebrekidan, 1998, pp.151-186 & Bonacci, 2015, p.27). However, their life after repatriation is filled with various adversities ranging from expression of their cultural heritage, legal status and denial of the land grant by Emperor Haile Selassie I to the Black people of the world. As a result, the repatriation to the Promised Land has not been accompanied by integration yet.

This chapter explores how the challenges are manifested in the Rastafari society in Ethiopia. While doing so, the research relies predominantly on open-ended interview method mixed with introspection. The study has also used participant observation in some instances. For a comprehensive understanding of the numerous forms of the Rastafari challenges, the research has thematized the challenges according to their distinctive nature such as cultural expression, acquiring legal status, land grant, challenges of the everyday and challenges within the community itself. The investigation notes a great deal of evidence that demonstrates the Rastafari's resilience in the face of the daily adversities.

Primarily, the chapter discusses the grief associated with the legal status of the Rastafari community, the key factor of the challenges. In the second place, illustration is offered on how Rasta culture is contested. The struggle with the land grant followed by the daily confrontations of the community is next in order. The daily miseries consist of misperception; lack of integration, exclusion; corruption; theft; ethnic conflicts; challenges in business; the bureaucracy in the country; and the health issues caused by the city garbage in the residential area of the community. Challenges within the Rastafari community as opposed to with the local and government are also discussed. Finally, the chapter foregrounds some of the implications.

### **The Root of all Challenges: Legality**

The issue of legal status is a cross-cutting subject in this chapter and throughout the thesis since it is a root cause of all the problems. For the last five decades, the Rastafari returnees deprived of becoming citizens or legal residents in Ethiopia. What makes the issue much worse is that the deprivation also applies to the Rastafari children born in Ethiopia. In July 2017, the Ethiopia granted recognition for this community<sup>84</sup>. Correcting of the injustice made by denying

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<sup>83</sup> The common phrase heard from the participants of this research.

<sup>84</sup> Details of what happened after the recognition is announced by the government of Ethiopia are analyzed rigorously in Chapter 6.



their legal status for 50 years would mean providing a solution to the challenges they face. The lack of legal status made the challenges of the community be in a vicious circle. This is because they cannot move from point A to B without it. Thus, legalization is vital to all aspects of their lives. Concerning the legal status, the participants make remarks. The following are some of the examples.

Sister Wendy:

*“A stumbling block is what I call it.”* Said Sister Wendy when I asked her what the hindrances of the Returnees in her six years stay in Ethiopia are. She continued, *“This legal status issue is a barrier not to work, travel, economic sustainability.”*<sup>85</sup>

Reuben Kush:

*“Living here day-to-day we find it difficult to put food on the table,...it is difficult to travel around Ethiopia let alone outside. Some of us, we don’t have the right ID, if we are stopped [by the police] we have problem,... Because we don’t have enough money, a lot of us is in Shash and they don’t come out of there unless to pick someone from the airport or meeting with government offices.”*<sup>86</sup>

Lacking legal status for the community means quite everything: inability to work, lack of freedom of movement, economic unsustainability. unentitlement to properties such as land and house, inability to send children to school (due to wearing their dreadlocks), inability to attend weddings and funerals, and denial of policy and budget for the community to self-support and support family. Again, it means being limited to contribute to the economic development of Shashemene, a mandate given by the Emperor to EWF. Moreover, the legal status issue that particularly affected the elder generation is haunting the younger generation as well especially the amount of tuition fees has become quite substantial as they are categorized as a foreigner.

With regard to cultural expressions, deficient in legal status insinuated religious freedom such as registration of religious institution and permitting their spiritual practices like ganja smoking for spiritual purposes.

The Ethiopian government has taken the Rastafari community by surprise by taking a step to acknowledge the Rastafari community after five decades and to issue national identification (ID) card issued to foreign nationals and Ethiopians by birth (see Chapter 6). This was on the news in July 2017. The process was not as simple as the volume of the news. For instance it was after nine months, in March 2018, that the first ID was issued. So far, only a handful of member of the community got the ID. Notwithstanding, the returnees are hopeful but have their reservation on whether this information will be passed on down to the implementing bodies like immigration, court houses, land administration offices, educational institution,

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Sister Wendy, Shashemene, 21 January 2018

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Reuben Kush, Addis Ababa, September 2017.

health offices and the like. There are discontented returnees because of the hold up of the implementation of the ID. Qes Banduli says: *“It has been like six months that they put up on the news that on the big media internationally,... the Rastafari get legal status, but InI here same way and nothing has been done and it has been swept under the carpet and all this thing is wrong... the longer it take to get our residency, they have no respect for us.”*<sup>87</sup>

Ras Kabinda who tried to get the ID, but failed to acquire it, strongly expresses: *“Here in Ethiopia, it is the most backward mentality. It is the same day that they said this on the TV, that same day they wanted to charge me 300,000 birr because I wanted to leave the country. And it is them who keep me here. I have to close the company. So, there is no justice, no equality, nothing like that exists here when you come to InI in Ethiopia. The Oromo government gave the Oromo people “carta plan” [land registration certificate] while they denied the Rasta community. That [not having the legal status] gives them the right and purpose. They can take advantage of us and there is no one who stands up to defend InI cause.”*<sup>88</sup>



Fig. 24. Ras Kabinda, in his residence compound, Shashemene.  
Picture by Mahlet A. Beyecha

On the other hand there are members of the community who are sympathetic towards the government and do not agree to be called illegal. They contend that although the government is aware of the Rastafari's legal status, it still let the community stay and this is recognition by itself. Taking their argument further, they add that however long one stays undocumented, there has not been a single deportation case of a Rastafari unless it is related to crime like ganja smoking and even that happens after a prison statement<sup>89</sup>. Ras Ibi from Shashemene underscores: *“We know that we are legal”* and forward a question to me: *“If we weren't legal,*

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Qes Banduli, Shashemene, January 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Ras Kabinda, Shashemene, 20 January 2018.

<sup>89</sup> This is a view shared by Dr. Desta Meghoo and Sister Ijahnya Christian, women elder participants from the participants.

*how come a thousand or more people come from foreign countries and settle in the country, buy pieces of land or build houses, send their children to school open companies, if we weren't legal? That couldn't work. So, we are always legal."*<sup>90</sup>

### **Challenges of cultural Expression**

The Rasta appearance represents a counter-cultural stance against the slave masters culture in the Caribbean in particular and in the Babylon culture in general. The politics of cultural confrontations in the Caribbean expressed itself in cultural language (Rasta dialect), dress; music, and, ultimately, religion, collected from different African countries. There are, dashikis, hairstyles- Afro and hair-lock; and Rasta colors- red, gold and green flags and decorations. These expressions are deeply rooted "in an objective material base of poverty and dispossession" (Tafari, 2001: 52-3).

Beneath the politics of cultural confrontation globally and nationally lie a secondary cultural contradictions embedded in ethno-nationalism. For instance, in the period of 1966-1988, according to Tafari, ethnic groups like the Oromo, Tigre, and Somali were discontent with the ruling- Amhara cultural tradition. Their primary and secondary cultural confrontations directly relate to the Rastafari challenges in Ethiopia (ibid, p.52).

Studies show that African cultural expressions and reflections are performed, manifested proudly amongst the African descendants in Brazil than one would find with similar African traditions religions within the continent. Perhaps, this explains why there is a persisting longingness for foreign culture and migration to outside the continent when the continent's old diaspora consistently identify themselves with Africa and celebrate their Africanness (Prah, 2012, p.5). Yet, their cultural symbols counteract when they reach the motherland.

### ***Dreadlock: Deadlock of Rastafari?***

Afro hairstyles, beards for the male, head-ties, and scarves for female with Ethiopian flag colors, green, gold (yellow) and red, used as identifier of Rastafari in Jamaica before their acceptance (Murrell et al, 1998, p.76). Dreadlocks, known as also knotty dread are a fierce symbol like the lion's mane. It is as well considered as crown (referring to the real His Imperial Majesty's crown). Owens persists that many misunderstand the meaning of dread in the Rastafari language. "Dread is an experience; it is the awesome, fearful confrontation of a people with a primordial but historically denied racial selfhood" (Owens, 1976, p.5).

The discrimination against bearded Rastafari has been a dispute from the beginning of the movement. For instance, in bearded or dreadlock Rastamen were not allowed to be members of the local EWF in Jamaica in the early 1940s. It was also a point of debate amongst themselves. Bonacci (2015, p.166) explains that there are three categories of Rastafari: the combsome, the bearded, and the wearers of dreadlocks. Bonacci adds that the dreadlock wearers are opposed to all baldheads.

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Ras Ibi, Addis Ababa, 28 January 2018.

After dreadlocks were accepted, certainly in the 1950s, its role was beyond a style, one that separated those who were hard-core or militant Rastafari dedicated from the weak-hearted (Murrell et al, 1998, p.76). The Rastafari persistence for their cultural identity not only brought confrontation from within but also anywhere else in the world. For example, they are discriminated by the Black Jamaicans in Jamaica. Even more striking is the alienation by the nation they thought are blood-bonded to.

In respect to the Rastafari in Ethiopia, it is largely the youth at school facing the challenges of discrimination because of their dreadlocks. Zion, 12, says the non-Rastafari schoolmates bully him: *“There is a mop on your head and the teachers do not like how I am [referring to his hair].”*<sup>91</sup>

As for adults, they feel the pain of discrimination because of their dreadlock or in general their cultural expression when they look for a job. For the Rastafari in Shashemene, when it comes to older adults, dreadlock is hardly a problem. However, this is not because Ethiopia is different. The main reason for the older adults to avoid the confrontation is because they are undocumented. This means that they are ineligible to work or even to apply for work. That is why they depend on self-employment like farming in their yard. Nevertheless, this does not mean they are immune. Going to government or private offices and to get things done is difficult, as they are mistreated. While in Shashemene, I had to get administrative works done at *kebele* [lowest district level]. For this, I had to visit the *kebele* offices. When I got there, although I am an Ethiopian, I always had to get rid of any traces of Rasta symbols on me like headscarf with Rasta color and hide all my dreadlocks inside my scarf. However, after all these, still being Rasta wife can be a reason for mistreatment in these offices. Sister T, a repatriated Rastawoman from the United States recalls how she was laughed at when she was in grade four by black students who used to tease her saying, *“Don’t you know where the comb is?”* Reflecting on this, she says:

*“When black people have dreadlocks they not only are intrigued by white people but they also are degraded by their own [black] people because a Rastaman or Rastawoman is a constant reminder of what black people do not want to be.”*<sup>92</sup>

History testifies that the Rastafari in Jamaica was confronted by the black Jamaicans and this was the case for Sister T. in the U.S. and for me in Ethiopia. My mother tried different things to convince me to cut my dreadlocks. She tried to take me to the Church to get me baptized with the *tsebel* [holy water] with the assumption that locking my hair was a devil’s work. She also used elder friends of family to mediate and to get me cut my hair. Except foreigners and pro-reggae Ethiopians, most locals have scorned me.

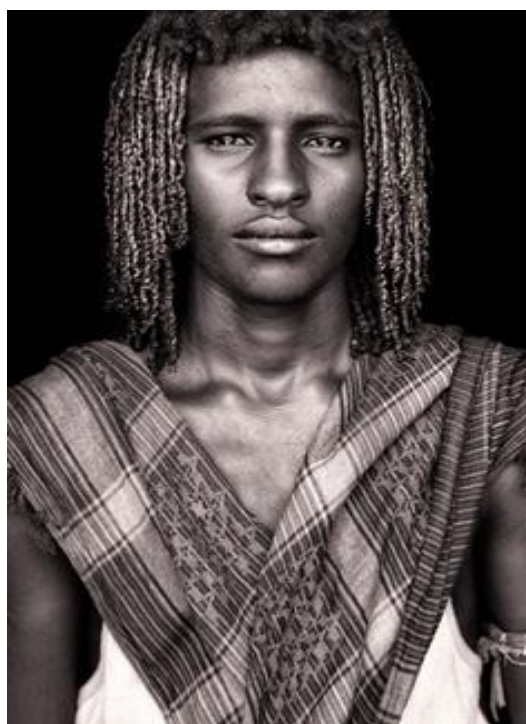
The irony is that dreadlock is not a foreign culture to Ethiopia. The Afar tribe in the northeast and the Hamar women in the south Ethiopia have dreadlocks. Among the Konso in the

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with young Zion, Shashemene, 5 November 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Sister T., Shashemene, 20 January 2018.

southwest, dreadlocks are worn by elderly women as a sign of having a grandson<sup>93</sup>. Though not accepted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the hermits of the church are allowed to have dreadlocks. It is the hermits that the Rastafari identify with next to the biblical story of Samson, renowned for the prodigious strength he derived from his uncut hair (Book of Judges, Chapter 13-16). The Jamaican-English dictionary (Cassidy, 2002) translates the word dreadlock as “Hair uncut and plaited, as worn by the most fully committed adherents of the Ras Tafari cult.” According to Cassidy, these men of dreadlocks were the Ethiopian warriors. The picture below are the Afar tribe, in the northeast Ethiopia, and the Hamar down south have plaited hair (see pictures below).



*Fig 25 : An Afar man from Northeast Ethiopia with dreadlock<sup>94</sup>*

<sup>93</sup> I got this information from Dr. Ongaye Oda Orkaydo, a researcher from Dilla University, Ethiopia, and a visiting fellow at the African Studies Centre Leiden, The Netherlands.

<sup>94</sup> The men of Afar tribe use butter to style their hair.

[https://www.google.com/search?q=Afar+men+dreadlocks&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=V4zaXlLfCHnWdM%253A%252CfjEB1ZkgiNlvHM%252C\\_&usg=AI4\\_-kT5jNMQbVvk7SF8jggq4OK9FoZH-Kw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiW34WlxqveAhXNsKQKHXLsBOYQ9QEwAHoECAQQBA#imgrc=V4zaXlLfCHnWdM:](https://www.google.com/search?q=Afar+men+dreadlocks&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=V4zaXlLfCHnWdM%253A%252CfjEB1ZkgiNlvHM%252C_&usg=AI4_-kT5jNMQbVvk7SF8jggq4OK9FoZH-Kw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiW34WlxqveAhXNsKQKHXLsBOYQ9QEwAHoECAQQBA#imgrc=V4zaXlLfCHnWdM:)



*Fig.26. A Hamer woman from Southern Ethiopia with dreadlock hairstyles<sup>95</sup>*

One important point to raise, on the impact of wearing dreadlocks amongst the youth in Ethiopia is different for a Rasta youth in Addis Ababa and Shashemene. The later, has its own community school, established by the Rastafari society in the city. However, since the school is open for all residents in the city, ridiculing the Rasta students by non-Rastafari students still exists.

In Addis Ababa, international schools and only one private school allow dreadlock children in their schools. In 2014, when a private school rejected my son because of his hair, I found it highly contradictory in a country that follows an ethnic federal system, and yet does not to respect and tolerate multiculturalism. Of course, the national constitution has nowhere mentioned about school dress code including how children's hair should be in school. The only commentary is for the Muslim women to be accepted with their hijab in school and at work places. Our conclusion would then be that the law of the land does not give a provision that supports those who exercise the banning of dreadlock children.

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<sup>95</sup> The women in the Hamar tribe use butter with ochre to style their hair. The Hamar, also spelled Hamar, are an Omotic community inhabiting South Western Ethiopia. They live in Hamar Wereda (or district), a fertile part of the Omo valley region. Source: and [https://www.google.com/search?tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=Su\\_WW7mSCcflkgXtnl-wAw&q=Hamar+women+dreadlocks&oq=Hamar+women+dreadlocks&gs\\_l=img.3...103514.107828.0.107979.2.22.0.0.0.81.1042.22.22.0....0...1c.1.64.img..0.12.606...0j0i67k1j0i10k1j0i30k1j0i5i30k1j0i8i30k1j0i8i10i30k1j0i24k1j0i10i24k1.0.QKG9I0n78cA](https://www.google.com/search?tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=Su_WW7mSCcflkgXtnl-wAw&q=Hamar+women+dreadlocks&oq=Hamar+women+dreadlocks&gs_l=img.3...103514.107828.0.107979.2.22.0.0.0.81.1042.22.22.0....0...1c.1.64.img..0.12.606...0j0i67k1j0i10k1j0i30k1j0i5i30k1j0i8i30k1j0i8i10i30k1j0i24k1j0i10i24k1.0.QKG9I0n78cA)



### ***Ganja: 'Holy herb'***

*"Ganja or herb is a plant that grows everywhere. Rasta didn't invent it." Mama (Dr.) Desta Meghoo*

Another significant symbol of a Rastafari is the ganja sacrament or ritual, often known as amongst the Rastafari the holy herb. The mainstream refers to it as cannabis and marijuana though there is a big debate about it<sup>96</sup>. Emily Dufton, author of "Grass Roots: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Marijuana activism in America", said; "no other drug has inspired this kind of debate and been tied to issues from war to racism to criminal justice" ([www.theverge.com](http://www.theverge.com) viewed on 28/6/18). The consumption of ganja in Jamaica amongst the Rastafari community is very common; it is smoked (or steamed), used in cooking and for the preparation of tea and other beverages. This "healing of the nation" has an important place in the traditional medicine in Jamaica and wherever the Rastafari exist. The use of cannabis for local medicine is more advanced and widely used in the Rastafari community in South Africa (Philander, 2018).

Distinctly, the Rastas use ganja is for spiritual purposes. The ritual of smoking the herb can also be compared with Christian churches ([www.sensiseeds.com](http://www.sensiseeds.com) viewed on 28/6/18). The rituality of the herb is also connected with Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Particularly, the monks in the remote monasteries<sup>97</sup> consume the herb significantly, and yet this is not recognized by the officials of EOC, and probably will not be acknowledged soon.

Possessing, using or trafficking in illegal drugs in Ethiopia results in severe penalties, and offenders could face long jail sentences and heavy fines. Even after the legalizing of marijuana by some of the developed countries, there is no discussion on any media type about its benefits in terms of medicine. A Rasta youth, Adam, 13, tells:

*"They call us obeah<sup>98</sup>. The thing is they don't know about ganja...they just call it drug with bad effect. Those who know don't want to tell the people that ganja is a medicine. Because the hospital wants to get money out of their chemicals. When the people start growing ganja, [the hospital will lose money]."*<sup>99</sup>

Mama Desta reminds us that Ganja or herb is a plant and it grows everywhere, hence it should not always be connected to Rastafari, since people all over the world are using it too.

The Rastafari in Shashemene use ganja only for ritual and personal purposes. They may share the herb during reasoning session or in the tabernacle, but not used for sell. However, Some of the reasons the Rastafari are alienated by the local include their drug use, and local

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<sup>96</sup> Some say the term marijuana is racist while others argue that it has no negative meaning. <https://www.theverge.com/2018/4/19/17253446/marijuana-cannabis-drugs-racist-language-history> viewed on 28/6/18.

<sup>97</sup> This information is collected from Ethiopian Rasta youth who paid to a visit to the monasteries and witnessed the case. Their names remain anonymous.

<sup>98</sup> A thing or mixture of things, put in the ground, as a charm to cause sickness or death. Witch, Wizard, Sorcerer (Cassidy, 2002, p.326).

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Young Adam, Shashemene, 5 November 2017.

children's addiction of herb, and Rastafari's engagement in drug trafficking activities. The irony is that it is mostly the local people who traffic the ganja.

The Jamaican Rastas settlement is located in the north part of Shashemene. As one travels from the north of the country, the green, gold (yellow), and red decorated Rasta houses tell them the arrival in Shashemene. Rasta travelers or visitors of the Jamaica *sefer* usually step out around there before the bus reaches the main station. The local youth who purposely haunt visitors or new comers surround the guest and start to sell ganja. Not only does this demonstrate that the local people are responsible for the drug trading and trafficking but also such trading events usually entails robbery and violence committed by the local youth.

Another incident that shows the ganja trading is a two-sided is that if one follows the youth brokers of the drug sell, there is a good chance to end up at a yard full of ganja plant owned and grown by an Ethiopian. Quite a few anonymous Rastafari from Shashemene informed that, in fact, their constant suppliers are Ethiopian ganja farmers.

In addition to the constitution, for demonizing the ganja plant in Ethiopia, religious institutions take a lion's share. The preachers who are responsible for shaping the society say that ganja is hashish<sup>100</sup>, and the Rastafari are *hashisham* [one who smokes hashish].

The challenges the Rastafari face because of ganja ranges from alienation by the locals to facing a jail time for using it even as small as less than one gram. Moreover, the very corrupted system in regional level allows the police to raid and harass the Rastafari any time and use it for the purpose of collecting bribes from the Rastamen who do not want to be thrown to jail. A policeman from the town who does not want to be identified told me that the police indeed know and understand the Rastafari for using ganja as one of their culture traits. Isaac, 19, told me: *"They [local people] don't like it in foreign, they portray ganja as being bad...not realizing it is actually helpful and medicinal. In England, they give it as a medicine."*<sup>101</sup>

### ***Religious issues***

The Article 27 of the 1995 constitution provides a policy framework for religious freedom. This constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, the government generally enforces these protections ([www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) viewed 7/7/18). However, for a religious institution to exercise this right, it should be registered to gain legal standing. *"Without legal standing, a group cannot open a bank account or fully participate in a court proceeding"* (ibid). The registration is required from all types of religious institutions except the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Islam. Challenges pertaining to religious or spiritual exercise of the Rastafari community are evinced along the lines of land grabbing, ethnicity, and cultural shock.

The major problem the Rastafari community is facing related to religious practice is the persistent land-grabbing targeted at their tabernacle. Few years ago, the city administration

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<sup>100</sup> Ganja in Ethiopia is known as by hashish.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Young Isaac, Shashemene, 5 November 2017.



took some of the land from the compound. However, this got worse when, in December 2017, during the fieldwork, the local administration told the community to tear down the tabernacle because of a roadmap that precisely split the building of the tabernacle in two. Elder Ras kabinda not only involved in the issue of the tabernacle in the past twenty years but also his residence and the shrine is separated by a fence which one has access to go to Ras Kabinda's residence once inside of the compound of the tabernacle. He said that his house and the tabernacle are marked as one on the master plan of the city. He explains the confrontation on the land of the tabernacle:

*"In the beginning, they said they have to break down my house and Nyabinghi quarters. When they first came to set the road mark, it is on the other side of the road. However, when they came to implement it, the kebele chairman said the person leaving on the other side is Oromo so they have to breakdown my house and leave the other people who live on the other side. ....Now the government came back, gives a new plan, and says they want to put a road in the center of the tabernacle. Although the tabernacle has been here for 15 years, they say there is a new revised master plan. Therefore, what we are arguing is that how come with a new master plan to go into the binghi when there is an existing road and there is a space on the other side that you could utilize. You understand? Why are they coming again and again?"<sup>102</sup>*

In order to prevent his house from being demolished, Ras Kabinda has to travel to Addis Ababa to complain to the Central Oromo government of Urban and Development Works Bureau. Further to the land-grab meshed with ethnicity, he appends to the above that the fast spreading Pentecostal religion view the Rasta presence, cultural expressions and prayer as a threat influencing the area. The community members agree that now it has become habitual to hear the pastor preaching against the Rasta. Ras Paul says that he has a plan to record these hate preachers and bring them to law.

Craig Storti, in his book "The Art of Coming Home" notes that there is a "reverse culture shock" when one returns home. He explains this by way of one's experience when moving overseas and the feeling of the stress of adapting to the foreign culture and the stress in the returning home. Thus, he calls the latter a "reverse culture shock" ([www.stated.gov](http://www.stated.gov) viewed on 9/7/18). On a similar note, the Rastafari who left the continent hundreds of years ago during the infamous trans-atlantic slavery had chosen to take a cultural resistance against their colonizers and adapted their ancestors African culture. In this process, Africanism particularly Ethiopianism (see Chapter Two) is adapted culturally and divinely. Albeit, Christianity is introduced to the African descendants by the slave masters, notably the Rastafari, in their belief they viewed Emperor Haile Selassie I as God and declares that bible a book of black people. The Rastafari's coming home to Ethiopia and seeing the Ethiopian Orthodox Church worshipping the white Jesus and Mary, Ras Chubby expresses:

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Ras Kabinda, Shashemene, 20 January 2018.

*“One of the cultural shocks for me was coming to Ethiopia and looking at the churches and seeing so much European Marys and European Christs. And in making that investigation, Aba [the pries/monk] would say to me they have been given to them from other [foreign] churches, but they didn’t quite understand the psychological effects fo those white Jesuses, how they were used in colonialism to enslave us mentally. We have to break down that trend.”<sup>103</sup>*



Fig 27. L.t.R. Mama Ijahnya, Ras Chubby, Ras Bangui and Sister T.  
Picture by: Mahlet A Beyecha

Ethiopians exclude the Rastafari saying that they believe in Haile Selassie I as God. For Ethiopians Haile Selassie I was a (human) emperor. Consequently, the elders of the Rastafari community are excluded while the younger generation is teased. Isaac observes:

*“In school there is another problem. A lot of Ethiopians don’t know the history of His Imperial Majesty; so for me, the problem is that they say to me: you are worshipping a person; when he was a king of Ethiopia, so many people died; he killed so many people, he was Satan. But they don’t take the time to know why? But now, from my dad’s explanation, we don’t worship the flesh. He [Haile Selassie] had the spirit of Jesus Christ inside of him<sup>104</sup>. They don’t understand that. They just say you are worshipping a person...”<sup>105</sup>*

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Ras Chubby, Sashemene, 19 January 2018.

<sup>104</sup> Isaac and his family belong to the Twelve Tribes of Israel mansion of Rastafari who believes that Emperor HaileSelassie is Jesus Christ in a kingly character as opposed to other mansions who consider the emperor as God (see chapter 1).

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Young Isaac, Shashemene, 5 November 2017.

## *Language*

Language and culture are intertwined. The meaning of a certain language manifests the culture of a certain social group. One cannot understand a culture without having access to the language ([www.language-magazine.com](http://www.language-magazine.com) viewed on 1/7/18). The Rastafari may be able to communicate with the local people in English or in broken Amharic. However, language is beyond the meaning of alphabets and grammar rules. Language learning process further enables the users to know the behavior of the society and traditional customs (ibid). There are three ways to show the link between language and culture. It is through language that one can express oneself, embody and symbolize one's cultural identity (Assemi et al, 2012, p.78).

The Rastafari cultural expression that has been from the creation of the movement evidently missed one important aspect of culture, language. The cultural manifestation of the movement is exhibited through a non-verbal communication of their way of life such as apparel, dietary, Ethiopian flag colors and ganja ritual smoking. Albeit, these features are directly linked to their host society, Ethiopians, their repatriation becomes incomplete without full integration with their distant relatives. This is due to the failure to express their story, give meaning to their experience, and view (add) the host language to their cultural identity. The official language of the Oromia National Region State is *Afaan Oromo*. However, apart from a limited degree of Amharic competence, none of the Rastafari speaks Afaan Oromo except words for greetings. Given the Rastafari exposure from ancient time, and its connection with Ethiopian Orthodox Church and after their stay for more than a decade, the returnees are expected to know either the federal or the local language. The community affirms that failure to speak the Ethiopian language fluently has created problems, in places like government offices, court houses, and markets.

### *Government offices*

Ras Kawintseb attests that language is by far the major hindrance he has in Ethiopia and in fact for many repatriates. But only a few of the community members admit language is one of the hardships. He said that if you stay in Ethiopia for many years like 5-10 or more, your Amharic would be good enough to communicate with your neighbor, for market negotiation. Nevertheless, "the minute you step in a government office for different reasons, you see that you are limited and you are deprived of that advantage of hearing what they are talking about you in front of you." He recalls one incident where he and the community elders were in the *mikir bet* [Council] in Shashemene to discuss about the location of the tabernacle and where the Rastafari committee were kept a day long while the staff kept on talking in *Afaan Oromo*. One of their obstacles related to language is when it comes to courthouses. The courthouse does not provide translators and it is difficult to have an official discussion or negotiation at any event.

### *Market price*

There is one caution that expats in Ethiopia warn when a foreigner is a new comer. An that is, “Be ware of the *habesha* and *faranji* price!” Except in the big supermarkets in the capital city, mostly prices are settled through negotiation both for Ethiopians and foreigners. Since Ethiopians know the average price of the item, they are not affected in the end of the negotiation. However, for foreigners, this is another impact of language barrier as they may end up paying three fold of the actual price and that is if the vendor has mercy on the buyer. Ras Kawintseb shares his technique for negotiations in the market of Shashemene “as soon as I start to throw my few *Afaan Oromo* words, the prices come down and I end up paying more or less the *habesha* price.”

The fact that not many of the members of the community see this as a challenge left me beyond comprehension. How come a repatriate who calls Ethiopia home, the Promised Land, crosses thousands of miles to reach there with one way ticket but do not make do not make effort the language? One must be disconnected from the society or so much into their own Rastafari community instead of integrating with the host. Mama Ijahnya told me that the reason she did not learn Amharic is because the Ethiopians speak to them in English. Ras Kabinda’s experience confirms with her.

The integration process is about how immigrants or any newcomer can be part of the host society. Without language, the new comers face challenge of adapting into a new society (Chauhdry, 2016, p.3). The Rastafari members, though not immigrants but rather returnees, are still considered immigrants in Ethiopia (MacLeod, 2014, pp.1-30).

Chauhdry (2016, 19-21), conducting a study on immigrants in Norway, explains that not knowing the language, not socializing and having a difficulty of economic sustainability are the main characters of challenges of an immigrant society. This ultimately hinders the integration process. Reuben, A Rasta youth in his twenties, born from a Jamaican and Trinidad parents and raised in Shashemene said that language and economic sustainability are his difficulties. “*I cannot socialize because I cannot express myself fully in the Amharic language.*” It is strange for the age group of Reuben or someone who is born and raised in Ethiopia not knowing Amharic, for the reason that they are expected to get it from school or neighbourhood. It was only later that I learnt that he is a school dropout. Most commonly, the Rastafari do not see socializing as a problem taking into account that their allegiance is to their own community in contrast to associating with the host.

Some argue that language did not restrict them from communicating with the local people. Sister Wendy who repatriated six years ago from U.K. contends that language is only spoken, one can communicate with body language, emotions and alike, and this is how she communicate with the local people in Shashemene. She said: “I speak more with body language even everything else is actions, emotions. But in courthouse it is difficult.” I inquired Ras Kabinda why he did not learn *Afaan Oromo* as he is in the middle of *Afaan Oromo* speaking region. He brings an interesting perspective:

*“Here everybody knows English now, and everybody knows Amharic. So, no problem. But mi youth [my children] go to school,... they learn Oromigna [Afaan Oromo], and eventually they teach Inl. If you are more settled you could have time to take a book, read and study, but here plenty times you are under stress...”*

Here Ras Kabinda highlights that there are challenges that one needs to deal with on daily basis. Even though he wants to learn the language, the surrounding routine challenges have impeded him from dedicating time to it. Related challenges are the land grant revocation by the state, corruption and robbery. In addition, there are difficulties arising from within Rastafari community. These are the disunity between the different Rastafari mansions creating tension between black versus white Rastas on the land grant.

### **Land grant to Land grab**

From the 1970s, the North-Eastern African state has witnessed three regimes. In this period, there has been a profound and rapid political change. This also brought a significant economic and social policy reforms affecting property ownership, resource management and state structures. The land is central to this with the fundamental questions such as ,who should own it? Who should manage it? How was it massively affected by the feudal, communist and ethnic federalism systems? (Rahmato, 2004, p.1). Therefore, the issue of land, either directly or indirectly, has always been the cause of conflict between the state and the people leading to a revolutionary change in the history of Ethiopia. Throughout the history of the country, land has been given to and taken away from the people for various political and socio-economic reasons by state actors

It should be noted that the land was given as a gift in 1948 to the black people of the world as a token of appreciation for their contribution during the Italo-Ethiopian war. In this respect, Ethiopian World Federation is assigned to administer it. Although in the beginning it was the African Americans who repatriated to Ethiopia and settled on the land, the Rastafari have also started to come back since the 1960s. Presently, all the returnees in Ethiopia are Rastafari, who were able to take that call of the emperor to return to their home and changed it to reality by repatriating mentally and physically to Ethiopia. Therefore, it's traditionally called the land grant to the Rastafari (see Chapter 1).

In what follows, illustrations of what come about to the land grant during the transition period and as the regimes continued are discussed from literature and experience shared by the community members. Current practices are given from the interview with the EWF representatives. The imperial regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I encouraged complex tenure system characterized by extreme state intervention. The feudal system of land ownership benefited the relatives of the king and loyal to the imperial regime. Given the state and religion intertwining, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was amongst the biggest beneficiary.

**1974-1992**

“Land for the Tillers” was the catchphrase of *dergue* and its basic principle and a cause threat is embraced by the change agents, the educated ones. The land reform policy disposed land from the “landed classes” and distributed it to peasants, but the peasants had only usufruct rights to the land which they could not transfer to others except children (ibid, p.1). The Rastafari community, which, in the eyes of the regime, was added to the “landed classes”, and as a result, lost the land grant to the peasants who latter sells it back to the community. Ras Tages vividly recalls his first journey to the Promised Land to visit the pioneer settlers in Shashemene on the land grant.

*“We [him and his Rasta friend from England, Binghi Faraki] arrived in September 1982, and it was the dergue regime in full pepper. When we came, we used to go to Meskel square and apply for a travel permit to go to Shashemene. Without it, you are not allowed to travel. The government officials were welcoming us but because of fear they just fogged us off. They didn’t give us the travel permit. They were just saying eshi nege, eshi nege... [Ok tomorrow, ok tomorrow]. We took our chance and went to see our own pioneers, so is done. We meet our pioneers; Papa Noel Dyer, Papa and Mama Bah, Brother Vincent, a priest from U.S. We strengthened them....Most of the people, the early settlers were frightened and returned to the west. But, a few remained and they got together and wrote a petition to the dergue. Reminding the dergue this little piece of land in Shashemene was given to our forefathers by His Imperial Majesty as a way of to say thank you to the support given to Ethiopia to defeat Italian nationalism. They were some officials who know that history and decided to help us, leave us with our land, which in that time was under new proclamation “Land to the Tillers.” So, only 2.2 hectares were allocated out of 500 acres for 18 families. The surveyors came to Shashemene and did the survey. But unfortunately did not implement it. Only two families got that 2.2 hectares. The rest 16 families didn’t get it. They only got the house spot. So from the beginning through the end of the dergue in the 1990s that was the community in Shashemene. Only a small group. Small group of families with house spot.”<sup>106</sup>*

Nonetheless, the rest of the land was allocated to farmers. The problem is that those farmers were given lands at the cost of the EWF’s land grant. And that is how it remained throughout the *dergue* ruling. After the official establishment of EWF in August 1937 (see Chapter 1), the land was granted by the emperor in 1948 (see Appendix 2). Originally, the total size of the land given was 500 acres (202.34 hectares). When the communist party took power, land was nationalized. The *dergue* regime recognized the land grant given to EWF, but only returned to two families who decided to stay in that regime out of 18. Here it is due to pay attention that there was not transaction involved until this<sup>107</sup>. Yet, the coming to power of EPRDF introduced a high transaction of land regardless of the law.

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Ras Tagas King, Addis Ababa, 31<sup>st</sup> Decembe 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Brother Reuben Kush.

### *1992 to present*

The present regime land policy framework is similar to that of the *dergue* in the view that it is the state has the ultimate power on land. Nevertheless, some significant characters make it different from previous land laws. The land policy is sanctified in the constitution of the state. Adults in the rural area are entitled for farming sufficient to their livelihoods. Land belongs to people and administered by the state, which in effect is a property of a state. Land cannot be sold, exchanged or mortgaged, but the policy allows short term leasing and sharecropping as well as hiring of labor which were illegal acts under the *dergue* (Rahmato, 2004, p.2). EPRDF is led by ethnic federalism where there is an umbrella federal government and nine regional states. The land policy of the regions is an extension from the federal state as the latter sets out guidelines for the former (ibid, p.3).

*“There is unanimity in all killil [region] legislations that land is a state property and that the rights holder has only use rights over the land. Thus, private property in land and the right to permanent transfer by sale, mortgage or other means of exchange is prohibited. Failure to comply may lead to the loss of one’s holdings” (ibid).*

Once the *Dergue* collapsed and EPRDF took power, the EWF has attempted to get back the land that was taken away from them. The EWF representative Reuben Kush observes what eventuated during the transition period.

*“A committee was set up by the transitional government at that time to take application from Ethiopian individuals, institutions and even the church to give back the land that was taken from them by the dergue regime and the Orthodox Church was able to get back a lot of land that was confiscated from them. A lot of businesses and people who owned hotel were able to get their properties back. The Ethiopian world federation, unfortunately, the government didn’t give them back any land that was taken by the dergue regime or by the Farmers’ Association.”*

In explaining why this happened, Reuben can only think of one thing. Their legal status. On a legal footing, the land that they are occupying becomes invalid. After the collapse of *dergue* in 1992, in the past 27 years the number of the Rastafari has increased to close to one thousand. In these years, the community members were buying lands from the farmers. Thus, the farmers who got the land free from the *dergue* have been receiving money from the returnees and other Ethiopians by selling the land. This, indeed, is an illegal act for both buyers and sellers, but the consequence is even worse when committed by an illegal party, which is the Rastafari. The suffering of the repatriates results from both the state which does not give a legal protection and the people who lead the land transaction using the gap in the legal status of the Rastafari and the weak justice system in the country. One instance is that they have been selling land to the community though the law prohibits them to do so. The abuse becomes consistent, and so the land grant to land grab saga. The leasing practice allows further land grabbing perpetuation. Reuben Kush explains:

*“The farmers, who we got the lands from they took money from us and then when the government issue its proclamation on the urban land of the lease policy, it meant a lot of the farmers, who we bought the land from, have been coming to us and take us to court saying they didn’t sell us the land, they only rented us the land. We have no official receipts to say that we occupy the land or we have some documents, the land was given to us as a gift. ....now there is a transaction of money [over the land]...so you found a lot of farmers charging us extremely high prices.”<sup>108</sup>*

The land grabbing by the locals also happens because of the fear of invasion of foreigners over their land. In addition, the fact that the Rastafari repatriates are able to buy a big chunk of land from the local and build mansions next to the locals’ small yard has created jealousy. Adam, a Rasta youth from Shashemene shares:

*“Because my mother is Ethiopian we mingle with the neighbors, but some neighbors are jealous. They say, “it is not your country...you should not have this big yard and we have a small yard. Because you got money to buy a big yard.”<sup>109</sup>*

Furthermore, lack of legal protection and the land grabbing by the local people is further encouraged by the ethnic federalism that gave the authority to Oromia region to own the land. Consequently, this meant exclusion of the Rastafari returnees by the local people. In the current endeavor of the government to register land acquisitions by individuals, the community’s confrontation over land is not yet over.

### *What is happening currently?*

In the past, few years Ethiopia has defied the customary land title ownership and started to implement the technologically supported and the largest and fastest land registration and certification reforms (Bezu & Holden, 2014, p.1). Introducing the second stage land registration included places in the regional administration, including Shashemene in Oromia region. What it does is it gives a written land title document providing proof of ownership for the occupier which will be recorded in a public land registry (ibid, p.2). Following this, the Shashemene administration has issued land occupied by the local and the Rastafari community members, but limited to those who are married legally with Ethiopians. The land title is limited to only 500m<sup>2</sup> while those owning more than that should lease it from the government. This undoubtedly saved the community members who have Ethiopian partners. On that premise, members without Ethiopian partners are left without the land ownership certificate, despite they too have bought the land from the farmers and lived on the land long. To solve this issue and get the rest of the land from the government that was taken by *dergue*, the EWF representative informs that the organization loved to take the opportunity to support

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with young Adam, Shashemene, 5 November 2017.



the materialization of the state's recognition of the Rastafari community and issuance of national ID, and to push the land issue.

*"Now that the government has looked into our legal status, we want them also to look the land issue. With the new IDs that the government will be giving us, we will own properties individually, but in terms of the organization we will try to negotiate with the government if the EWF can have a land that is governed by the organization. That's gonna be a next challenge because the government is trying to make sure we integrate properly here in Ethiopia, as an organization we want to be able to gain some of the land that was confiscated from us so that some of the new repatriates can have land."*<sup>110</sup>

Desalegn Rahmato (2004), who did an extensive research on land tenure security, affirms that amongst the major impacts of the present government, the land policy is "land insecurity". The two elements attributing to this are: a weak justice system for settling land disputes, and the authority given to different government agencies to intervene land matters (ibid, p.5). His findings show that the Oromia region is relatively better in respecting the rule of law in that there are some bottom-up court systems to solve land disputes (ibid, p.7). Notwithstanding, the experience of the Rastafari in Shashemene manifests the opposite since the deprivation of legal status has denied them to have equal rights with the local people. The head of the Language Studies in the Department of Culture and Tourism in Shashemene,<sup>111</sup> Abdulkarim Tuke, comments that the Oromia Regional government, the Customary Law Office and the Oromia traditional administration, *Abba Gada*<sup>112</sup> system encourage that people from different cultural background to live together peacefully. *"We are aware that they have a land grant and they are living on their land peacefully,"* he added. Apparently, Abdulkarim seems aware of the historical background, but there is information gap between the regional administration and the local community members. Alternatively, it could also be the case that Abdulkarim knows what is going on and he is trying to cover up. Furthermore, the head of the legal office in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tebikew, underlines that land is the state's property. He adds that the land issue is stipulated in the constitution, article 40(1):

*"The right of every Ethiopian citizen to own private property is guaranteed. Unless the law provides otherwise in the public interest, this right shall include the right to use and enjoy property, and, as far as it does not violate the rights of others, to sell, transfer by succession or by any other means."*<sup>113</sup>

As Per the constitution, only those who have Ethiopian citizenship can enjoy the rights and privileges of land ownership. For the Rastafari who have already settled on the land for the

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Reuben Kush, Addis Ababa, September 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Ato in Amharic is the equivalent of Mister (Mr.) in English.

<sup>112</sup> Abba Gedda is the leader of Gedda, a traditional system of governance used by the Oromo people in Ethiopia developed from knowledge gained by community experience over generations.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Tebikew Terefe, Legal Officer at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, September 2017.

past five decades, the above law does not solve the land dispute only because they have not acquired Ethiopian citizenship.

Apparently, it is not only Ethiopia that attracts African descendants back to their roots. In the West Coast of the continent, Ghana is an additional destination. Ghana's allure for many African descendants including the Rastafari is due to its relatively calm political climate, the economic opportunity, the bountiful resources, and the temperature. This was stipulated when Ghana issued the Right of Abode Bill, Number 573, in November 2001 (See Chapter 6). For the slave descendants in the West and Caribbean, Ghana represents a special place in their heart for its infamous "the Door of no Return", (see Chapter Five) the last place their ancestors stepped on. Implicatively, this has given so much sense for the returnees that Ghana should be the first step to step-in-back to the continent. Even those who believe that Ethiopia is the Promised Land make their first way in through Ghana as a symbolic representation of defying the "door of return." As a result of the above views and the long-standing history of the pan-Africanism history of Ghana's government, the infamous door-of-no-return has changed its name to door-of-return ([www.Rastafari.tv](http://www.Rastafari.tv) viewed on 5/7/18).

In 2001, alongside the issuance of the Right of Abode Bill, traditional rulers were encouraged to set lands aside for re-settlement and development in agriculture, small-scale industry and education. Nonetheless, the process of granting the citizenship and work permit have been eased. So far, it is Rita Marley, the wife of the late Bob Marley and a handful of who has been granted visa. According to 2014 estimates, 3000 African-Americans and people of Caribbean descent (ibid), that is two folds of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the adjustment in the land-of-return was not easy. They have difficulties that arise from their western lifestyle that creates certain expectations to be not met in the daily life in Ghana. The practical difficulties include not having regular electricity supply, shortage of running water, and the malaria.

What is thought-provoking observation in the midst of their turbulent and paradoxical situation is that, the returnees in Ethiopia have the above difficulties in their everyday life, even worse because infrastructure outside the capital is either hardly existent or it is continually distributed by ratio. Nonetheless, the challenges uttered by these returnees in Shashemene are beyond the daily survival. They are much heavier. It is about basic human rights, namely, securing legal status, freedom of cultural manifestations, and freedom of belief and practice of religious rights. These and other factors have resulted in the slowdown of Rastafari's integration with the native Ethiopians. In Accra, though delayed, integration has never been raised as a stumbling block as the granting legal status or cultural expression or freedom of movement are not bottlenecks as they are for the Rastafari in Ethiopia.

Through my network in social media, a Rastafari sistren from Britain connected me with Ras Amde, a Rastafari repatriate in Ghana. He notes that the Rastafari house of chiefs is the one, which is taking care of the land issue. The chief serves as a mediator between the Rasta community and the local people to enhance the land issue. Albeit the land is allocated, the

process to document is taking ages. As a result of the long process, he concludes, *“so far no land is in reality granted to a Rastafari in Ghana.”* Ras Bobo Quarshie agrees that the land documentation is taking time. Subsequently, this has created a paradox of the land issue. On the other hand, a prominent Rastafari elder, Ras Bosco insists that *“Access to land is not a problem, but ownership.”* He explains that dubious landowners either sell what is not theirs or double sell the same land to multiple buyers at the sametime. There are a number of cases with diaspora going to court over property ownership issues, disputes over boundaries and similar problems.

In Ghana, there are returnees from the West and Caribbean, conventionally, the Rastafari. Commonly, the returnees from the west, African-Americans or Afro-British are a retired people with good pension and wealth that enables them a better life than the ordinary Ghanaians. This better life comparison also works not only against the native but also from within, the group of returnees, the Rastafari. Over 60 years, since the land grant has been consented by His Imperial Majesty to the black people of the world who return to home. However, the land grant has turned to land grab in the past half of the decades, since the 1974 revolutionary change in the country.

Due to the centrality of land in Ethiopia’s dynamic political change in the past 40 years, it has left the Rastafari to whom their repatriation is based on the land grant, in a paradoxical situation. In reality, the land grant for the community turned into land-grab by the state and the local people. It gets even worse when it becomes impossible for the Rastafari to correct the injustice because according to the law they are not legal in the country, thus, they cannot take the land grabbing case to court. This paradoxical situation has affected the Rastafari community in Ethiopia whose survival greatly depends on land and nature.

The recognition rendered by the Ethiopian state to the community in July 2017 has its difficulties in implementation (see Chapter 6) since it is not practically impossible for the community members to fulfill, nor the state is ready to be flexible. Moreover, in the directive issued, there is no mention of the land grant. Thus, it is zero chance for the community to win the case by law as they hope to do. In respect to Ghana, after almost two decades, since Ghana passed the bill of Right of abode the suggestion of land to be granted by the local chiefs. But so far it has not been implemented<sup>114</sup>.

## **Challenges of the everyday**

### ***Misperception: Them (faranji) and us (Ethiopians)***

The Rastafari disregard “traditional ways of conceiving, being, and knowing” despite a plethora of labels attributed to the explanation of Rastafari movement by scholars, media persons, and the entertainment industry (1998, Murrell et al, p.3). Amongst these labels are: “religious cult”; “reactionary, anachronistic, eccentric Judeo-Christian heresy”, “African-

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Ras made, in Ghana, made via facebook on 7/7/18.

Caribbean religious myth”, “nuisance [and] an embarrassment to the Jamaican people...” (ibid), who should be jailed or hung for their traitorous acts against Jamaican society (Interview with Dr. Desta and Ras Kabinda). The entertainment industry is one of the weapons to create misperceptions amongst people. For instance, Hollywood is government mouthpiece. “*Black Hawk Dawn*” pretty predicted the USA plan for Somalia. For the Rastafari, “*Marked for Death*” disseminated anti-Rastafari and anti-Jamaican (ibid) propaganda.

One of the main confrontations the repatriates daily face in Shashemene is the misperception that all Rastafari are Jamaicans. Sister T said, “*Many assume that all Rastafari in Shashemene are from Jamaica. I do not have a problem with that but it can offend people as there are returnees from more than 25 states so you cannot call them all Jamaican.*” Jah Danny, who is the island of Bermuda, adds that not only the Ethiopians label all Rastafari as Jamaicans but also “we have been looked as foreigners... but he advises that to move forward “we have to *i-nite*<sup>115</sup> *I-selves*<sup>116</sup> to eliminate the problem.”

After independence, in addition to poverty and the aftermath of post-colonial, the Rastafari have their problems brewed by the worst consequences of plantation of slave society in Jamaica. Amongst these is also “the persistent vilification of the African presence in the cultural matrix of a society that has yet to come to terms with its blackness on one hand and its creolization on the other” (Owens, 1976, p.vii).

The suppression of African culture due to slavery in the colonial Jamaica contributed to the Rastafari movement in the island in the 1930s. The Rastafari cultural features are created based on symbolic signs and practices, as a result, they are also known Rasta symbols. These are: wearing dreadlocks, African clothing including camouflage and military colors, natural living, also called *ital-livity*, Rasta talk, alias dread talk, veneration Emperor Haile Selassie I, Rasta colors based on Ethiopian flag, green, yellow (or gold) and red, the holy-herb, also known as ganja or cannabis. In the absence of all these elements, a Rastafari can also be recognized with their language (Chawane, 2012, p.93). Joseph Owens (ibid. p.1) in his book “Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica” quotes a Rastaman sharing his experience of frightful persecution which brethren is endured:

*“I know brethren who live in the hills, brethren who hardly see asphalt road, for they are in the hills for years and come to this state that they don’t see streets so easy. They just live in the hills like hermit. And police take helicopter and go on in the hills and dig out those brethren and half kill them.”*

The history of Rastafari movement’s misperception by non-Rastafari, from the beginning corroborates a brutal confrontation between a Rastaman<sup>117</sup> and the colonial or neo-colonial

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<sup>115</sup> In Rastafari vocabulary *I-nite* means unite.

<sup>116</sup> In Rastafari vocabulary, *I-selves* means ourselves.

<sup>117</sup> Only masculine gender is used to show that in the beginning of the Rastafari movement, it was only males who joined the movement (from Interview with Sister T., Shashemene, January 2017).

Jamaican society. This entails “slaughtering, imprisonment, beating, victimization, contempt, ridicule” (Owens, 1976, pp.1-2). The cultural characteristics and belief are used as a tool to express their boldness to oppose colonial system in its every form.

*Listen my sister, His Imperial Majesty is our modern day savior. We were living in a serious, serious time... our elders are thrown to jail, beaten up, killed officially by government, because we said Africa. Because we said His Imperial Majesty! Because they [the elders] did want to bow down for Queen Elizabeth!*<sup>118</sup>

What the world failed to understand is that one can try to stop a movement by making human body suffer and even kill, but the idea does not die. In fact, it rises up with many souls of followers. This is, indeed, strongly supported by their belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie and the movement is not a man’s idea; rather, it is a concept of God (Owens, 1976, p.3). After nearly a century, the adherents of the movement globally suffer from discrimination. This is no exception for the Promised Land. Ethiopia, even if, ultimately seen as Promised Land and where God wants to be, the repatriates daily encounter challenges of freedom of cultural expression, misperceptions, legal issues, land grabbing, corruption, and robbery.

The community in Ethiopia have around 25 nationalities, mostly from the Caribbean and the west. Sister T explains: *“Many assume that all Rastafari in Shashemene is from Jamaica....I do not have a problem with that but it can offend people as there are returnees from more than 25 states.”* The collective naming of the returnees as Jamaicans does not only exist in conversation but also present in research works (Birke, 1999).

### ***Integration***

The repatriation of Rastafari to Ethiopia is a one that is not followed by integration which makes the process incomplete. Some of the returnees believe that they have integrated well, but there are those who see integration as, indeed, a break to mend in the process. Tafere et al (2006, p.29) reports that the returnees do not feel integrated mainly due the land grant is taken away from them. There are three views reflected from both the Rastafari returnees and the local people. These are explained below.

The first view is blaming each other community that is to say while the Rastafari community accuses Ethiopians for consistently looking at them foreigners that ultimately made the integration practice impossible. Qes<sup>119</sup> Banduli, a priest of Bobo Shanti says: *“We speak Amharic, a little Oromo language and we have skilled teachers and nurses, but because we are considered foreigners, we cannot develop ourselves and land grant in Shashemene as ordered by Emperor Haile Selassie.”* Equally, Ethiopians denounce the repatriates for not mixing enough with them in social affairs. Kinini, in her 30s, is from and lives in Shashemene. She also worked as an employee in the repatriates’ residence for years. She gets into conversation by declaring: *“Though we [The Rastas and Ethiopians] live together, we don’t know about each*

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Mama Desta, 25 December 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Qes in Amharic is the equivalent of priest.

*other. They alienate their community from the local ones. Only few have successfully integrated and these are those who have Ethiopian partner.*" She explains that it requires the wife's commitment and diplomacy in convincing her foreign husband that to participate in social life is indeed important. This can be completed if the husband or the Rastaman is ready to embrace Ethiopian culture and loves Ethiopia. For that successful integration, it takes two to make it. "After all they say they love Ethiopia" she adds. Kinini speculates on where the Rastafari separation from the local emanates. According to her, it results from their belief or religion and culture. Hers and other Ethiopians concern is they do not participate in the social life of the local community, particularly, that of *idir*<sup>120</sup>. *Idir* is an informal socio-economic tradition that is bottom-up and widely practiced among Ethiopians. It is a national phenomenon regardless of linguistic, religious or ethnic backgrounds ([www.tadias.com](http://www.tadias.com) viewed on 30/6/18). Excluding oneself from *idir* yields being judged as disrespectful and deviant.

*"It is true even within Ethiopia we have different cultures and beliefs, but not participating in idir, during mourning is unacceptable,"* Kinini added.

The next group of people is those who think that greetings between each community are as good enough as integration. Sister Wendy Bryan, 52, born and raised in England from Jamaican parents, repatriated to Ethiopia with her five children in 2011. She said that she had a good relation with her neighbors. She explains, *"I get a good response when I greet them and vice versa, thus, I believe we are integrated."* Obviously, hailing on the road is not what is accepted by Ethiopians for a person to assimilate, they should participate in the informal social institutions like the *idir*. In our conversation on the challenges of community, Sister Wendy marks, *"In spite of challenges, we belong to an organization [referring to her mansion 12 Tribes of Israel]."* Balancing the above two is the approach proposed by Ras Kawintseb which admits that the failure of integration is due to the lack of initiative to narrow the gap by creating awareness about each other's culture, history and the like. He acknowledges: *"There is a parallel ignorance going on with both the Rastafari and the natives, and I think we should come together and close the gap."* The lack of harmonized socialization resulted exclusion. An anonymous Rastafari informant told: *"Sistrene, the situation is serious! There are some Rastafari who do not even allow an Ethiopian in their yard, and there is obviously much less integration, of course."* In contradiction to this, community members claim full-integration. For instance, Ras Kabinda notes:

*"Well I've an Ethiopian wife...we've a daughter...I built a house for her and she lives on her own.. So that is the level of survival. But, we have fully integrated. When I firstly came here, ...I built two school for the Oromo children in the area Maro school, before I build for myself. You hear of us? I used to train all the youth throughout the village."*

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<sup>120</sup> Established a century ago ([www.tadias.com](http://www.tadias.com) viewed on 30/6/18), the Ethiopian self-help system, *idir*, is a kind of grass roots life insurance. It is organized amongst neighbors, employees in the same organization or people from the same place of birth in the country. In this system, people save money monthly to organize funerals and provide solace in grieving when the members of the *idir* her/his closest relative dies.

*Everybody in the village....when they're sick it is to I they come. I make medicine for them for several years, heal several of them in the village. So, I have done all my self-integration. I know all of them. I speak Amharic. I don't know Oromigna [Afaan Oromo] to tell you the truth I know enough Amharic to get along. You overstand? I've been fully integrated the first 20 years of mi life [my life] is total dedication to all the ghetto youth inside there..."*

## **Exclusion**

### *"Parallel ignorance"*

This research observes exclusion from community, the returnees and the host. I ask Mama Ijahnya, "Why the exclusion of Ethiopians if you love Ethiopia and be an Ethiopian?" With a surprise look, Mama Ijahnya says: "Sistrene, your language is foreign to me." Her argument is that they are invited by the government to nations and nationalities meetings and celebrations. She says proudly: *"We were invited to nations and nationalities meeting in Meqelle."*



Fig. 28. Mama Ijahnya  
Picture by Mahlet A Beyecha

Nonetheless, the ground truth is what measures the real situation between the communities. The exclusion might not have arisen from a fight or violence, but if the gap gets broader and without being tackled, it leads to an unpleasant level. This is also taking into consideration the regional politics of the country.

## **Corruption**

In nowadays, corruption is one of the most serious problems in Ethiopia. According to the 2017 corruption perceptions index of the Transparency International, Ethiopia's latest average



rank is 109.65 ([www.tradingeconomics.com](http://www.tradingeconomics.com) viewed on 1/7/18). The highest is 138 in 2007 and the lowest is 59 in 2002 (ibid).

The Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC) was established in 2001. Prior to its establishment, Civil Service Reform programmes with Ethics sub-programme were given on the sideline ([www.feac.gov.et](http://www.feac.gov.et) viewed on 1/7/18). In the past few years, the advertisement of anti-corruption invaded the electronic media. Like anywhere else, corruption in Ethiopia exists in a number of service providing areas. In this regard, it is a significant problem in the land administration area, mainly due to its importance for the country's growth and development ([www.u4.no](http://www.u4.no) viewed on 1/7/18). A research by the World Bank evidences that the Oromia Regional Government having the highest record of corruption (ibid 4-5). Perhaps, this is attributed to the width of its geography. that makes the region attractive for investment and business due to its easy access for infrastructure. With respect to this, the Rastafari community in Shashemene and Addis Ababa state that bribery has hampered their lives. Brother Reuben Kush, the local representative of the EWF admits:

*"...bribery and corruption is one of the major issues affecting the development in Ethiopia. Shashemene is not free from that. There is a lot of corruption taking place in the Shashemene administration. In any administration in Ethiopia, they go through the same challenges. We work with the Shashemene administration to make sure that our community does not suffer from bribery and corruption. There are some workers in the kebele who take some money and give their permission to put up the fence or a wall, which is illegal for our community as far as the law is concerned. So, that is one of the challenges that the organization [EWF] is fronting with the government departments."*<sup>121</sup>



Fig 29. One of the advertisements of the FEACC  
Picture source: its home page

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Reuben Kush, Addis Ababa, September 2017.



The Shashemene administration does not recognize the land grant. The local administration recognizes the community on temporary basis. It is considered that whatever they do on the land is considered on temporary basis giving them a ground to dismantle it at any time. This is entirely caused by the lack of legal status. Ras Kabinda's experience illustrates what is said by Reuben Kush said:

*"...you want to build a toilet, the kebele come and take your entire tool. If you don't give them 5,000 Birr [Ethiopian currency, ETB], you can't build a toilet. You try to build up your fence...they will come up and tear down your fence, if you don't pay them 5000 Birr. You want to build a house?...if you don't pay. A real extortion business they exercise on InI because we are not legal. Pure corruption! Rampant! There is no real cause to justice and no body you can go to get some kind of reprimand. Imagine you are in your yard, you want to build a toilet, and you can't. Especially in the 010 kebele [lowest government administration] ...on this side, it is not so dangerous. You can build a house, you can set up yourself. But, in 010 kebele, pure extortion...you can't hit a nail, if you don't pay them a money. Meles Zenawi [former Prime Minister of Ethiopia 1991-2012] said every Ethiopian should build a toilet in their house. But if you build a toilet, they come and tax you. If you want to expand your house....to give your children comfort, you have to pay them a bigger amount of money. This is viciousness. And there is no one you can complain to so they have us like...that is why the legality is a major issue."*<sup>122</sup>



Fig. 30. Sample fences and toilets in the Rasta residential area  
Picture by Bethlehem Ras Kawintseb

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Ras Kabinda, Shashemene, 20 January 2017.

Corruption related to land and building on the land can take place in all sorts of forms extending from trivial administrative bureaucratic corruption, justice, and state capture. Notwithstanding with their 'illegal' status, life with the Rastafari returnees goes on. And in the midst of this, meeting the basic needs of existence requires them to either become corrupt or victim of corruption. My own experience is a typical example.

*My husband repatriated to Ethiopia in 2006 and ever since lived in Ethiopia for eight years. His first year was under a tourist visa while the next three years were under a work permit that he managed to get because of his charity project. After tolerating him for three more years of bureaucracy to get a land for the project which fortunately coincided with our departure to abroad for my studies, his work permit was returned. When we came back in 2012, neither he nor I were working because health condition of our son. Consequently, my husband's tourist visa could not be renewed, and he joined the majority of the undocumented Rastafari society which we tried to avoid in the past years. In 2013, the country introduced an insane law on foreigners in Ethiopia that charges 10 US dollars per day after the expiration date. In 2014, I got a job and the first think in our-to-do-list as a family was to get legal status to Jahnoch. Accordingly, I approached the director of Foreign department of immigration with all the necessary documents that explains why it took us three years. Prior to that the receptionists told me From 2012 June until 2015 February 10 US dollars per day will be 13,200 US dollars. It is obvious we are not able to pay that money. I am inside the office of the director. My heart was pounding because this is a decisive moment for us. The options were either my husband would be legal or gets arrested or deported. Amongst my Appeal documents are medical reports and intimate pictures of my son during his bad health condition. I was so emotional because those documents were kept for my son to see them when he becomes old enough to comprehend and take in that. As I entered, I greeted him and sat without being invited to be seated. I burst into tears before I started to explain the matter. Wiping my tears racing down my cheeks, I told the director that the situation my family was passing through was beyond our capacity- so my husband had to stay illegally in the country for the sake of our son and I handed him the pictures and medical reports. As he gave me back the documents, he wore a dark serious face. Only then I became aware of the kind of person I was talking to. He said firmly, "It is the law and there is nothing he can do." My tears ran down again, sniffing my nose. I begged him to give me a solution. I told him I can give what I had only. He asked me how much I could pay. The saving I made in that few months equaled 5 percent of the total money requested. He told me to bring that money immediately to finalize the case. I thanked him and stood up to leave his office. Just before I opened the door, in an excited voice, I told him that my husband would be here, too. He said firmly, "Bring only yourself." The awkwardness of his response was only to be felt later. My husband any ways had to come to the immigration because I forgot my bank book and without it I couldn't withdraw money. Since he said me alone, Jahnoch was waiting downstairs where the cashiers were. I was the first in the line after lunch. As soon as I*

*entered he asked if I brought the money. I nodded for a "yes." I expected he would write a letter or some kind of notification that would authorize me to pay only the money I had as otherwise the people downstairs would make me pay the 13,200 US dollars. Instead the director told me to give him the money. Unpleasantly surprised, I watched the director waiting for the money. My mind wanted to believe he was the cashier as well. My hands shakingly went inside my bag and passed the packed bank notes. He put it in the already open drawer on his right side and locked it. Then he returned the same paper that the officers sent me with the crazy amount, folded diagonally in one corner with a note "Please process his resident ID with charge." At that point, I realized I was an accomplice of corruption.*

As Ras Kabinda rightly pointed out, not only corruption but also other challenges remain vicious unless the key question of legitimacy is addressed. From a different perspective, corruption combined with a weak-judicial system will indeed lead to abuse of people's human right. Reflecting on the incident, had I knew from the beginning the money was for him, I am not sure if my action will be different. Immediately, I wanted to notify the police, but questioned myself if the director's decision would be reversed. What if they decide to deport my husband? What if they lock me as an accomplice of corruption? Above all, knowing the mal-functioning and corrupt judicial system of the country, I decided to zip my mouth and live with shame.

The relationship between Rastaman and Rastawoman and particularly the relationship between a Rastaman and Ethiopian woman is a window opener for researchers. This research observes that the dispute between couples in the Rastafari community is one other ways corruption surfaces. The Rastaman uses the immorality and the shaky-legal system in the country to execute his abusive character and escape from law. An old woman whose daughter is married to a Rastaman express bitterly:

*"Only the Rasta people's right is respected. Our people in the government office, they don't care about us. The Rastaman beat and assault our women, they cannot take any action because the Rastamen bribe them. My daughter is suffering from the attack of her Rasta husband, but we are poor, we have nowhere to go. Here the poor and the rich are not equal."*<sup>123</sup>

### **Theft**

The research focuses on thefts that the Rastafari repatriates experienced. It also aims to bring to the readers' attention that it is one of the challenges the community faces. The returnees are estimated to be 800 in Shashemene alone from more than 25 countries in the world, mainly from the West and Caribbean. Theft is one of the most common challenge the community face. The largest travel guidebook publisher in the world, Lonely Planet, advises

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with Ethiopian elder woman whose daughter is married to a Rastaman, Shashemene, November 2017.

visitors to be vigilant while visiting Shashemene ([www.news.vice.com](http://www.news.vice.com) viewed on 11/7/18). In the past few years, it was considered dangerous to visit Shashemene, particularly where the Rastafari community settled due to robbery and murder that the town has experienced so far. The robbers usually sit on the main road where the visitor of the community possibly steps out. The thievery is carried out in anyway: walking, driving or being at home. The youths are the major actors of thievery. The burglary is mostly executed at night and involves murder. Burglary is conducted for stealing cash or electronic materials. In addition, burglary is caused by dispute over land. Some say travel to the town is also a bad idea because there are people who smoke ganja. However, personally I have witnessed that no one forces you to smoke. What is different from other cities is the easy access of the herb (ganja).

The Rastafari repatriates have crossed thousands of miles to settle in the Promised Land, however, their imagination and reality of Zion is far from truth. The theft targets the community. In most cases, one of these local youths is an insider in the victim's life or house.

### *Ras Ibi*

Ras Ibi was born and raised in Sweden from Swedish parents, joined the Rastafari *livity* at a young age after a mystic revelation he got from Haile Sellasie. He lived in Jamaica for 15 years. He first came to the Promised Land in 1996 to help the building of the Nyabinghi tabernacle and for its inaguration. In 2000, he brought his family and ever since, he is living in Ethiopia permanently. He is one of the successful few businesspersons in the community and who have no problems in their travel in and out of the country. Unlike other business people, he was based in Shashemene, but now moved to the south in Arba Minch with frequent travel to Shash. Ras Ibi is a multi-trader who is involved in Moringa export, a teacher of Chinese traditional medicine and Japanese traditional massage, Japanese traditional massage, a builder of houses and sauna bath for private houses and hotels in Ethiopia. I met Ras Ibi in the middle of his busy schedule preparing for an annual festival in Ethiopia in February 2018. The festival was the first of its kind on peace that brings all religious and spiritual leaders from the globe followed by a U-nite day festival with Ethiopian sound systems at Lake Langano. The latter business with his partner includes a charity organization for handicapped and a Rastafari tour whereby they offer a tour for Rastas following Haile Selassie footsteps in Ethiopia.



Fig. 31. Ras Ibi, picture taken during interview.  
Pitctures by Mahlet A. Beyecha

One of the greatest challenges for Ras Ibi is the non-stop brutal robbery and the vicious corruption in Shashemene. He stresses that almost all members of the community are victims of burglary and immorality. He recalls on his recent experience that made him relocate to Arba Minch, a twon south of Shashemene:

*"I have my house, my land and papers like you can get. Then certain violence and certain things start to happen and I left the place and based myself down in the South. When my neighbors started to be killed, houses burnt and stoned, people were robbed, beaten and brutalized... My house was stoned for many, many months. People for three hours everyday stone my house, break my house, mashed my house. These are locals, my neighbors! Stone it everyday for three hours."*<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Ras Ibi, Addis Ababa, 28 January 2018.





Fig 32. Ras Ibi's house,  
Picture by Ras Ibi

Horried by the story and unable to imagine how one can live for many months while one's house is stoned every day for many months, especially after witnessing a neighbor's death I bombarded Ras Ibi with questions. According to him, the reasons are usually entwined with land and ethnicity. There is a deep sentiment that the land is in Oromia so it belongs to the Oromo. Pondering if justice was served, I asked him if he had taken the case to court. With surprise, he answers:

*"I was taken to the law. It was the biggest disgrace I have ever seen. I have never seen so much corruption in my life. I went through the court in the Oromo region. We went to the court and the people who were bringing me to court through foolish accusation, they change their names in the middle of the process and we have to do the process again. He changed his name, so the process has to start again. So they were telling people all the time, from the kebele to the judge that even if I win the case, they still gonna chase me out from there. So finally, I won the case, sold the house and moved from there. Sold the house very quick for very small money, and I have to give 100,000 Ethiopian birr to the people who were stoning my house so I could sell the house. This is the reality."<sup>125</sup>*

In the case of Ras Ibi, having his legal status through business license and financial ability has enabled him to fight the injustice until the end and get a fairness decision from the court, albeit it has cost him money. However, if the same injustice is committed on members of

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<sup>125</sup> ibid.

the community who are not legal and do not have the financial means to fight it through the court system, the story will be different. Ras Kabinda speaks:

*“Especially they see us as a foreigner, so it means they could just extract from us and no mercy. I tell you, it happened to a people who I heal [with herbal/traditional medicine] when I first come here, some have cut...hole [on their body], some cut on their foot. I used to go for weeks by them to heal them and take care of them. One night while I was in the Binghi on 2<sup>nd</sup> of November [the Coronation of His Imperial Majesty], six of them come in my house and take every little thing I had in my house. And one of them was a youth that I was going to his house everyday for six weeks and healed him....and he was one of them. ....so it has been really difficult. To tell you the truth, I’ve never met a next set of black people who have the mentality of these people have.”<sup>126</sup>*

Robbery sometimes followed by murder just to take a mobile or small sum of money is what most of the Rastafari returnees experience in Shashemene. It is undoubtedly not exaggeration to say at least one time each household of the community has experienced burglary committed by the local people. “Not even a potty survives the theft, and I am not joking” said my husband, speaking of theft in Shashemene. The robbery involves from simple house furniture to murder of the community members. Theft has become the Shashemene experience. My husband was robbed of his Nyabinghi drum and a bag in daylight while he was walking carrying it. During the All African Rastafari Gathering in November 2017, a participant was robbed of her recording materials (video), mobile phone, her passport and money. She was literally pleading to the suspects to return her passport and take everything else. The third one was in the Nyabinghi where one woman lost her rolled-up ready spliff with her hotel room key which she later got the *spliff* back but not the key. What is beyond comprehension is whether the thing to be stolen is valuable or not to the stealer or the victim, there is always a robbery targeting this community.

Many agree to the fact that the city is a commercial center attracting people including criminals from different regions. The recent incident was an eye opener that calls for a close research for where the criminal-state of mind of the people comes from. For six months now, Ethiopia has been going through unprecedented change. The reformist Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, has done an historic political change by calling opposition leaders who were in exile to come home. Following this, ethnic violence and mob attacks spread in the country. In a recent rally in Shashemene to welcome Jawar Mohammed, an Oromo activist who was based in the United States before the come-home call of the prime minister, the mob attacked a young man, accusing him of carrying a bomb. He was beaten to death and hanged upside down on a utility pole. This brutal killing of the young man shocked the nation. That very day, a car suspected of carrying explosives was set on fire.

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with Ras Kabinda, Shashemene, 20 January 2018.

## ***Bureaucracy***

There are both positive and negative literatures and theories about bureaucracy in modern government. For this research purpose, I will focus on the impediment of bureaucracy for any effective government (Peters, 1981, p.82).

Building an all-inclusive representation and equitable bureaucracies in a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural polity is a challenging phenomenon. Ethiopia is one instance. In a constitutional reform in 1994, Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism consisting of nine regions and two chartered cities along the federal government. The monolingual working languages of the federal and regional governments have given way to inequitable bureaucracy.

In this regard, the Rastafari community lives in one of the nine regions in Oromia Regional government where the official language is *Afaan Oromo*. In the city of Shashemene where the community is settled, there are people from other regions and the Rastafari who are non-speakers of the language of the region. Therefore, they are forced to go through translators with additional cost. Most of the community members speak either English or French and to some degree Amharic, but not *Afaan Oromo*. This is not only limited to the regional administrations, but as well the federal administration. Ras Alex, from France, originally from Guadeloupe is owner of Zion Lodge in Shashemene. He observes that his main problem while he set up his business was the bureaucracy related to language in the federal investment office. Furthermore, some of the participants of the research described the bureaucracy saga of the country in federal and regional level, as one of the cultural shocks compared to the western system. Sister Makeda [name changed] experience affirms this. Sister Makeda lived in Ethiopia for over twenty years after leaving the country because she was forced to close her business company. She owned a small-scale handcraft investment producing clothing and jewelries for both local and export market. As a result of high taxation, she was forced to close her business. However, because of the extreme bureaucracy, the termination process could not be finalized in almost two years. Finally, since economically she was unable to sustain the livelihood of her family, she was forced to leave the country without finalizing the issue.

## ***Challenges of running a business***

One of the aftermath of the lack of sense of belongingness to Ethiopia is not holding a proof of nationality- being undocumented. This is a major disadvantage for the repatriated Rastafari who want to engage in the business. Ethiopia's policy for foreign investors requires a minimum of 200,000 US dollars capital and if the investor is investing jointly with domestic investors the investor shall be required 150,000 US dollars ([www.2merkato.com](http://www.2merkato.com) viewed on 10/8/18). Notwithstanding, Ethiopians can set up a business with a capital as low as 5,000 Ethiopia birr, approximately less than 200 US dollars. Another constraint is high taxation. Reuben Kush, who is owner of mechanical engineering workshop in Ethiopia said, failure to pay the tax timely, also entails a late filing and late payment penalty. The penalty is 5 per cent of the amount of unpaid tax per month up to a maximum of 25 per cent ([www.2merkato.com](http://www.2merkato.com) viewed on



10/8/18). Added challenge associated with running a business is sustaining employees. Reuben said, *“The law sympathizes Ethiopian employees.”* He explains:

*One of the incentives the government [of Ethiopia] providing [for investors] was cheap labor, so one of the reasons for coming here is to take advantage of that. ...There was no minimum salary set up by law, so it is up to between the employer and employee to agree. Now a lot of things have changed. So you find employees taking their employers to court. And what we are finding is the law is very sympathetic to the majority of the cases in courts [cases of Ethiopians accusing foreign employers]. It happened to me also....and in most of the cases the employee win the case. Thus, this is causing a major problem of the employers.<sup>127</sup>*

Protection of citizens is what is expected from the law system of any functional government. Thus, protection of its citizens from cheap labor and abide the employers by setting a law of minimum salary is one of the token. Ironically, what Ras Reuben proves the paradox of the Rastafari of *“they become the Babylon they ran away from”* (see Chapter 3). One of the significant features of the Rastafari movement is its commitment for pan-Africanism and thereby for the development of Africans. On the contrary, the Rasta brethren who repatriated to Africa in the name the development, particularly, of Ethiopia is complaining why the state law is sympathizing its citizens. How paradoxical it is.

Another way of reframing the problem in business area is the challenge of betrayals by Ethiopians on the Rastafari. This happens usually in the first few years while the returnee tries to set up her/his own business. As mentioned above, the start-up capital requirement for foreigners is much more than what is requested from Ethiopians. As a result, the Rastas look for alternatives for joint business or open the business under ‘trustful’ Ethiopian that they have come across. However, this usually gives a play for betrayal of the one who put the trust on. Sister Tibebwa is the victim of this. She is a Rastawoman from Europe who came to Ethiopia to live with her two sons. She lost the office and residential that she build to an Ethiopian colleague that she trusted to build it under his name. It is obvious how this experience devastated her, but she is dedicated to call Ethiopia home. She describes: *“The walk of life in Ethiopia is the walk of faith and patience.”* This event may be experienced by any foreigner, but what makes it unique in the Rasta case is the spiritual imagination for Ethiopia and Ethiopians biblically based and like other issues their imagination did not meet with the reality on the ground. Sister Tibebwa is a devoted Rastawoman who believed in the deity of Emperor Haile Selassie and viewed Ethiopia as *“Heaven on Earth....and the people as angels.”* According to her, her faith helped her to walk through challenges and she admits that she no longer believes in the ‘angelness’ of Ethiopians.

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Reuben Kush, Addis Ababa, September 2017.

## ***Garbage***

As per the United Nation Environmental Protection (UNEP) 2013, report the solid waste generated worldwide is estimated to be 1.7 to 1.9 billion metric tons (Mohammed & Elias, 2017, p.194). This is expected to increase by 2 billion metric tons in 2025. The collection rate for developing countries including Ethiopia is 70%. This is also applicable for Addis Ababa, the capital city of Addis Ababa. Five percent of the dump is recycled while 25 percent remains uncollected (ibid). A research was endeavored in 1988 on Addis Ababa and ten other selected eleven project towns on solid waste management including Shashemene. The research found out that, apart from Addis Ababa, the rest do not have a centralized waste disposal system (Birke, 1999, p.326). Shashemene has a decentralized waste dump system. The worst is the waste is dropped in the midst of residential area, known as Jamaica or Rasta *sefer* [area]. The garbage is collected once in a week on average.

The uncollected waste has grave environmental impacts: ecological and socio economic impacts. The waste that ends in open dump or drainage system pollutes the surface and ground water, soil and natural environment as a whole (Birke, 1999, p.326 and Mohammed & Elias, 2017, p.196). The waste has impact on health as it creates a breeding ground for mosquitoes and the persistent noxious odor from the open waste, a major asthma trigger for the residents. Sister Tarikua, a resident in the area in less than 300 meters from the waste, is suffering from asthma due to the strong smell coming from the garbage. Jah Danny, elder Rasta who also lives close to the trash, said the consistent smell from the waste caused him a health problem.



*Fig. 33. The open waste dumping area*  
Picture by: Mahlet A. Beyecha,

Before it turned to a waste dumping place as recent as two years ago, the place was green and full of running streams which supplied pasture and water for cattle. Some residents also

used the streams to wash their clothes. The reason for the relocation of the waste dumping from its oldsite to where it is today is totlly unclear. The community members involved in this study expressed that they brought this case to the attention of the city administration but nothing positive has come out. They believe that this lack of response amounts to a deliberate decision in which the city administration has clearly shown not having any respect for the Rastafari community. On sunny days, the awful smell from the waste and the roaming flies make it impossible for Rastafari farmer to work on their yard. They also make it difficult for the Rastafari community sit and reason in their yard. Moreover, the sanitation problems emanating from the waste damping site has serious consequences on the health conditions of the *qoshe (dirt)* collectors from injuries caused by infected sharp materials. Such injuries have the potential of making the dirt collectors acquire such diseases as HIV and Hepatitis.

For years, hyenas have been part of the living fabric of Shashemene. Ordinarily, they are heard or seen only after the sunset. However, it is a common sighting now-a-days in the waste damping site spotting hayenas before the sunset. This makes it difficult for movement of people. There are some rastas who believe hyenas are important in Shashemene because they are 'clearners' of the city specially the dead animals<sup>128</sup>.

Scarcity of land is another challenge the Rastafari community members face. This is, in fact, related with ethnic federal arrangement in the country. Shashemene is located just 25 kms away from the capital city of Southern region, with this, an attitude of "not-in-my-backyard" developed by the regional administrations whereby it prohibits city administrations who dump their waste outside of their administration region.

The open waste dumping needs to be addressed and relocated to where there are no inhabitants of the town nearby. In this regard, the Foreign Affairs Legal counsel has already noticed waste damping problem, and knows that the problem is not just a problem in Shashemene, but rather a national challenge. Ato Tebikew added that this kind of challenges exists even in the capital city. What would be a permanent solution to the waste is to establish a plant that transforms the waste to clean energy that will benefit the all the residences in the city and creates job as well. For instance Addis Ababa is tackling this social problem with Africa's first waste-to-energy plant ([www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org) viewed on 9/9/18).

### ***Caught in a conflict that is not their making***

Shashemene town accommodates inhabitants from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds with the majority speaking *Afaan Oromo*. Distinct from other regions, Shashemene's diversity includes the Rastafari community (Tafere et al, 2006, p.29). The relationships of the inhabitants of Shashemene with neighboring communities were reported to have been strong until the fall of the *Dergue* regime (ibid, p.28). The popularization of ethnic politics in the town since 1991 has resulted in conflicts and misunderstandings, particularly, between the Oromo and other ethnic groups. The country is pregnant with dissatisfied

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<sup>128</sup> Random conversation with Jahnoch, February 2018.

nationals. This is in conjunction with the state's practices that direct resentment against immigrants and ethnic minorities as the easiest and most obvious targets often projected as the cause of social ills.

Nyamonjah (2006) contends that the movement of people in Africa, as anywhere else, is effecting questioning of nationality and citizenship (2006:3) from the host. He illustrates the contradictory deadlock of the national citizenship and internationalization among citizens and migrants. Social mobility and uncertainty among nationals tend to create tensions fuelled by those in peripheral and this facilitates for governments to collaborate with the disaffected ones and direct their resentment against immigrants or ethnic minorities because they are considered as 'social ills' (Ibid, pp. 228-9). Parallely, the Rastafari in Ethiopia live in the midst of ethnic federalism consisting of more than 85 ethnic groups. Except as a community, the Rastas do not belong to any of the ethnic groups. The largest ethnic group, the Oromo, began protesting against the central government since 2014 demanding for land reform, equal political participation and human right. The Rastafari who settled in Shashemene has subsequently become the target by those who are discontented by their presence on the land. Thus, the sense of belongingness of the Rastafari mainly based on the land grant has clashed with the displeasement of Oromo people with the federal government land policy. It is to be recalled that the stepping down of the ex-Prime Minister of Ethiopia in February 2018 was the result of the Oromo protest that started in 2014. As mentioned above, the root cause for the Oromo to protest against the government was the overall political, economic and human rights discontentment. However, the widespread protest in 2014 had an immediate cause: "Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan" which would have displaced thousands of Oromo people from their land without enough compensation if implemented. The study participants have shared that there were Rastafari community members who got threats from the Oromo people that they would chase them away from their land. Ras Isaiah (name changed) shares his worries about this:

*"It is the same vicious circle with the Oromo dem [them]. Because right now we are in this Oromo mentality. We have been informed that the mayor asked the federal government to move out Rasta from Shashemene, because we occupied the Oromo land and they want Oromo land to be occupied by Oromo people. So that is a kinda mentality now been fostered. .... So it is all at different levels with the whole Oromo nationalism. .... They want to practice this tribalism, ethnic cleansing upon Inl."*

Oromo is the largest ethnic nation in Eastern Africa ([www.intpolicydigest.org](http://www.intpolicydigest.org) viewed 7/7/18). It is also the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia contributing to one-third of the total population of Ethiopia that is estimated to be over a hundred million. One of the reasons for the local people for excluding the Rastafari community is for their belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie. In addition, the increasing literature of demonizing the monarchial ruling in Ethiopia and its emperors parallel to the heightening nationalism among the Oromo have fueled the tension

between the returnees and the host. Isaac, a Rasta youth from Shashemene comments that there is a difference between the generations:

*"My parents don't mingle that much.... They mingle with those parents who are into the Rasta worshipping of the Rastafari ....the thing is the children are brought up with the same idea where the parents are brought up. I have a lot of Ethiopian friends, they are not Rasta...they kinda enjoy it. ...when there is Rasta celebration they come... and some come for the free food [laughter] and some come for the fact that it is Rasta."*<sup>129</sup>

Ras Kabinda concurs with Isaac:

*"Generally speaking, most of the youth almost 90 percent are very friendly towards Inl. They see us [the elders] as a father. They get work for little construction, farming, etc. A lot of dem are close to Inl, respect us to the fullness... Just small elements... like vigilant few of dem are responsible for taking down of the seven properties; the killing of the brother; only few of dem are running in that semantic..."*

Furthermore, the issue of the Rastafari community has been rolling out for the past two decades between the regional and federal governments. Immigration and business licenses are dealt with at the federal level. In addition, matters beyond the regional administration are referred to the federal offices. The community members are deprived of work permit so they cannot earn money. Therefore, travelling to the capital from Shashemene comes with a high cost. The local EWF representative, Reuben Kush, shares his experience dealing with local administrations: *"We have presented our issues to the Oromo Regional government during all the changing presidents of the region. They turn around to us and they tell us it is not a Regional issue, it is a federal issue. So they can't assist us on regional level."*

Another form of the conflict of the regional and the federal government is that there are differences in the implementation of the constitution. For instance, the decision by the regional administration to demolish the tabernacle of the community does not involve compensation or relocation of the prayer place. The Foreign Affairs legal counsel whom I asked for his opinion said that the region should recognize and protect the community members' entitlement to worshiping place. He underlines "Protection is not only constitutional but also human right."

In such situation- meaning where the predicaments of migrants, racial and ethnic 'others' in a world of globalization seems to bring about an obsession with boundaries and belonging is all, too, obvious. Even when legal rights are extended to migrants, racial and ethnic minorities, they have not always been able to claim them because they are denied the social membership in local and national communities where such rights are contingent.

## **Challenges within**

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with young Isaac, Shashemene, 5 November 2017.

### ***Decentralization***

Rastafari has always been a heterogeneous movement. The heterogeneity of the movement has been regarded, by many researchers, as a positive character as it gives the freedom for the individual Rastas to belong to any Rasta groups either religious or secular. In contrast, others view the decentralized appearance as an exhibit that the movement is amorphous (having no organizational head) or polycephalous (having many heads) (Murrell et al, 1998, p.349). Some say that the reason Rasta did not attain political power so far is due to lack of centralization. Others proudly say “Rasta is in no politics” and enjoy the decentralization.

The disharmony between the Houses of Rastafari has an impact on its global and local movement. Study participants reveal that their belief that some of their challenges will be fixed if they have unity among the different groups. Notably, the disaccord becomes a disadvantage due to their representation at government offices and as low as in solving individual difficulties. Ras Gebremedhin, 39, from Jamaica underlines that Emperor Haile Selassie’s main advice when he arrived in Jamaica on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1966 was to organize and centralize. He notes that Jamaica has relatively overcome the obstacle of discrimination because dreadlock children go to school, and a dreadlock man can be employed in government and private institutions. Proudly, he says: *“There are Rasta lecturers, lawyers, and lecturers.”* However, he reveals that the obstacle is still the issue of centralization among the different Rasta groups. From another point of view, Mutabaruka, from Jamaica who is a renowned poet and hardliner, does not foresee Rastafari being decentralized from Jamaica ([www.ukessays.com](http://www.ukessays.com) viewed 9/7/18). During the All Rastafari Gathering conference, Jonathan Dyer from Shashemene shares the experience of the young Rastas in Shashemene.

*“We have a few gaps. One is the gap between the youth and elders; the gaps that we have between the organizations here in Shashemene and the gap that the organization has with the Ethiopian government. It is weak, ..Not acceptable, not feasible. ... I grow up with some of my brothers. [struggles with tears] There is one, brother Naphtali. He is not in a good condition now. I went to school with him. Tough youth. Musically and everything, really poetic, but right now he is on the street... Yes, some of us went to school, university, but how do I feel to come back graduated and my brother is on the street chewing chat.”*

In his presentation, he told the participants that there used to be a different children program on the weekend and Sunday school in an attempt to discipline the youth to cope with their difficulties regardless of differences in Rasta groups. Currently, the community members are more individualistic. According to Murrell et al (1998, p.352), this individualistic characteristic is entrenched with the Rastafari movement:

*“The decentralized nature of the movement is probably a logical outcome of what Rastafarian scholar Ernest Cashmore calls the “epistemological individualism” or of what sociologist Laurence A. Breiner terms the “authoritative individuality” that pervades Rastafari. Epistemological individualism or authoritative individualism is*

*rooted in the philosophic concept of “I-an-I,” which leads to the Rastafarian insistence on radical freedom and democracy that is very resistant to centralization.”*

One of the justifications shared by both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Immigration Authority for the delay of the implantation of providing the national ID for the Rastafari members in Ethiopia was the polysepalous nature of the movement in general and the community in Shashemene in particular. Tebikew, the legal officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that there were three representatives of different organizations presenting three different lists of community members with overlapping names and, sometimes containing names of members that do not live in Ethiopia. Likewise, a legal officer from the Immigration Authority, Ato Tewodros, said that only after the directive was out that they learnt the gaps in the directive. For example, they learned that the community has different representatives and the immigration authority prefers to deal with one representative and one complete list.

### ***Black vs White***

*“Identity matters as much as it doesn’t matter.”*

The emergence of white Rastas joining the Rastafari movement can be seen through the global phenomena of Reggae popularity and the large waves of migration of the Caribbean people to the west in the 1960s. This, consequently, gave birth to the hybrid culture of the Rasta movement by accommodating white Rastas as well (Loadenthal, 2013, p.11). Nowadays, the internationality of the Rastafari movement is apparent. Caucasian and other non-black races of Rastafari practitioners are increasingly growing in numbers. Do not get me wrong. I’m not talking about the teenagers with dreadlocks, and who smoke marijuana and listen to reggae music. I’m talking about real, deeply religious white Rastas.

Considering the Afro-centricity and a belief in black-supremacy (see Chapter 1) of the Rastafari movement, seeing white Rastas exhibits nothing but the irony of the movement (see Chapter 3). But, this notion did not last long as many non-Black Rastafari subscribed to the faith. In fact, Emperor Haile Selassie I, who was the center of the movement, publicly condemned inequality and advocated for equality between races. Thus, those who view themselves as true Rastafari and claim to live by the example of the Emperor embrace all sorts of races as long as they believe in Haile Selassie and his divinity. However, this does not disqualify the race concern that the returnees have in Ethiopia. Rather, it recontextualizes it. Dr. Desta explains that black supremacy is not based on superiority; rather, it is based on equality of human beings and recognizing that the origin of humanity is the black race. According to her, this, as a result, overturns the discourse of black people and Africans are sub-Saharan, and sub of everything, meaning sub being below, and recontextualize it around supreme. She stresses, supreme, being the origin of humanity. She underscores, *“identity matters as much as it doesn’t matter.”* It appears that the Rastafari movement offers a rare platform for both the blacks and whites to work together to fight against the global oppression.



The Rastafari community in Ethiopia comprises more than 25 nationalities of Rastas. Among these, less than one per cent are white Rastas from Europe; Austria, France, Ireland and Sweden. In most cases, their partners, kingman or empresses, are black, usually the former is the trend. I observed during the fieldwork tensions between the black and white Rastas. The tension is commonly agitated by the land grant and the history of slavery that whites have been prosecuting black people. Subsequently, the Caucasian Rastas in Ethiopia have experiences of a tense, and sometimes conflictual, relationship with the black Rastas. The land grant is a token of appreciation given to the black people of the world who helped Ethiopia during the Italian invasion. Thus, the agitation arises when a white man settles on the 'land grant.' As mentioned earlier, the land grant is evoked since the downfall of the monarchical rule, and yet repatriates, regardless of color, buy land from the farmers in Shashemene and settle on it. This is from where the tension emerges. The blacks argue that the white should not be on the land grant since it is given exclusively to blacks.

Sister Tibebeba is a spiritually devoted and active white Rastawoman from Ireland. She considers herself as originally African who came to Ethiopia twenty years ago. She settled in Hawassa and Addis Ababa because one of the businesses she runs is based in Hawassa. However, she has one reason for residing in Hawassa and Addis Ababa. She states that *"One of the main reasons for the respectful relationship I have with the Black Rastas is because I do not own any tiny piece of land from the land grant in Shashemene."* She adds that as a white Rastawoman, she keeps her boundary. *"I'm very keenly aware that this is a black movement. Although I play a supporting role in very key works and I always have done, I never put myself in the front. So, those who are in power in the community [referring to the certain black Rastafari leaders] say that I'm ok because I know my place."* On the other hand, Sister Sandrine from France, empress of Ras Alex from Guadeloupe said that she is too comfortable that she sometimes forget that she is white.

In this regard, the decision of the Ethiopian government to recognize the Rastafari community becomes paradoxical. By implication, granting national IDs to the Rastafari means entitlement to land ownership like that of foreign nationals who are Ethiopians by birth. Wondering what the position of the state would be, in our last round rapping up interview, I asked Ato Tebikew what the stance of the government was as to the land grant to the black people, and if the ministry considered the land grant by the Emperor was only to the black people. He persistently stated: *"The Ethiopian government granting of ID to the Rastafari is based on the historical tie, and all we know is there are black and white Rastafari members. As long as he/she fulfills the requirement [in the directive] who are we to segregate? No color difference."* His statement contradicts because the historical tie of the community refers to black people who reached out to Ethiopia when during the Italo-Ethiopia war. Reasonably, the answer from an anonymous staff of the African Union department of the Foreign Affairs justifies the action of the state. In addition to what his colleague said, the anonymous staff said that one of the major reasons for Ethiopia in recognizing the community is to minimize the statelessness of the young generation, and ensure their love for Ethiopia.



The second reason that surfaces tension is the demand for justice for transatlantic slave history. In this regard, the Rastafari movement advocates for justice in the view that the perpetrators [white people] have to internationally recognize, apologize and demand for reparation. Ras Tagas exemplifies the fact that black and white are all one human family, but amid the family, when there is a conflict, the perpetrator has to apologize and embrace the victim. *"In order for us for the victims, to truly love and forgive them, we need them to accept what they have done to us is wrong."* Although slavery has gone long ago, Ras Tagas believes that for a healthy relationship, it is important that the perpetrators recognize the injustice they committed and apologize.

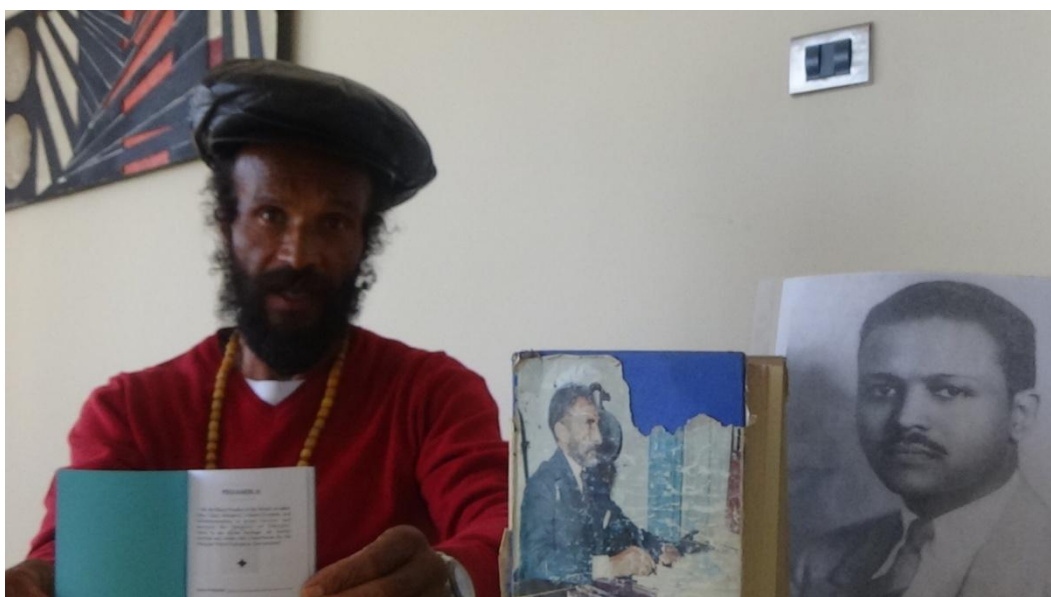


Fig. 34. Ras Tagas  
Picture by: Mahlet A. Beyecha

Another matter of contention emanates in the religious aspect of the Rastafari movement. From all the mansions of Rastafari, the Twelve Tribes of Israel is known for not accepting members from all races. In contrast, the oldest subgroups, Nyabinghi and Bobo Shanti allowing white Rastas to have access to the tabernacle and the bobo camp. However, this is always argued within the members as adherents have different views. It was always the reasoning that settled the issue. This has changed in the course of time. During colonialism, the Nyabinghi order was merely on the "total liberation of the black people," but now it has changed to "death to all black and white oppressors." Ras Ibi speaks that in 1996, when the Nyabinghi tabernacle was opened in Shashemene, he had confrontation with a black Rastaman for playing instrument. However, he emphasizes that after a deep reasoning with the brethren, the matter was solved once and for all. He concludes, *"To seal it up, Rastaman nah [not a] racist."* It is worth noting the persistence of the white Rastafari informants to

emphasize on the positive experience they have with black Rastafari community in spite of the challenges they face (see also Loadenthal, 2013, p.13).

## Endurance

*“Challenges are everywhere...so better to face them at home”*

The Rastas’ repatriation to Africa, notably to Ethiopia is a journey from a place where they did not belong, from the Caribbean to a place where they belong to, Africa. Journey home. However, their quest for belongingness was met with the brutal law. The land grant where their receipt of their belongingness is granted is ripped from them by the regimes who succeeded the emperor. This was worsened when the political unrest arose in the Oromia National Regional State. Nyamonjah (2006, p.3) contends that as anywhere else in the world, the movement of people in Africa is facing national citizenship and globalization from the host. He further explains that a flux of migration and uncertainty among nationals tend to create tensions fuelled by those in peripheral facilitating for the government to collaborate with the disaffected ones. The community’s endurance is beyond imagination. Despite the absence of belongingness, the Rastas are determined to stay in Ethiopia and continually calling it home. To better understand this, I return to what the Rastafari sister, Dr. Desta, says in what seems to be a self-doubt:

*“Everywhere in life there are challenges. But the spirit of Rastafari feature is on faith... in all spirituality you are looking for that light. You focus on that light. The question is, do you like to face the challenges in the West or in Africa, Home? Do I prefer the challenges in New York or in Addis Ababa? And I say in Addis Ababa. We have challenges of finding a school, jobs in the west because of how we appear. Our dreadlocks. At least you are home. You are connected to the brown. Self-hate is what we are experiencing both side. But again this is the result of slavery. It made us to hate ourselves, our hair, our body... Drop it dong, as we say in Jamaica [smiles].” Ethiopia is my home. My children and grandchildren are raised in [African] consciousness. They are connected one way or another. We hold on Sankofa<sup>130</sup>, meaning don’t forget to look back to look at our history. You know identity matters as much as it doesn’t matter [with a firm tone]. Wherever you are, don’t forget who you are.”<sup>131</sup>*

In consideration of sister Desta’s well established background in terms of finance and legal documentation, I assumed that she will not face the same problem like those who do not have legal status. I hope she will have the ‘strange’ voice. Thus, I resort to the voice of those who live in miseries but surprisingly, have the same endurance and persistence in trying to fulfill repatriation to Africa, particularly to Ethiopia. Qes Manduli and Prince Paul are priests of the

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<sup>130</sup> **Sankofa** is a word in the [Twi language](#) of [Ghana](#). It means "Go back and get it". Morphological analysis of the word is: *san* – “to return”; *ko* – “to go”; *fa* – “to fetch, to seek and take”. and the word also refers to the [Asante Adinkra symbol](#) represented either with a stylized heart shape or by a bird with its head turned backwards while its feet face forward carrying a precious egg in its mouth. Sankofa is often associated with the proverb

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Mama (Dr) Desta, Addis Ababa, December 2017.

Bobo Shanti. They have gone through the same challenges like others. Additionally, they caution that the Rastafari are caught in the middle of community conflict with the local people. Qes Manduli shares the following;

*“...because of Immigration and Foreign Affairs problems we are considered to be foreigners even though we consider I n I self to be Ethiopians. So it’s contradictory. If the government considers us to be the 83rd tribe and yet we have no rights, it is like worse. There is no substance and we don’t know meaning. They should stop doing that. It has been like six months that they put up the news on the big media internationally... that the Rastafari gets legal status, but InI here same way and nothing has been done and it has been swept under the carpet and all this thing is wrong. If you want to give someone legal status, you have to give them now and now! [Claps]. Not keep waiting suspended in animation.”<sup>132</sup>*



Fig. 35. L-R: Qes Banduli and Priest Theophilus  
Picture: Mahlet A. Beyecha

The informants disclosed that because of challenges at ‘home’, there are many who do not want to repatriate to Ethiopia. Rather, they decide to go to Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria where the situation is better. Priest Paul confirms that the Rastafari who love Ethiopia go through the greatest challenge of all Rastafari in the world. He is shocked that their lives are like a prisoner in the place they consider home. After listening to their stories, emotions and experiences, I always ask my informants: “What would be their next step? What happens after they acquire national IDs? Will they prefer to go and settle in another African country or go back to the west or the Caribbean?” Bobo Shanti’s response was no different from sister Desta’s except hers is historical grounded and his is biblically justified. Likewise, Qes Manduli similarly emphasizes *“Ethiopia is our home. We love Ethiopia. If we do not love Ethiopia I would*

<sup>132</sup>Interview with Qes Banduli and Priest Theophilus, Shashemene, December 2017.

*not come here.... Because of His Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I, who was the king of Ethiopia we are here."*

Members of the Rastafari community, like Jah Danny, Sister Desta and others few, firmly and deliberately emphasize on what have to be done to go forward and wants to show the other side of the coin, in this case, what the government has done to the community instead of pointing the finger on somebody or the state. For instance, the community is not recognized officially, nonetheless there was no case of deportation for their overstay without visa. Thus, Ethiopia's seemingly contradictory attitude towards the returnees unfolds the state's fathomless denial of legality for several years, yet, lends a hand with great resilience through the state's silent mercy on the returnees. The same endurance is maintained by the members of the community regardless of legal status, age, financial capacity, or birth. Ihoja, 13, son of Ras Jah Danny was born and grew up in Ethiopia. His mother left when he was five years and his father struggled to raise him and his other siblings 12 and 8. Isaac, 18, left England when he was two and travelled back and forth for the past 16 years. However, for both youth, home was, is and will always be Ethiopia.

## **Conclusion**

The life of the Rastafari in Ethiopia with their host Ethiopia has not been a love affair. As early as in 1974, Bob Marley realized the difficulties of translating a dream into reality (Campbell, 1980) in his stay in Ethiopia. The Rastafari veneration of Haile Selassie and some of their cultural practices like smoking ganja and wearing dreadlocks have ensued exclusion. The core of repatriation, the land grant has turned to land grab by the Ethiopian government's policy change on land after the downfall of the emperor. Furthermore, the community's endeavor for integration has become impossible while their life is confronted and challenged on daily basis because they are continually misperceived and excluded. The vicious cycle of corruption and theft they face with the system and the locals have negatively affected their lives. The ontological conflicts stemming from ethnicity have created the tension between the regional and federal governments and pulled in the returnees of the Rastafari in a conflict that is not theirs own making.

Conventionally, the members of the community who are under the Business visa have relatively a better life since they are documented, and hence, legal. Nonetheless, running their business challenged by state policies and bureaucracy in government offices. The lack of homogeneity among the community played a role in some of the major difficulties such as having one representation in the face of government for concerns that need collective actions. A particular and timely instance is the reasons that the delay of the issuance of national ID is always the lack of a unified representation among themselves.

The Rastafari movement evolved through time into a global movement and produced Caucasian followers. However, this does not authorize that they are fully embraced. The community in Ethiopia displays tensions between the black and few white Rastas that arises from the land grant that is given to black people; religious codes and the long overdue of

slavery. The latter tensed the relation when the white colonizers failed to recognize, apologize and compensate black people.

At the outset the display of adversities alongside with the Rastafari's perseverance paints the paradoxical state of the community at max. By putting forward the resilience and endurance of the community, the research aims to demonstrate vehemently the devotion of the community to continue to call Ethiopia home despite the tribulations they are going through. After emotionally sharing their personal experience crammed allover with challenges, they are genuinely happy to call Ethiopia home, and they are not moving an inch from this decision. The challenges of Rastafari are not only limited to those who returned to Ethiopia. Their challenges are shared by native and repatriate Rastafari in Africa and globally. Chapter five demonstrates this in depth.

*“Sometimes you get used to challenges and you forget they are challenges. ... Because our positive way of life, we become excellent hurdlers without realizing it.”*

*Elder Ras Shango Baku*

## **Chapter Five: Shared Challenges**

### **Introduction**

This piece of writing is conceived in the wake my participation in the first-of-its-kind conference of All Africa Rastafari Gathering held in Ethiopia in November 2017. The seven days event gathered more than 125 Rastafari participants from all over the world. My own participation in the conference comes in two folds: paying allegiance to somewhat my quasi membership of the Rasta community and as a researcher. The core of my engagement lies with the latter.

Before my departure to the field, my research proposal was to conduct a comparative research on the Challenges of the Rastafari in Ethiopia and Ghana. For the reasons explained in previous chapters, the research focused only in Ethiopia. This being the case, meeting representatives of Rastafari community from thirteen African countries, Europe, North and South America, and not to find out what their experience is in their respective countries seemed waste of time and a priceless opportunity that potentially add to a knowledge production of the subject under study. On that premise, this chapter provides a narrative of biographical data collected from six participants out of which five from African states; namely, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya and South Africa and the other one from the Caribbean islands, Trinidad and Tobago.

The study assesses the adversaries of Rastafari in Ethiopia whereby it unravels the perplexities and contradictions of the Rastafari in the Promised Land. With regard to this the purpose of this chapter is to examine the personal (and the community's) encounters in their respective countries. The research investigated challenges faced by them and their community; the commonalities and differences of the native and repatriates Rastafari in their engagement with society and state; and if Africa is home for them and despite the challenges, and if they still continue to call it home. The narratives of the study participants exhibit the globalization of the Rastafari movement. In addition, the All Africa Rastafari gathering speaks for itself that the movement is embarking on transnational connections using its diasporic network, this will be discussed a bit further on the last section of the thesis.

Briefly the chapter provides historical background of the challenges. Following the circumstances that facilitated to the conception of the topic and methods used to collect data is reasoned out. Albeit the informants are from different African states and considerably their view is shared by the Rastafari community they are delegated by, the research opted to give emphasis on the personal narrative of the interlocutors. This will avoid the risk of a seemingly inductive reasoning of representing an individual experience sharing as the voice of the

Rastafari community in the countries of the participants discussed. In the narrative part, I give “thick description” (Greetz, 1973, pp.5-6) of the dialogues that speaks the resemblance and corresponding features of the challenges across different countries. The themes under each narrative expresses ideas or issues raised within the conversation. The study deliberately used recurring topic in the story as themes of the story. The intermittent themes in each informant narrative crystalize the correlative shared challenges among the informants, hence the Rastafari community in the country they emblemize. In conclusion, it summarizes with commentary.

### **Historicizing Rastafari Challenges in Africa**

Long before the actual or the physical repatriation of the Rastafari to Ethiopia the mental movement was set by Marcus Garvey. Garvey has an enormous effect on the whole creation of the Rastafari phenomenon. Both mental and physical movements of the Rastafari were born in Jamaica in the 20<sup>th</sup> century whereupon the former paved the way for the latter. Two decades before the crowning of Emperor Haile Selassie I, Garvey foresaw the “Africa for Africans at home and abroad” crusade and revealed the crowning of a black king prophesized “Look into Africa for the crowning of a black king. He shall be the Redeemer” (Barett, 1988, p.67). Barry Chevannes observes the “idealization of Africa” is through the Ethiopianism that he claims from bible. This gave a departure for Ethiopia to be conceived as symbolic or actual homeland and therefore both as a source of identity and a destination for the repatriation of Africans living outside of Africa (Chevannes, 1994, p.34).

Ever since their forcibly and involuntarily removal from their native land through the Arab-led and Western-led Atlantic slave trade, Africans have been regenerating and practicing the idea of Back-to-Africa movement (Prah, 2012, pp 1-3). With altering ideologies back-to-Africa movement exists from slavery to present in search of a place they can call home and to unite with their distant relatives. A number of African descendants in the west have preached, promoted and experimented. Paul Cuffee; Robert Campbell; Chief Alfred Sam, are among the prominent ones. The most enduring and influential figure however was Marcus Mosiah Garvey, whose legacy affected African in the diaspora particularly those in middle class (Niaah and MacLeod, 2013, p.24) and at home (Prah, 2012, p.5-6).

*“It is impossible not to be touched by Rastafari if one is search of an identity in which Africa is a central component (Niaah & MacLeod, 2013, p.120).”* Rastafari is a movement born out of back-to-Africa which is described by some scholars as connecting to roots (ibid, p.118 p.118). It is impossible to think of Rastafari repatriation without its deeply entrenched African identity.

In addition to its biblical connection (Psalm 137 and Psalm 68), historians resonate the movement with the Jews returning-home. Similar sentiments were also reverberated by the late Marley. King of reggae in his several tracks among, especially in his album: "Exodus"<sup>133</sup>:

*Open your eyes and look within:  
Are you satisfied with the life you're living?  
We know where we're going:  
We know where we're from.  
We're leaving Babylon, y'all!  
We're going to our father's land.*

Western Africa ports, known as the "Door of no Return", served as a main embarkation point for the exportation of more than 10 million slaves from Africa over the period of 300 years ([www.thebestofafrica.org](http://www.thebestofafrica.org), viewed on 25/11/18). Elmina of Ghana and Goree of Senegal were the most prominent exit routes from Africa. But, today, the African descendant Rastafari taking an upfront a role, are entering through the same exit door they went out. Earlier studies and current investigation of this research profiles the experience of the repatriates in Africa as one collision between imagination and reality on the ground. Jenkins (1975, p.51) observes:

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

Remarkably, challenges faced by Rastafari in the continent are non-discriminatory whether it is a repatriate or local one. The journey in search of their root to claim what is African in terms of religion, attire, or hairstyle, dietary and rituals are seen as foreign culture and led them to be summed up with the returnees from the west and Caribbean in the eyes of their fellow citizens. The problem they face is a double standard; on one hand with immigration rules of the state and legacy of slavery that is practiced by the people and state. Essentially Africa represents Zion, the Promised Land, and Babylon symbolizes any form of oppression white or black. In this regard, the Rastafari are experiencing Babylon in Africa- the Babylon they ran away from the west. The article of Carmen M. White, "*Chanting down Babylon in Zion*" and "*Rastafarian Repatriates and the Negotiation of Place in Ghana*" (2007, p.701 and 20xx, p.318) documents such views. In both articles, Ras Rod is quoted saying: "*Slavery not done. The chains may be gone, but slavery not done. It gone modernize...*" In her later article he said:

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<sup>133</sup> "Exodus" is a song by Bob Marley from the album Exodus that came out in 1977.



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

Although Western Africa is seen the gateway for repatriation or perhaps a "zone of transit" (Akiyinka and Gewald, 2015, p.2), Ethiopia is the Promised Land. The repatriation to Shashemene was made possible in 1948 by a land grant from Emperor Haile Selassie I as a token of appreciation for the black people of the world for their contribution during the Italo-Ethiopian war when the king was in exile in England. It is said to be that the land was given from HIM's private land in Shashemene. At that time, the land was administered by the Ethiopian World Federation founded by 1937 by the Emperor's emissary Dr. Melaku Beyan. The first settler arrived in 1955 and their number is currently estimated to be 800 to 1000.

## Events

Fortunately my research coincided with the first All Africa Rastafari Gathering *under the theme of Intra Africa Trade for a self-Reliant Rastafari Nation*, held in Shashemene from 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017. Despite the aim of the conference which was to bring African Rastafari from all parts of the continent, it was crashed by the diaspora Rastafari mainly from the U.K. and North America and as far as Brazil. The conference brought more than 120 participants and 13 African countries were represented: Angola; Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, Zimbabwe. The gathering was deliberately coincided with the 87<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coronation of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017. The conference program was comprised of Nightly Binghi *groundation* on the first three days and on the night of the closing. The Rastafari way of life is predominantly a patriarchal<sup>134</sup> however, remarkably the conference witnessed more female participants than male and women chairpersons who chaired, managed the conference and taken care of participants throughout. The gathering was also supplemented with Shashemene youth activists, Live Reggae music night and visits to Hawassa and Wondo Genet hot springs which are nearby towns to Shashemene.

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<sup>134</sup> [www.africaspeaks.com](http://www.africaspeaks.com) writes: Rastafari is a patriarchal organized religion where women are oppressed.



*Fig. 36. A group photo of All Africa Rastafari Gatherings conference participants at the Lilly of the Valley Hotel, Shashmene  
Picture credit- Rasta United Front (RUF) South Africa*

On another fortunate occasion, I was blissful to get introduced to the Ethiopian Alle School of Fine Arts and Design that solitarily produced artists of the state by an old artist friend. Here is where I found Ethiopian Rasta youth informants to share with me their experience. Likewise with that of the gathering, the art school favored me finding a number of informants at one spot. Taking part in the conference was planting two trees in one pot<sup>135</sup>. The conference gave me an opportunity to learn from the sessions, but mainly it was also an event that greatly facilitated for easy data collection and new findings as I attempted to record the experiences of the Rastafari participants from Africa, Caribbean and the West. The challenges faced by the Rastafari in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa particularly the local Rastas are strikingly similar and as the participants correctly pinpointed to come to a solution centralization of African Rastafari community is vital.

## **Narratives**

Reflexive ethnographic accounts include forms of writing such as narratives, autobiography and life histories (Chevers, 2008, p.57). Narratives help to establish collective memories and imagined community thus bridging the gap between cultural history and with personal

<sup>135</sup> During my interview with one of my key informant Dr. Desta Meghoo (as I often called her Mama Desta) I used the idiom; killing two birds with one stone, being a Rastawoman, vegan and her promotion of nature conservation, good-humoredly she hinted me saying why not “planting two trees in one pot.” Ever since, I adopted it and started to use it.

experience (Plummer, 2001). The personal stories of the African Rastafari from the All Africa Rastafari Gathering divulge challenges they face as a result of their choice to live in the Rastafari way of life. They recount their confrontations; express how they wish to be treated by their supposedly African sisters and brothers; and how the state should approach the Rastafari. As they narrate their stories, they become their stories and set forth the reader to wear their dreadlocks and feel the paradoxes and tribulations of the African Rastafari living in Africa.

***Tuesday 28th Nov 2017 - 30th Dec 2017***

***Alex, Elias, Santa, and T.K., (Ethiopia) - Local Ethiopian Rasta youth***

Santa was dreadlocks but his attire was full of Rasta symbols. I throw my first question, "Are you Rasta?" He responded, *"You don't have to be dread to be Rasta; this is not a dreadlock thing. Divine consumption of the heart,"* Quoting lyrics taken from Morgan heritage's song, *"You don't haffi dread to be Rata."* Santa continues...

*"As an Ethiopian and a non-colonized nation in Africa and in the whole black nation in the world, there is nothing we lost or that has been taken from us. We are born as Rasta! The repatriates in Ethiopia are claiming what they have lost due to the trans-Atlantic slave trade.... They are trying to be me; I am not imitating them... I'm a born-Rasta!"*<sup>136</sup> He asserts.

He argues that most of the cultural expressions of the Rastafari are taken from Ethiopia... for instance, the mother of reggae music; ska is taken from the Ethiopian orthodox chanting instrument- for instance, *tsinatsil*<sup>137</sup> is added to the calypso of the Jamaican music. Similarly the dreadlock culture is based on the hermits in Ethiopia which is also deep rooted with the story of Samson the Nazarite from Bible. Tsegaye (known as T.K.) disagrees with the limitation of Rastafari's cultural expression source with Ethiopia. He stresses that if one listens to his or her heart and becomes conscious of the good over evil thoughts and harmonizes it with nature, then regardless of our external expression, we all are Rasta. However, it is a matter of choice whether to listen to that call or to ignore it.

The following thematic topics arise from our discussion with regard to challenges they face as a Rasta Ethiopian youth.

**Misconception**

Unfortunately, the Ethiopian society in general, is misinformed about the whole Rasta phenomena. Rasta is always associated with crimes- murders and doing nothing but smoking ganja all day. Fueling the already existing misunderstanding, Ethiopian movies use a dreadlock artist to characterize a criminal, murderer, shabby, and as a result Rasta is out-casted by the

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Santa, Addis Ababa, December 2017.

<sup>137</sup> Tsinatsil is an ancient musical instrument, unique to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

society. *"We don't see anyone trying to explain the true livity<sup>138</sup> of a Rasta, which is actually a contrary to the labels given by the society."* Elias from Alle School of Fine Arts and Design explain. Moreover not every dreadlock is a Rasta that smokes ganja and not every Rasta smoke ganja. *"This seems the main misunderstanding our society holds up to and do not want to unlearn."* The candidate under graduate students added.

#### Distorted history

The core of the Rasta *livity* is imbued with His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie I and his teachings. The main reason is based on the bible prophecy while the second important reason is because of his 'divine' character as being the 225 lineage of King Solomon and Queen of Sheba. The other is owing to His unqualified achievements during his sovereignty. Santa emphasized. However, the history of HIM is distorted and demonized in the name of feudalism and this is what has been taught to today's Ethiopian generation. Thus, the society is forced to know about its own history, in Santa's words- through the 'back door'- i.e. through the reggae music, since reggae music has been the only bridge between Ethiopian people and the Rasta movement. As the Kenyan Ali Mazuri said "A people denied of history is a people deprived of dignity. This is what is happening in today's Ethiopian young generation. In this regard Santa remarks:

*"Haile Selassie's achievements such as, the first leader to formulate a national constitution in Africa; attributing His palace to be a university of the country; establishing the first Fine Art School in the continent where we are studying; implementing and continuing infrastructures started by Emperor Menelik II; and the founding father of the Organization of African Unity, to mention a few, are not taught to the people of Ethiopia."*<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> In Rastafari vernacular the Rastafari lifestyle is referred as *livity*.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Santa, Addis Ababa, December 2017.



Fig. 37. Students (participants) from Alle School of Fine Arts and Design. LtoR: Elias, Santa and Alex  
Picture credit: Mahlet A. Beyecha

As once a person from Art school, whom I don't remember his name for now said the following on a radio interview: *"If we Ethiopians were wise enough, regardless of our political, religious and tribal differences, we could have used Haile Selassie I as a jewel of Ethiopia"* [paraphrased]. For this reasons, one can imagine if people were well informed of the history of Haile Selassie I, then people will have a different conception of the Rasta *livity* as the name Haile Selassie land Reggae songs, and thus, the Rasta movement are inseparable.

***Sunday 5th November 2017 at 8:30 p.m.***

***Brother Jonathan (Ethiopia), Sister Tipokazi (South Africa), and Royal Kofi Asante (Ghana)***

*Jonathan Dyer (Ethiopia)*

Dreadlocks: Dreads of society?

Jonathan Dyer is the grandson of Noel Dyer, who is one of the first three returnees to Ethiopia and defied mass migration of Jamaicans to England and the United States of America by repatriating to Africa. Noel Dyer (Papa Dyer, as referred by the repatriation) used train from England to Spain with a stopover in France for few months to work and save some money and by boat to Morocco followed by travelling on foot to Egypt, Sudan and finally to his destination Shashemene, Ethiopia in 1965 (Bonacci, 2015:163-5 & Campbell, 1994; 223-4). Though, Papa Dyer is gone physically Jonathan holds on his father's dream of making Ethiopia home culturally, socio-economically, and politically. In an open discussion held with the participants of All Africa Rastafari Gathering, Jonathan emotionally speaks: *"Speaking of challenge, I'm a victim of challenge. It has been years since I cut my dreadlocks. I had it for 12 years."* Upon the completion of his undergraduate studies, he spent three years searching for a job, and was

not successful. He confidently says that he has been a competent candidate and did well in the interview and self-presentation. When he asks the employers why he was not selected, they usually gave him excuses that did not explain the case. In a decision to give it a try to go through the system or what is called as 'normal trend', he cut his hair. Finally, he decided work for YAWENTA Children Center in Shashemene founded by a Rastafari woman, Sister Ishiba Tafari<sup>140</sup> instead of working for the system. Sister Thipokazi relates the situation (the problem with dreadlocks) in general as the misperception of Rasta people in general.

The other contributing factor, as explained by Jonathan is for the challenge is lack of unity between the different factions of Rastafari organizations in Ethiopia (See chapter 1) which at least collectively could have brought the challenge of unemployment to the fore front and fought or defended their rights on behalf of the young generation. He remarks that not only the different groups of Rastafari, but also within a Rastafari community the young and old generation should come together and discuss issues that concern the community.

#### *Sister Thepokazi (South Africa)*

A motion of a new of mobility within the transatlantic slavery is operationalized by the African-descended Americans from U.S. and Afro-Caribbean's to the very Southern of the global south. This mobility was a result of anti-black violence and failure to integrate the free slaves into the society in the aftermath of post-civil war in the United States (Prah, 2012, p.389). Although the Afro-descendants sailed to South Africa to get employment in the land of the British colonial subject at that time, a number of them found home in Cape Town and never returned (ibid.). The Rastafari in South Africa consists of repatriate and local Rastafari. Regardless of their origin, Rastafari in South Africa suffer from discrimination by the society and public institutes.

Albeit worn by hermits, priests or healers, in Africa dreadlocks are still considered to be uncommon. The hair-locking of the Rastafari originates from Samson the Nathrite (Book of Judges, Chapter 13-16) of the bible, *bahtawis* [hermits] of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and for Rastawoman Sangoma women in South Africa and others tribes in Africa are who the Rastafari from the Caribbean looked up to. Nonetheless, the Rastafari are out casted by a society and *bahtawis* teachings are condemned by the Ethiopian Orthodox churches. The hermits are not allowed to enter to the compound of the church. Regardless the local African Rastafari followers continue to struggle to gain acceptance and suffer from occupational segregation in the large part of the continent.

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<sup>140</sup> "Positive Action Charity Organization is a non-religious charity organization registered with the Ethiopian government. Its founder, Ms. Isheba Tafari, has been living and working in Shashamane since 1997. Our project, the Yawenta Children's Center, was opened on March 1, 2008." Taken from yawenta.wordpress.com





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Fig 38. An Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) hermit.  
Picture credit: Internet

Sister Thipokazi, 31, from South Africa remarks:

*“the way the community perceives us is my main challenge. As a Rastawoman I have to compromise my Rastafari way of life....particularly finding a job is difficult. For instance I cover my hair and wear long dresses and this is not acceptable in the job environment.... so, I had to change the way I look when I go to work...what you see me now is not how I look when I go to work [she is dressed like a Rastawoman, long skirt, hair covered]. I am a different person. Now I am doing crafts to generate income. So “give thanks”<sup>142</sup>, no more compromising.”<sup>143</sup>*

<sup>141</sup> Picture source: [https://www.google.com/search?q=Ethiopian+hermits+picture&tbn=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=q-c6lELRUBKCsM%253A%252Cd-QdsoCC2EsznM%252C\\_&usq=\\_S9EzNpl4VDo0-zlGYaYa0A\\_2WVQ%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjCqYKmrDxaAhWBLVAKHbLIAmwQ9QEILzAC#imgrc=0zBJiEyOv-Jo1M:&spf=1524656873123](https://www.google.com/search?q=Ethiopian+hermits+picture&tbn=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=q-c6lELRUBKCsM%253A%252Cd-QdsoCC2EsznM%252C_&usq=_S9EzNpl4VDo0-zlGYaYa0A_2WVQ%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjCqYKmrDxaAhWBLVAKHbLIAmwQ9QEILzAC#imgrc=0zBJiEyOv-Jo1M:&spf=1524656873123)

<sup>142</sup> “Give thanks” in Jamaican patwah or in a Rastafari vernacular it means expression of gratitude.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Sister Thipokazi, Shashemene, November 2017.



Fig. 39. A Sangoma lady in South Africa<sup>144</sup>  
Picture credit: Internet<sup>145</sup>

Garvey's self-reliance ideologies are well incorporated in the Rastafari movement. Presently most members of the movement are artisans: crafts- (wo)men, musicians, entertainment, and health promoters: herbalists, manufacturing of healthy foods, food vendors and running vegan restaurants. This does not mean every member would like to do this. Those who study a certain discipline would like to work their profession. However their cultural manifestation has prevented them from doing so. As mentioned above, as a means of income generating, currently sister Thepokazi is forced to leave her job and do crafts.

#### *Ras Royal Kofi Asante (Ghana)*

Ras Royal Kofi proclaims that challenges faced by the Rastafari community in Ghana are not far from his Ethiopian and South African brothers and sisters explained. He declares that the problems come in various folds: exclusion, misunderstanding, misrepresentation and police brutality. He asserts. This is more or less similar to what Alex, from Ethiopian Fine Art School painted the challenges the Rasta youth face in Ethiopia.

<sup>144</sup>[https://www.google.com/search?q=Sangoma+woman+picture&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=W90T3B9Qis\\_cnM%253A%252C8jrNAZQdXkD0ZM%252C\\_&usg=\\_J7orgfl\\_kCcJVEWOqwn\\_4v9VNTQ%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiF0a2Tu9XaAhVJalAKHSDsDXIQ9QEIQzAM#imgsrc=W90T3B9Qis\\_cnM:&spf=1524660553404](https://www.google.com/search?q=Sangoma+woman+picture&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=W90T3B9Qis_cnM%253A%252C8jrNAZQdXkD0ZM%252C_&usg=_J7orgfl_kCcJVEWOqwn_4v9VNTQ%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiF0a2Tu9XaAhVJalAKHSDsDXIQ9QEIQzAM#imgsrc=W90T3B9Qis_cnM:&spf=1524660553404)



## Exclusion

*"In Ghana when the local start to follow the Rastafari way of life the rejection start from family who discord you and put you out of the house for not shaving beard and for not going to a barber for not practicing the same religion like that of the parents'."*<sup>146</sup>

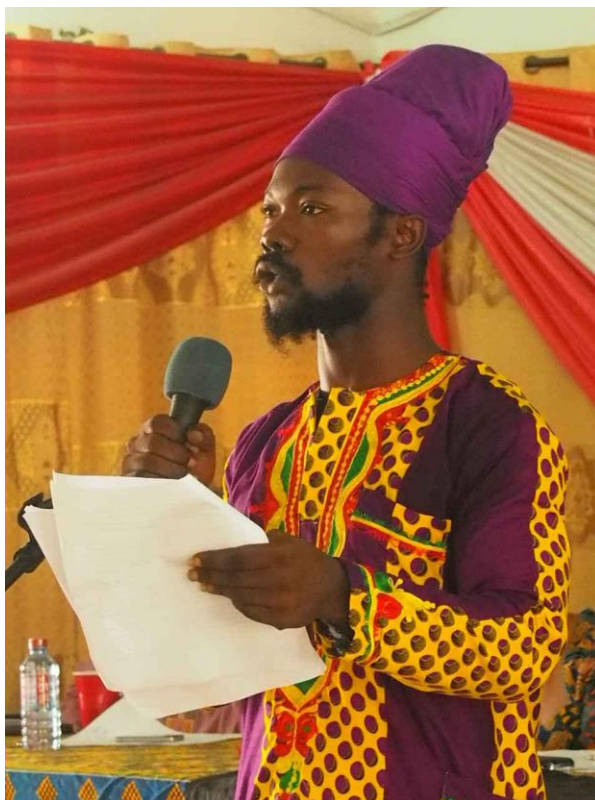


Fig. 40. Ras Royal Kofi Asante  
Picture credit: Ras Royal Kofi Asante

## Misunderstanding:

*"People do not understand where the ideologies of the Rastafari come from. "It is from nature and bible" he asserts. Rastaman loves his Africanness. The things Rastaman do are not necessarily biblical. It also comes from nature. Most of them are educated by the elite (he means by the system). Thus, the people do not understand why we wear our dreadlocks, why we smoke ganja, why some of us live in the bush and why we are close to nature in general. Therefore these things make them to attack us."*<sup>147</sup>

## Misrepresentation:

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Ras Royal Kofi, Shashemene, November 2017.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

*Rastaman does not control the media. The way media represent us is not how we are or how we want to present ourselves. The media often identify us like people who wear dreadlocks, lazy people who only smoke ganja. They do not show the Rasta's way of life, the preservation of nature, self-preservation, basics in Rasta! ...and preservation of right. So we are misrepresented.*<sup>148</sup>

#### Police brutality

*"The law against marijuana is one of the very instrumental things the police use against us. It is known that Rasta use ganja for spiritual reason; for meditation, for sacrament. But the police use it to attack the Rastafari. For instance travelling in a bus the police would only search for the Rastaman in the bus in search of marijuana. Meanwhile, if the police go to the ghetto, there are many people who are not Rasta smoking weed the whole day. They use the Rastaman also for the prison industry, the capitalist system. Because once caught, the person serves a number of years in prison. They use prison labor because it is cheap."*<sup>149</sup>

#### Locals versus Repatriates

*"On the street, once they see a dreadlock everybody is a Rasta, they don't know who is local or who is repatriated. However, in our working relationship, the colored people (repatriated) Rastas have a better understanding about Rasta than the local people. In any case, they are Africans even though they repatriate from a foreign country. Originally they are Africans who are taken out of the continent due to slavery. The difference is in socio-economic strata, pointing to the existence of class division. The repatriate have money to buy and build mansion and start business whereas the local Rasta finish school, graduate from the university, but he can't even get a job. This entails a discouragement for young Rastas to pursue their education. It's only few Rastas who pursue to higher education. However, we hear from the ladies of Rastafari movement that they tell us we need to step up our status to the level of the repatriated Rastas. There is a notion that Rastafari is a Jamaican. They also misunderstand that Rasta is only a patois-thing and thus the repatriated ones talk patois best,... they are kind of considered as a real Rastas. As a result, the people perceive that a foreign Rasta is better than the local ones in terms of resources. Because they can buy land, start business. On the street there are lots of educated Rastas/dreadlocks who do not want to identify with Rasta. There is a kind of branding, a foreign Rasta, a local Rasta. Now relatively there is a progress [in terms of the state's attitude towards Rasta], for example when there is an election or peace-campaign they use Rasta people to set up entertaining music program."*<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

Despite apartheid is over twenty five years ago still the white South Africans have the upper hand of the country's economy. In a similar fashion, in the Rastafari community although the repatriate Rastas are not necessarily whites, but they are economically more privileged than the local Rastafari community. Thepokazi, however, underlines that for both local and repatriate Rastafari, freedom is bread hanged far and for now they all are living under feardom.

Every real Rasta person aims to reach and live in Zion, the Promised Land. Zion, according to Rastafari, traced as Ethiopia. Thus, Ethiopia remains to be the core of Rasta's repatriation. On the other side of the continent, the Gold Coast in West Africa has equally attracted the Afro-Caribbean and African-descended westerners for a variety of reasons and many of them seemed only authentic given their resemblance with Ethiopia and its leader. Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Ethiopia's Haile Selassie I are pan-Africanists and the founding fathers of African Union, the then Organization of African Unity in 1963. They both have a persona of a symbol of freedom who fought for freedom of their own nation and Africans. Of a significant similarity is that when the two leaders pan-Africanism sentiment is manifested in their call for African descendants to come back home. Symbols are important in Rastafari *livity* (see chapter 1); among them is Rastafari colors; green yellow (gold as often called) and red with lion of Judah on it which is derived from Ethiopian flag during the monarchial time. Additionally Ghana holds that stamp of the last place where African slaves stepped on before they are shipped across the Atlantic Ocean, thus for many it holds a position of a gate way or stepping stone of Zion. For this reason Rastafari amid African descendants are the forefronts who responded to the call of Kwame Nkrumah. In addition, the Rastafari movement itself being emerged from a pan-Africanist ideologies, it was only natural for the Rastafari to follow Nkrumah's call and come back to the west coast of the continent in the assumption of to take part in the development of the country. Renowned African-descended Americans like Nkrumah's mentor W.E.B. DuBois (Marable, 1986) has claimed Ghana as his home and final resting place. It could also be summed up Ghana's importance in the notion of Rastafari notion of repatriation is due to the country's continued legacy in pan-Africanism. In 2000, Ghana has issued "Right of Abode" status Immigration Act (573) to African descendants that allows them to have Ghanaian citizenship.

Many viewing Rastafari as only religion and others as simple as reggae music and locked hairs, globally the Afrocentric Rastafari culture has its hard time to be understood. Paradoxically, Africans, who are presumably have same culture, have difficulty to understand Rastafari. Rastafari followers in Ghana including repatriates and local share same challenges like their Rasta sisters and brothers in Africa. Regardless repatriated or native, confrontations encountered are the same with the native people. The only difference is the subsequent tribulation starts within the family and resulting elimination from the house. Ghana like other any other state in the world has changed politically and socio-culturally. As brother Shengo's narration of his story, the root cause for the elimination of the Rasta follower from the family

and misperception of the locals about Rastafari comes from understanding it as only a religion while it is much bigger than religion.

When one look at Rastafari from only the angle of religion then they are already blocking themselves from trying to understand what is behind the movement, because it is bigger than that. It is born out of pan-Africanism ideologies while opposing the western and colonial system and to date condemns any other oppressing systems whether white or black. Rastafari is going back to roots in the way of their *livity*. It is to love, close to and take care of nature. Importantly, It is to love Africa and to re-claim back Africanness. The Rastafari returnees come back to Ghana to pick up where they left (White, 2007, p.690) and the native Rastas are regenerating their roots culture. In this journey of reclaiming African culture as much as there is a point of intersection and thereby a common understanding in their interaction as Shengo explained, it serves as a point of departure on the other side of the coin. When Ghana billed “Right of abode” to African descendants returning home, under immigrant act 2000 (573) it also included land grant to land, by encouraging traditional rulers to set aside land for their re-settlement and development in the areas of agriculture, small scale industry and education ([www.pampazuka.org](http://www.pampazuka.org), 8/7/2010 and [www.Rastafari.tv](http://www.Rastafari.tv), 8/6/2015, accessed 25/8/18). Since those who came from outside a better finance position combining the opportunity granted from the state and their finance they quickly become business owners while the local Rastas still struggle to get a job and unable to have their own business due to financial constraint. Nevertheless when it comes to their manifestation of culture all Rastafari in Ghana face same challenge. Jonathan Tanis in his study observes that as ubiquitous the Rastafari culture is in every corner of Ghana in the forms of Reggae, dreadlocks, the colors of Rasta or any symbol, Ghanaians have critical towards this community (Tanis, 2010, p.7). He added that academic world has also ignored the prevailing of the collision of Rastafari with the local community. Tanis’ study observes; “Not a single academic article existed at the University of Ghana discussing Rastafari history, ideology or sociology.”

Dreams shared ...or abandoned?

Curious to know, whether the dream of returning home for those who are going to repatriate and staying and making Africa (Ethiopia) home, is shared by the young generation, I ask my discussants to share their thought and that of their community’s. Looking doubtful, Jonathan states:

*“Yes, yes we can. We can .but only if we can actually go back in time and check what is written in the mission. What is it about? And if we can update it with the current time... and empower it, yes we may share the dream. Realistically the cultural and political situation, the economic crisis... all these things have influenced the younger generation as a priority in life as something we should be carrying on. But to answer your question,*

*yeah there is a hope [a hope of the forefathers' dreams to be shared] ..... definitely. Definitely!"<sup>151</sup>*

Thepokazi who has been nodding throughout, agrees with Jonathan and reminds that Ethiopia is home not only for Ethiopians but for all Africans and the Rastafari from inside and outside the continent, and calls for economic support of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia.

Brother Shengo remarks that Rastafari should embark on all-African mission reminding that is the only way that leads to total African liberation, thus in his opinion the young generation must carry on with the dream of the ancestors to return to Africa. "It is the only way to defeat neo-colonialism" he highlights.

Interestingly, Ethiopia has been seen as home not only by the local African Rastafari but also all African nation in as much as it is a capital of Africa. In my interview with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, the officer revealed to me that there is a plan to provide an Ethiopian national ID to foreigners, who have worked in the country for 15 years and more in international organizations like AU, UN and others. He noted that this is considering if they want to come back to Ethiopia again to feel at home. Whether the Ethiopian government is going to implement this specific guideline is not the question of this research, but the step about to be taken deserves appreciation. What is beyond belief is the state's way of approach of to two sets of groups of foreigners in the country. For those who call Ethiopia home and repatriated to the country with one way ticket, some using different means of transportation including on foot are neglected for five decades while they live in destitute circumstances, whereas others like Eritreans who stay temporarily in Ethiopia are rewarded the ID to live permanently. Even if the state announced in July 2017 to legalize the Rastafari, the practicality of it is surrounded by difficulties due to mandatory requirement non-inclusiveness. The second group of foreigners is the expats or the international organization staff which the government is planning to issue a national ID same as the one for Rastafari for those who stayed 15 years and more. Although the officer at the ministry was not explicit whether it is the government's initiative or the expat community request to be granted a national ID, this research found it the state selected a prejudiced approach.

Ghana's "Right of abode" is aimed at granting the returnees an indefinite stay and for those who wish, to give dual citizenship to create for the community a sense of belongingness. Nevertheless this become paradoxical since the Rastafari within and outside has difficulties with integrating with Ghanaians. As a consequence of discrimination, the Rastafari in Ghana created their own space where they freely congregate (ibid, p.20).

In concluding the discussion, Jonathan said that the All Africa Rastafari Gathering, aside from learning the situation of brothers and sisters of Rastafari in other African countries, it created opportunity to network with them in the future to discuss on issues that concern them and together to find a solution for their triumph. He also added that he will share the information

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Jonathan Dyer, Shashemene, November 2017.

and energy he got from this gathering with the Rasta youth in Shashemene who did not get the chance to participate.

***Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2017***

***Ras ChaMuwari Ketano- South Africa***

Ras ChaMuwari is brethren for Ga-Kgosi Galeshewe in Azania. He works as entrepreneurship Programme Manager at the Gert Sibandi TVET colleges. He is a member of the Rastafari United Front (RUF). RUF is a vanguard movement for Ras Tafari social, cultural, faith and economics rights. RUF has a presence in 16 countries globally. Ras ChaMuwari is the coordinator of RUF's Rastafari Budiness Forum (RBF). The forum is a platform support Rastafari owned enterprises. The RBF supported establishing the Rastafari Garden project, an agricultural initiative for food sovereignty. The RUF had a delegation of seven members that attended the AARG, and Ras ChaMuwari is one of them.

As we walk out of the conference room to look for a quiet place to record the interview, he tells me:

*"You know, our challenges are of mainly acceptance by a non-Rastafari South Africans; lack of knowledge- not knowing who and what Rastafari is, unemployment due to wearing dreadlocks and our own dress-code, stigma in education, nullifying the local knowledge of herbal medicine that InI offer, police brutality because of marijuana ..."*<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with Ras ChaMuwari, Shashemene, November 2017.



Fig. 41. Ras ChaMuwari.  
Picture credit: Ras ChaMuwari.

Different from other African Rastafari situation in the continent, the South African is considered to be exemplar in terms of organizing and legalizing the community, however this hardly won them a favor over their fellow Rastafari in the continent. With the assistance of the Rastafari United Front, the South African Commission for Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL), after consultation with the Rasta communities in five provinces, has published its research on, *Challenges Faced by the Rastafari Community in South Africa* (2012). The publication consists of a background on Rastafari movement and religion for a better understanding and to be accessible for those who want to make research on the area. It also included recommendation to several departments of the government of South Africa in respect of the type of challenge. The 24 pages publication came up with 44 recommendations addressed to 11 governmental departments in respect to the challenges. Such as South African Police Services and Department of Justice; Department of Education to allow Rasta children to attend school with their dreadlocks and beard; to Department of Environmental Affairs to access worshipping place including sacred place in nature; to South African Council of Churches for tolerance of all religions; to Department of Home Affairs, for Rastafari to allow to cover their hair, are amid others (interview with Ketano and the CRL publication in 2012). Apparently, the research is commissioned by the government, and RUF was able to bring the research outcomes to the president office but relevant departments are not communicated (interview with Ketano).

In the midst of our conversation, I took seconds to congratulate for the work their community has done. With wide eye, Ketano inquires:

“But, look what we have, what do you think it will happen when a Rastaman walk on the street and meet a police?”

Without waiting for a response from me, he answers:

*“He [Rastaman] will be single haunted as a Rastaman... he is made to feel guilty for being who he is in his own country.”*

Finding it hard not to be biased, I pose a question; is there a difference in the challenges you face between the local and repatriated Rasta? If so, in what way? Ras ChaMuwari states:

*“There is no. hmm... I mean if we understand our history correct, we are saying that we all are Africans those at home and abroad. Africa for Africans! Those are the words of Marcus Garvey. Our brothers and sisters who have repatriated to come to the motherland are not different from us. Prosecution in Africa, in Caribbean in the west, we are basically largely oppressed as a black people. ... We should not be fooled and tricked that there are differences between us, because that is how our enemies operate.”<sup>153</sup>*

My gut feeling tells me that there are differences, particularly in the socio-economic layers within the returnees and local Rastafari. I understand that Ras ChaMuwari did not want to add a fuel to what is propagated already by the ‘enemy’ as he called it. However what he said is not true because from what sister Thepokazi from South African shared with me a day before, there is a difference between the two.

In persistence of to get to the bottom of my interpretation of the above narrative of my informant, I was able to tease out the following on a continued dialogue, Ras ChaMuwari observes;

*“I have taken a vow in my Rastafari levity, so I wear a turban. Consequently, I need that to be respected. For instance, so ...when I go to the Department of Home Affairs office, the first thing they will tell you is “We cannot take a picture of you having your turban on.” But then I say, if you look at it the Hindus from India, when they come they have their turbans, no one actually ask them to remove it. ... It is only up to our each individual ability to defend ourselves. Only through our persistence we would find our identification card, passports, and licenses that we maintain our turban on our documents picture. But those who are not vocal are disrespected and their turban is removed for a picture.”<sup>154</sup>*

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.



He articulated a strikingly similar endurance and determination like that of the repatriated Rastafari community in Ethiopia (see chapter 4) when I asked him; *despite the difficulties faced in South Africa or in the continent as a whole, do you think the repatriates still continue to come to Africa and call it home?* In response to my question, Ras ChaMuwari cite a dialogue between British master and servant in a movie about Shaka Zulu.

*“During the colonial rape, the servant of the king looks at the growth of Zulu nation as a form of resistance. As a result, he goes to England and report the situation to his master.*

*“Servant: ... We have a challenge there is this great force of a Zulu nation that is coming there and now they are occupying some of the spaces that we thought we would occupy as English.*

*King: ...open the window up. He asks his servant, what do you see outside?*

*Servant: I see clouds my master.*

*King: how many days of the year in England do we experience this kind of weather condition?*

*Servant: for a larger part of the year.*

*King: Because Africa represents sunshine, we can't lose Africa to the Africans. So it means we cannot loose Africa for the Africans, because it is their sunshine.”*

In his own words ChaMuwari interprets the dialogue as follows:

*“Considering Africa is Europe's sunshine, despite the challenges and that sunshine, it is significant of land, agriculture, food production, gold and so forth. So if a repatriates understands how the colonial master view Africa as their sunshine the repatriate should understand that despite the setbacks, this is our sunshine, and we need to claim it. Rastafari!”* He concludes.

The South African constitution section 15(1) recognizes and advocates for freedom of practice for all religions. In spite of this, “smaller religion”<sup>155</sup> like the Rastafari feel discriminated against the practice of their religion which hindered their way of life in various aspects. In the publication it is stated CRL has the authority to intervene and ensures their rights is respected when “smaller religions” like Rastafari have a problem to practice their religion. Although there are some progresses, the plight of the community still continues to be a reality of the Rastafari in South Africa. In this regard, ChaMuwari remarks:

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<sup>155</sup> The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) published a research of “Challenges faced by the Rastafari Community in South Africa” in 2012. In this research CRL call Rastafari as smaller religion.

*"I do not recall any specific incident where the CRL has intervened on Rastafari challenges... To date there has been little engagements with these departments.. InI would say these communities should actively engage the CRL to get maximum support from them... I.e. in the case of Rastafari, we need to visit engage a those departments mention in the CRL recommendations."*<sup>156</sup>

Pan-Africanism took its organizational form during Marcus Garvey "Africa for Africans" movement in the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). While this has mainly for Africans in diaspora, for those at home (in Africa), pan-Africanism was given concrete organizational form in the establishment of organization of African unity (see Chapter 1). However for Africans at home pan-Africanism was preached and concretized through the Rastafari movement and one of its symbols, reggae music (Campbell, 1984, p.2-3). Black Nationalism, black pride, pan-Africanism and self-determination were the messages that the Rastafari convey across. Concomitantly this resonated with those who were fighting apartheid in South Africa (Philander, 2010, p.69). Philander records that the first mention of Rasta in South Africa was in the late 1970s when a Rasta was killed in Uitenhage during an anti-apartheid strike. This gave a rise to few hundred of Rastafari of South Africa (ibid, p.70). Another scholar in the same landscape, Chawane (2012, p.xx) confirms that Rastafari is blossomed during apartheid, even though the seed is sown in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. He further explains the development of Rastafari in South Africa is a three phase: a foundation period attributed to the ideologies of Ethiopianism and Garveyism; during the period of apartheid (1948-1994) and post-apartheid era. The latter stage, according to him, has by far gained is an influential one as the movement has become a major force in the social, cultural, political and religious area, and grown since it got media's and CRL's attention. According to the president of RUF, Thau Thau, the current adherents reached three millions, but this research is not able to confirm this from written documents. In spite of this, in present day South Africa the Rastafari adherents are faced with a number of challenges. Chawane's research (ibid., p. 184) supports Ketano's view:

*"Opposition arises from the government, school authorities, employers, some members of civil society, the police, the judicial system and other religious movements such as priests of Christian churches who all have problem with the question of decriminalizing ganja (marijuana) and the wearing of dreadlock by Rastafarian learners and employees."*<sup>157</sup>

**Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017 at 7:30 p.m. Shashemene**

### **Brother Koko Shenko - Ivory Coast**

The Ivorian Rastaman, brother Koko Shenko, 37, is from Ivory Coast, who embraced the Rasta way of life when he was 17. He is an artist specialized in mural art. Currently, he is a president

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

of the Rasta community in Ivory Coast that consists of 300 local Rastafari. Explaining his encounters as a Rastaman in his country, Shenko categorizes them in four: misperception, ganja smoking, unemployment and their legitimacy.

The stretch of Rastafari along the West coast of the continent also includes Ivory Coast. The Rastafari movement took hold in Ivory Coast in the 1960s, after three decades of its emergence in Jamaica ([www.newstatesman.com](http://www.newstatesman.com), 4 Feb 2016, viewed 29/5/18). Tired of police brutality and prosecution the Rasta artists and reggae musicians in Ivory Coast established a Rasta village in Port Bou in Abidjan in 1999 housing 500 families ([www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com) 10 May 2010, viewed 29/5/18). For long, the village was known for its profound contribution for promoting Rastafari through its reggae music concerts and artworks by Brother Koko Shenko, who was the participant of the *All Africa Rasta Gathering* in Shashemene and who is the informant of this research.

The Rasta village was a self-sufficient commune that adopted the self-reliance<sup>158</sup> principle of Garvey in which it earned through selling jewelry, reggae concerts and ganja was grown for ritual consumption and not for sale ([www.newstatesman.com](http://www.newstatesman.com), 4 Feb 2016, viewed 29/5/18 and [www.africaresource.com](http://www.africaresource.com) 7 April 2012, viewed 29/5/18). However their tribulation was far from end. Their peaceful lives were discontinued when the government decided to give the land they settled on for a Lebanese-Ivorian investor. As a result they became homeless ([www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com) 27 July 2012, viewed 29/5/18). On our continued conversation on the subject matter via Facebook Shendo draws my attention to this:

*"You know that our Imperial Majesty [refers to Emperor Haile Selassie I] came two times in our country and that's the hotel place where he slept which became the Rastafari village that's them destroyed. The hotel was abandoned so the Rastaman squatted the yard which became the Rasta village."*

All Africa news (27 July 2012, viewed 29/5/18) described the event as:

*"In the early morning of Wednesday 11 July, riot police came with bulldozers and razed a whole community in the Ivorian Capital, Abidjan. The "Rasta village"- known as such owing to its high Rastafarian population- was reduced to rubbles with pieces of wood, personal belongings and posters of reggae artists scattered on the ground."*

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<sup>158</sup> Self-reliance was one of the mottos of "Africa for Africans" movement by Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), an organization founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914.



Fig.42. Picture of the dismantled Rasta village

Picture by: Ras Koko Shenko

[Video 45: The destruction of Rasta village <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPKGUirODU0> ]

Today, resembling to what the Rastafari from Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, and Shenko asserts that the misunderstanding often starts from family primarily for not following the family's religion but also it largely has to do with the wrong perception that is imbued with Ivorian or anywhere in Africa. Paradoxical to the cultural expression of the Rastafari which is the culture of African people picked and woven together from all parts of Africa (see chapter 4), Africans perceive the Rastas as foreigner and their cultural activities as non-African. Unfortunately ganja has become one of the battles of Rasta in this planet except for few who live in the countries who legalized it. So far from the continent two countries; Zimbabwe and Malawi have legalized ganja ([www.edition.com](http://www.edition.com), 7 May 2018, viewed 30/5/18). One of the misconceptions of the people about Rastafari is that, marijuana is just an excuse for a Rasta to get high and waste time whereas the teaching of the Rastafari states this herb is used for ritual. Unfortunately ganja has become one of the reasons for Rastafari facing courts in every corner of the globe.

*"Ganja is for high meditation, to elevate our mind, to reach the most high. ....in this meditation you can find a solution for any problem. You can find the right discipline and the right way. ....this why we smoke this holy herb"* Shenko avers.<sup>159</sup>

The other problem that misunderstanding of Rastafari entails is unemployment. Except international organization, neither civil organization nor private companies hire Rasta. The

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Ras Koko Shenko, Shashemene, Novemeber 2017.

entertainment industry is exceptional to this but even then the character they portray is as robber or antagonist.

*“Just because you grow your hairs, smoke marijuana and you do not eat meat, they see you as a robber, lazy man.... That is why we all are rejected by the society. ....As a Rasta you must take care of yourself for yourself. You are not gonna wait for someone. You are the master of your mind. This is why we are independent from the system and become artists, artisans and farmers.”* With his heavy French accent Shenko explains.<sup>160</sup>

At the outset it was unfathomable for me when Koko Shenko uttered legality as one of challenges that the Ivorian Rastas are confronting for a simple reason that why should a local person face predicament of being legal or not in her/his own country. Only when he describes his organization situation I understood. The Rastafari association where Shenko presides, one of its objectives is the motto of Marcus Garvey, self-reliance of the black nation, and this also fits in the contemporary world of Rasta in which they formulated a solution for constantly being rejected by employers. The irony is even when they proactively seek a solution by organizing themselves, the authorities does not take them seriously and as a result it took him years to register the organization. Brother Koko Shenko on challenges of the Rastafari community in Ivory Coast explains:



Fig. 43. Ras Koko Shenko,  
picture by Koko Shenko

Conventionally but not limited to, to become a Rasta means having dreadlocks, to be vegan or vegetarian, no animal killing, smoking ganja, in general having a good vibration while talking

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

and working. All these supposedly bring a positive energy wherever a Rastafari is present. However, this might be true among the young people but not to the family. *“For a Rastafari, the hardest confrontation after he started his Rasta levity is to meet your family,”* underlines Koko Shenko.

Differently from the above discussed countries, but similar to its neighboring western African countries, Ivory Coast in its post-independence, its leader.... Opted to tie relationship with its colonial master as opposed of allying with the freed African countries for pan-Africanism ([www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com) 10 May 2010, viewed 29/5/18). Those who gave birth to the Rastafari movement opposing to the brutal oppression of colonialism in the Caribbean reclaimed their ancestors' culture from Africa. In the same manner, Ivorian's who opposed the neo-colonialism found voice through reggae music that the sons of their ancestors used for the voice of the oppressed. Eventually the country gave birth to local Rasta movement including internationally acclaimed reggae artists like; Alpha Blondy, Tiken Jah, Ismael Isaac and Desire Aloka. Striking is while repatriated Rastafari are challenged in the integration process with the local society and the native Rastafari adherents in Ivory Coast are separated from the rest of the society and formed a community, as a result of discrimination by the society and police prosecution. The online news newstatesman.com (4 Feb 2016, viewed 29/5/18) quotes Ras Kevin who lost his child and became homeless as a result of the eviction from the Rasta village; *“Nobody cares for the Rastaman, wherever we go they don't like us.”*

Comparatively, Ivory Coast is not the destination of Rastafari for repatriates from outside of Africa. However this might change in the coming years since Koko Shenko, representing the Ivory Rasta community, during the conference, promised to grant land for those who want to repatriate from outside and inside the continent, particularly bestowed to the returnees in Ethiopia considering their difficulty to get land promised by Emperor Haile Selassie I I. For Shenko, the conference urges for the unity of the African Rastafari community and gave an opportunity to network with sisters and brothers within and outside Africa.

### ***Wednesday 14 March 2018 at 4:48 p.m. Facebook chat with my Rasta sister***

#### ***Sister Welete Selassie (Ex-repatriate to Ethiopia now living in Trinidad & Tobago)***

Sister Welete is my Rasta sistrene, a friend, and we became a family four years ago when I became a god mother of her daughter, Afreeka. She is born in Germany from her Ethiopian father and Germany mother but adopted and raised by a German family. She repatriated to Ethiopia in 1997. After two decades of trial and tribulations, she left Ethiopia in July 2017 to Trinidad and Tobago where her husband is from.

On 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018, I received a facebook message from Sister Welete asking me if I know of Certificate of Character issued by Ethiopian Immigration Authority which the immigration of Trinidad required as mandatory to process her resident permit. Confused as I am, I explained I never heard of such a document, but out of curiosity, I asked why their legal marriage certificate is not enough to grant her a resident permit from a country where her husband and



her children belongs to? To my dismay, she told me let alone a marriage certificate, even a work permit from a University of West Indies which she got one for teaching Germany, will not make her eligible to be accepted by the state of the island. Only the Certificate of Character from Ethiopian immigration office would serve but unfortunately impossible to get one. She comments: *“going through our trials and tribulations to legalize my stay here... lots of obstacles, reminds me of Ethiopia...”* This alarmed its suitability to this chapter and I asked her to get more details after explaining the purpose. Thus, the data is collected in the wake of this random facebook chat. In a manner of turning the situation to my consumption of data for my research, I explained how sharing her story would be useful for my research. We conversed as follows:

*Sis Welete: what is your topic of research?*

*Me: Challenges of the Rastafari in Ethiopia*

*Sis Welete: Ha-ha, you really making it hard for yourself girl. I could tell you ironies and paradoxes all night and day long, if you want.*

*Me: hesitantly, I ask can I record the interview visually*

*Sis Welete: ....so come over, we go to the beach or the river with a picnic basket and talk forevermore.*

Sister Welete, 42 now spent more than half of her life in searching for home; where the space in her mind become a real place; a society that embodies her as one of them; and a state that permit her to live and work. Eventhough she got a work permit through her German language teaching work at the University of West Indies in Trinidad, the state fails to grant her resident permit unless she provides the certificate of good behavior. Insanely, this certificate is not required only from one country but also from every country she was before her arrival in Trinidad and Tobago. *“God knows in how many countries I have been so far.”* She remarks. By not having the resident permit she is deprived of insurance and pension. The only means for it to be legal is by having the work permit. Although Sister Welette reached her destination in cases, Ethiopia and Trinidad, but home was not attainable since she was segregated from social, cultural, economic and political strata of the states she repatriated to. Her suffering extended from Africa to Caribbean.

### **What the future holds: Commentary**

Jonathan is excited to share with the hope he sees with the opening of new TV channels as opposed to the previous autonomous state channel in Ethiopia. In these alternative channels, there are new programmes that transmits reggae music, such as EBS TV, Nahoo TV and JTV. *“This is really a good progress, but it is not enough to change the misperception on the ground”* he notes. He insinuates that the community members should use this platform and have to bring-in the Rastafari teaching to the table.

*"I wish this phenomenon started three years ago, maybe I would have not had cut my locs" he expresses. "What is so bad about being an African, practice African, and have knowledge of Africa? Astonishingly he questions to present, who is Rasta? Why are the Rastafari in Ethiopia?" Ethiopians are caught with the western culture, I am not saying one is better than the other, but what is bad about learning (coming back) to your own culture. Rasta can bring a change in every corner, spiritually, materialistically....it's powerful! It has been introduced by reggae music but it has to be reintroduced again with the teaching."*<sup>161</sup> He concludes.

Ras Royal Kofi in his opinion declares: *"Rasta has to take over the movie industry and tell our own story. Depicting the Rastafari way of life; how kings and queens live together....and the western media has to engage the Rastafari."*

Sister Thepokazi marks that skills and development is what the Rasta youth needs. Most of the Rastafari youth are on the street while trying to make it in life. She reveals that she and her peers did not get this opportunity while living with their parents who know nothing about Rasta. So her point is now as a Rastafari parent she wants to be a better parent and prevent the same problem happening to their children and thus the youth can keep her/his dignity without compromising recalling to how Jonathan cut his dreadlocks to get a job, and her uncovering of her hair to get a job, and when she used to go to work.

Related to the announcement of the national ID issuance nine months ago by the Ethiopian government, I turn to Jonathan for his comment. He says...

*"I've got to be honest with you. The time our fore fathers said we are going home- to Ethiopia that is the identification already. That is it! The Rastafari have been and still is in Ethiopia for 50 years and they always identified themselves as an Ethiopian. This whole talk-of-national-ID comes as surprise. It came out of the blue. No activities taken place with the community. May be the government decided to give us ID but, still not materialized. The ministry did not involve us, they did not ask us what we want. "I actually rather expect something out of this conference."*<sup>162</sup>

Those who passed the challenge of getting school and made it far in their study, still have a difficulty of joining the job world. Regardless of their success story and finding jobs for Rastafari remains a challenge. Relatively the Rastafari in South Africa has recognition as one of the religions in the country, but challenges are still there because many Rastas are being sent to prison in one way or another, for a reason of their practice Rastafari livity. *"I think we need to come together and solve our challenges as one because the challenges we face are similar"* Thepokazi concludes.

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with Jonathan Dyer, Shashemene, November 2017

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.



Those who usually associate Rastafari with its movement birth place in Jamaica are wrong. Rastafari is all about Africa. Today Africa's Rastafari (dreadlock) youth are spotted across the continent from Addis Ababa to Dakar, from Zanzibar to Cape Town. This confirms, not only it is a Caribbean and African phenomena but also a transnational movement, in Jonathan words, "unconquerable," and it is rapidly spreading across planet Earth and not-surprisingly the .... Percent of African youth are surrendering.

In the law of African countries discussed above there is no stipulation in their constitution that is against of wearing dreadlocks or that bans the dress-code of Rastas or nor against those who impose their own culture in school and working place. As a result the decision lies with employers and management of school. However they have ratified for equal learning opportunity for children. Therefore what is practiced by the academic institutions and employers are contradicting. This research suggests to the governments to protect the Rastafari community by law in order for them to use their rights privileges at same time carrying out their responsibility.

Departing from the narrated stories of the participants, the challenge usually starts from family, due to families' view of Rastafari limited to only religion and marijuana. This research recommends the government to impose preaching of tolerance in religious institutions. In addition, the Rastafari community in Africa to be proactive to prepare programs of introducing what and who Rastafari is? How the movement started? What should the society know beside its religious aspect? What kind of knowledge they can transfer to their distant relatives and to the global nation? Likewise, in the case of Africa, the repatriates should learn from the society and acknowledge and accommodate the dynamic of changes in socio-culturally and politically that the continent has gone through.

## Conclusion

To be born and raised in Ethiopia did not help Jonathan, the second generation of a repatriated Rastafari, to get a job with his dreadlocks. For Ras Shengo of Ghana and Ras Shenko of Ivory Coast, being local in a place where they call home and where their umbilical cord is buried did not save them from family outcasting on the account of their Rastafari *livity* and loving their Africanness reclaiming the culture of their African ancestors.

Albeit in South Africa, Rastafari is represented in the interfaith commission, the outcome has been minimal. The endeavor by the community to get acceptance from their own fellow citizens has been a zero sum game because the Rastafari among the institutionalized Christianity religion would be the lone voice in such particular forums.

Welete's blood tie with Africa and Caribbean is not enough to create a sense of belongingness for her. She moved from Germany to Ethiopia, reached physically her imagined destination whereas she was not able to work, unable financially, incapable of paying her house rent. Home was unrealizable. Subsequently, she has to flee from Ethiopia. She arrived in Trinidad

with a hope of a better situation considering her husband is from there. However the reality is that her challenges carried on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Notwithstanding reggae's popular culture among the young and the older generation, Rastafari *livity*, in its wholeness is not accepted. Perhaps, not yet. While Bob Marley and reggae song became famous, but the man that Bob's songs are based, Ras Tafari Mekonnen, known is his crown name as Emperor Haile Selassie I I became less known and rejected by his own people, Ethiopians to say the least.

The journey of finding the imagined home physically and making home in social, cultural, economic and political level is infinitely filled with the persisting trial and tribulations. The stigma against the Rastafari originates within the family, institutions of education and at working place, society and governments, regardless native or repatriate. Interestingly, the society has opted to push their culture (and religion) to the Rastafari followers instead of aspiring to learn who and what Rastafari is.

For more than a century Rastafari scholars have contributed their voice to break the silence that imposed on the challenges of the Rastafari. These scholars are who were cognizant of their African-ness, thus African-conscious, and those who embraced Rastafari along the way. Marcus Garvey; Walter Rodney; Prince Emmanuel; Prophet Gad; Rex Nettleford; Barry Chevannes, Jahlania Niaah; Arthur Lewis; are among the elders or if you wish ancestors of the (Rastafari) scholars on Rastafari. Relatively recent Rastafari scholars and activists and notably women are: Guilia Bonacci; Erin MacLeod; Ijahniyah Christian; Desta Meghoo (PhD); Queen Mother Moses, whom this research is fortunate and indebted from their literary contribution, from the first two and their insight based on their lived experience, on a none-to-one interview in Shashemene with the rest.

The Rastafari movement's adherence to pan-Africanism of black-nationalism and black-pride accompanied by its fight through its emblematic reggae music against the downpressors has offered Rastafari acceptance by Africans. Paradoxically its re-claiming of African roots in its cultural sense, such as, wearing dreadlocks, smoking of ganja for spiritual reason and its dress-code has become the members' of the communities greatest challenge in Africa.

According to my light, the positive teaching of the Rastafari coupled with facing and overcoming challenges has become a definition of who Rastafari is. For those in the academics, who are researchers and members of the Rastafari and who embarked on a research in their own community, their work have become breaking barriers, breaking borders, mashing up challenges. Above all become a living exemplars to they young generation of the transnational Rastafari community. Thus, it will be easier for those who stigmatize the Rastafari *livity* to learn from the researchers' reasoning and detailing the challenges, endurance and their ironies and paradoxes. Such as this work. Such will serve for the young generation of Rastafari to look up to the work of their elders. As the elder Rastaman from the U.K. originally from Jamaica said; *"sometimes you get used to challenges and you*

*forget they are challenges. ... Because of our positive way of life, we become excellent hurdlers without realizing it."*

*"Our situation is really a catch 22."*

Ras Kawintseb

## **Chapter Six: The Catch 22 of the Rastafari in Ethiopia**

### **Introduction**

This part of the thesis was hatched during my ethnographic investigation on the attitude of the governments of Ethiopia through time of various regimes as part of my research on the challenges and paradoxes of belonging of the Rastafari returnees in Ethiopia. Enlisting the government officials as one category of the interlocutors was in the view of examining the attitude of the current federal state with a background of previous administrators of the state. Such examination has even brought a great opportunity to the researcher in that it is the first of its kind to assess the new directive issued by the government.

A few days prior to my departure to the fieldwork in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government had announced its recognition of the half-century long Rastafari returnees' integration quest. It added that the government made all the necessary preparations to issue the Rastafari returnees a national ID. This, indeed, created a mixed feeling on the researcher. On the one hand, the announcement made me excited for Rastafari community whom I have known for more than a decade, and petrified on the other hand as the news meant to throw my research proposal under the carpet since it fundamentally contended that the returnees face challenges in the place they call home mainly caused by the government's failure to recognize them.

In view of this, I arranged a meeting for open interview with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter referred to as the Ministry) in the beginning of September 2017. On the meeting day, I was referred to Ato<sup>163</sup> Tebikew, Legal officer in the Legal Counsel Department at the Ministry. He was also a member of the jointly consultative committee consisting of staff members from the Ministry and the Immigration Authority of Ethiopia (hereafter referred to as the Authority) who drafted the directive and task force for issues related to Rastafari in Ethiopia. Before our discussion, I was handed to view the new guideline entitled: *"A Guideline to facilitate conditions for the Rastafarian Community in Ethiopia to get the rights and privileges provided to foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin # 21/2009<sup>164</sup>"*. With some negotiation, I managed to get the copy of the document for which I was told I was the first non-employee of the Ministry to get a copy. In no time, I decided to postpone the meeting by

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<sup>163</sup> Ato in Amharic is the equivalent of Mister (Mr.) in English.

<sup>164</sup> The guideline is in Amharic and the year 2009 is in Ethiopian Calendar which translates to 2017. In this case, citations from the article are translated from Amharic to English.

a week so that, after a careful examination of the issues raised in the guideline, I would well prepare myself for the interview. What followed is an account of my discussion with the official of the Ministry in a two-fold aspect. The first part of the interview is an assessment of past and present approach of the government to the community while the second part is based on questions arising after examining the directive. The focus of this writing is based on the subsequent.

Primarily, the guideline provides a background for better understanding why it took the Ethiopian government half-a-century to legalize the returnees. It discusses the general issues on the guideline and impact of the directive on the Rastafari returnees, backed by interviews with Ministry and Authority officials. Following is relative advantages and shortcomings of complying with the guideline. In doing so, the investigation compares the directive issued for the Rastafari with proclamation 270/2002 that provided foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin with the rights and privileges and how that legal bill gave rise to the new guideline. The research takes it further and presents the Ghana law of “Right of abode” under Immigration ACT, 2000 (ACT 573) in relation to the discussion raised in the directive for the Rastafari in Ethiopia. Finally, it concludes with my reflection (see the directive 21/2009 and proclamation 270/2002, Appendices 4 and 5).

### **Why did it take Ethiopia 50 years?**

As Historian Gibbon writes, “Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Ethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world, by whom they were forgotten” ([www.addisfortune.net](http://www.addisfortune.net) viewed on 13/5/18). I remember once hearing the late Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, on a national TV saying, “We can’t allow our fellow Ethiopians to eat with two hands. You are either Ethiopian or not,” referring to the prohibition of dual citizenship by the state. Awakening from the sleep Gibbon discusses, in the 1920s, Ethiopia decided to legislate a law of nationality based on blood and flesh relationship as opposed to soil<sup>165</sup>. However, following the events of Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the impact of globalization after world war II, the coup d’état of 1960 in Ethiopia, military takeover in 1970s, and U.S.A.’s immigration act of 1990 Diversity Visa Program headed up Ethiopians to flee from their land (ibid).

No longer able to ignore the dynamics that scattered its citizens or those who have blood relationship with their Ethiopian ancestors all over the world, the Ethiopian government extended the rights and privileges to them by lifting legal restrictions in 2002 under the Proclamation No. 270/2002. This act was mainly to include persons of Ethiopian origin to take part in the development and prosperity of the country, however, restricting dual citizenship.

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<sup>165</sup> “Ethiopia is one of the countries whose nationality law is based on the principle of “jus sanguinis”. As a result, the concept of dual nationality, which enables an individual to have two or more nationalities at the same time, is not permitted. Double nationality is commonly associated with the so-called “jus soli” principle, which also makes a place of birth an independent criterion for determining a person’s nationality” (addisfortune.net. viewed on 30/4/2018).

In same way, it took a number of decades to revoke the law that excluded Ethiopians from taking part in the country's development, it took about five decades for the Rastafari to be recognized. Nevertheless, neither of them gets citizenship.

### **Analysis of the Ethiopian Guideline (21/2009) for Rastafari**

After 50 years of brutal negligence by the government of Ethiopia against the Rastafari repatriates in Ethiopia, in seemingly acknowledging the ignorance, the government decided to correct itself by issuing a roadmap, entitled *"A Guideline to facilitate conditions for the Rastafarian Community in Ethiopia to get rights and privileges provided to foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin # 21/2009"*, based on the same terms and conditions of Proclamation 270/2002 that served to grant a national ID for foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin by birth. The seven-page guideline contains three parts, namely; General background, Conditions for issuance of the identification card (eligibility, rights and responsibilities), and miscellaneous provisions.

Part one renders definition of terms, their representations and the scope of application. The second part consists of the rights and responsibilities for the provision of the ID such as who gets the national ID, rights and responsibilities, exceptions, mandatory requirements, service fees, validity of the ID, back payment fees, conditions for complex issues, returning the ID, and conditions for annulation of the ID. The end part contains miscellaneous provisions on the amendment and replacement conditions for the guideline.

As we moved to the second part of the first-round interview with Ato Tebikew, my first question was "Why did it take the Ethiopian government 50 years to come up with this guideline?" His response was: *"First of all, it should be clear that the justification that served for the formulation of such guideline is due to their historical and cultural ties with Ethiopia and their contribution in that respect... so, for that to happen, it should be backed by law which came only in 2002"* shrugging his shoulder in what appeared to be, thus, what should be counted is what happened after 2002 but not before that for the relevance of this part of our discussion<sup>166</sup>. The legal departure point for the guideline that he mentioned comes from Article 8 (8) of Proclamation 270/2002 that states:

*"Notwithstanding the provision of Article 2(1)<sup>167</sup> of this Proclamation, when the Ministry and the Authority find it appropriate, they may jointly grant to foreign*

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<sup>166</sup> In general, what happened in the past 50 years and measures taken by different Ethiopian governments is discussed in chapter 1, Section on Attitude of the State.

<sup>167</sup> Article 2(1) of Definitions of Proclamation 270/2002 states: *"Foreign National of Ethiopian Origin" means a foreign national, other than a person who forfeited Ethiopian nationality and acquired Eritrean nationality, who had been Ethiopian national before acquiring a foreign nationality; or at least one of his parents or grandparents or great grandparents was an Ethiopian national.*

*nationals residing in Ethiopia, the rights and privileges accorded to Foreign Nationals of Ethiopian origin. The details shall be prescribed by directive.”<sup>168</sup>*

Therefore, in interpretation of the above article, it means that whenever the Ministry and the Authority find it necessary they collaboratively can decide to grant an identification card to foreign national residing in Ethiopia like foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin. Therefore, this became the jumping-off point to prepare the Directive 21/2009. Tebikew pointed out that such cases happen only when the individual’s economic contribution is acknowledged and important for development and prosperity of the country. As he explained from the outset, the justification used for granting the ID for the Rastafari is appertaining only to their historical and cultural ties<sup>169</sup>. Albeit, the previous article that gave departure for the current came in 2002, it took 15 years for the Ministry to issue a guideline based on Article 8(8). In justifying this, the officer stated:

*Although the returnees have queried the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a number of times, the delay is due to assessment of contribution of the community; to get the support of two government offices- the Ministry and Immigration, and finally waiting for the state’s approval to reinforce the directive. However, we gave priority to the implementation of the proclamation 270/2002 for the Ethiopian diaspora in which it was improved recurrently.”<sup>170</sup>*

The primary objective of this research is to argue that the directive actually rejects the eligibility of many of the Rastafari community members as it did not consider the reality of the returnees. The following thematic discussions show the relative advantages and shortcomings of the Ethiopian directive compared with the proclamation and the Ghanaian act.

### **Relative advantages**

Authentications that allowed the state of Ethiopia to allow foreign nationals are two completely different ones. On the one hand, it is for its own people who once identified themselves as Ethiopians in travel documents and other paper works but now adopted a different citizenship for various reasons. On the other, the Rastafari community members believe their blood and flesh relation with Ethiopians date back to the period of slavery. The motives for the government to grant the ID include economic contribution and strengthening historical ties for the Ethiopian diaspora and for the Rastafari, respectively. Commending the directive, Ato Tebikew proudly speaks: “As per our study of this community [the Rastafari ], I think what the government came up with, a national ID that allows them to benefit from the rights and privileges of what Ethiopian by birth can get, is as the best it can be.” What he said enlightens what is usually misunderstood

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<sup>168</sup> The directive came out in 5<sup>th</sup> February 2002. And Identification cards for foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin are issued.

<sup>169</sup> Directive # 21/2009, at the very top of its first page stated that guideline is issued based on Article 8(8) Proclamation 270/2009 and in order to strengthen the longstanding historical tie between the Rastafari community members and their families in Ethiopia.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Ato Tebikew Terefe, Legal Office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, September 2017.

and taken for granted. As Chishlom (1998) in his study about the Rasta-Selassie-Ethiopian Connections suggests that the Rastafari association with Ethiopia started in 1928, fed by biblical and historical accounts that assured the lineage and divinity of His Imperial Majesty (HIM) Emperor Haile Selassie land Ethiopia as the new Zion since it is the birth place of HIM. This eventually led the Rastafari followers to adopt “Ethiopianness” (Macleod, 2014, p.35) as the new identity. Many of its members repatriated not only to fulfill the physical repatriation but also to adopt the new identity of Ethiopianness. Consequently, and presumably, Ethiopians and their government understood that each returnee’s dream is to have Ethiopian passport though nothing is facilitated by the state and its people. However, what the Ministry and Authority found out was that this was not so. The immigration officer revealed to me that many of the members do not want to be Ethiopians unless they are allowed to keep their western or Caribbean passport. Similarly, Ato Tebikew conveyed the same reasoning during the meeting. According to Nationality Law (Nationality Proclamation No. 378/2003), dual citizenship is not allowed. Therefore, to get a national ID which is basically another type of citizenship allowing the Rastafari to enjoy the rights and privileges like Ethiopians who relinquished their Ethiopian passport for various reason but whose Ethiopianness can easily be traced document wise, is the best the country can give for the repatriates by far. In my “endogenous research” (Van Ginkel, 1998, p.252) of this community in Ethiopia, I observed that most of the returnees do not want to give up their original passport because they do not want to become combatants in case the country enforces compulsory military services in the event of war which *en passant* is not the case for the last nearly three decades. The only repatriate whom I came across and expressed his readiness to adopt an Ethiopian identity is Ras Kawintseb K.M. Selassie who is also known as the barefoot Rastaman. He is ready to give his Trinidadian passport in order to become officially Ethiopian.

Directive 21/2009, Article 5(1), emancipates the Rastafari community in Ethiopia from the restriction of the basic human rights and allows them to enjoy some of the rights equally with native Ethiopians. However, this is only provided to those who qualify the requirements on Article 6 of the Guideline (below, see its shortcomings). These entitlements are not requirements for entry visa or residence permit, work permit, not subjected to exclusion that applies to foreign nationals regarding coverage of pension scheme under the relevant pension law; restrictions imposed on fixed asset and foreign nationals regarding the utilization of economic, social and administrative services are lifted and have the rights to be considered as domestic investor. This, indeed, has lit a ray of hope for some members of the community. In order to discover the impact of the guideline (if implemented) and what it essentially will change in the lives of the community, I resort to Ras Kabinda who expresses:

*It [implementation of the guideline] will give us the freedom to move. If I have legality, I could sell my house or I can put it on collateral and take a loan. ... I can make movements, because Selassie I [Emperor HaileSelasie I] says you make movements. I didn't come here to sit down, to just be in a little house on 500 square meters. I came here to live on a farm. I want 500 acres of land. I want to have 10,000 bananas planted and fruit trees. I want to be running a major corporate in food production. That is what*

*I came to Africa for. I didn't come to sit down and smoke spliff, and that is no part of InI meditation...*<sup>171</sup>

The Directive is announced in July 2017 ([www.fanabc.com](http://www.fanabc.com) 27/7/17, viewed on 6/8/17). Until my departure from the field, no one received the identification card. However, one should bear in mind that this is a research conducted on an ongoing event that the different factions of the Rastafari community unusually coming together to speed up the process of the authority to issue the ID. As, therefore, I write this paper, there are new developments that I get from my informants and shared on their social media pages as well. As recent as on May 6, 2018, on her Facebook, Dr. Desta Meghoo, J.D., cultural consultant, manager and curator, and a Rastafari socialite in Ethiopia wrote that out of the three people in the first batch, two of them have got the ID because they are born and raised in Ethiopia; however, it is not clear why the third person's ID was held back. On the next day, another elder also got the ID, totally making it three out of a close to 1000 members of the community. It is worthwhile to note that by the time this research is published, there might be more people who have acquired the ID. In light of the hope and contentment that being legally recognized brings them, the post of my informant, artist brother I-Timothy, on his Facebook page reads:

*I-Timothy will soon be available for spoken word/poetry readings, speaking engagements, radio, TV, emceeing, etc. as Ethiopia has begun processing some of the Rastafari community here with Ethiopian resident status & I.D. cards...That means I will be able to travel to Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, S.A. or any place that wants to see & hear from THE poet/emcee I-Timothy! Contact me (inbox) on this or any of our FB pages...Much Thanks to J.R.D.C. & E.W.F. & especially the Ethiopian government! Bless up!*<sup>172</sup>

Cancellation of debts of service fees payable for resident permit; other immigration service fees; and services that are applicable to foreigners, by far are the major profit of this directive. The Ethiopian government introduced an insane regulation in December 2013 regarding visa overstay charge that basically ripped and essentially left the returnees hopeless by charging 10 US dollars per day. Earlier one can get a tourist visa on arrival<sup>173</sup> at the airport for 20 US dollars for three months. However, after three months, it is not renewable except some countries like U.S.A. citizens who get a two years visa on arrival. This can be renewed three times by paying the same amount for each month. Intentions to stay after the three renewals can be granted if the applicant should apply either as an investor or as a businessperson and can obviously stay under a business visa. The new law insanely raised the visa overstay fine from 20 dollar per month to 10 US dollars per day, 300 per month, and 3650 per year. The repatriated Rastafari are not tourists and they come to Ethiopia to stay premised on the calling from Emperor Haile Selassie I. Regardless of the immigration officers at the airport or the consulate where they obtained their

<sup>171</sup> Inerveiw with Ras Kabinda, Shashemene, 20 January 2017.

<sup>172</sup> A Facebook post taken from I-Timothy Green on 20 April at 2:48pm

<sup>173</sup> Visa on arrival is mostly to the western tourists.



visa enforce them to pay for tourist visa. Ras Reuben Kush, president of the Ethiopian World Federation discloses the situation as: *“The immigration authority have always been aware that we are staying illegally, because whenever we go to immigration office in Addis and ask for residence permit, they tell us it is not allowed so to go to Shashemene and do not come back to their office as it could result in arrest for overstay of visa and not renewing it. Thus, in a way the government is aware we are here but chose not to do anything up until now.”* Notwithstanding with rules and regulations, and since for the Rastafari coming to Ethiopia is coming home, thus, they have no option but to overstay. Not for one month, or two month, or three month, .... one year, but for a decade, two decades, quarter and half of a century. Thus, amounts payable to immigration for visa overstay charges by the community member who stayed for one year is unthinkable and not to mention those who stayed for decade or more so. Ras Kabinda who lived in Ethiopia for 25 years, indeed, overstaying out of visa for more than half of his stay, verbalizes his frustration:

*“The great advantage of having a legal status is I will be able to travel. I could go to Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, and Ghana. Right now I can’t move, because dem [they] want tme to pay 300,000 Ethiopian Birr to travel. Imagine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in Black Africa!...not everything u can say [on the camera]....[shed tears].”<sup>174</sup>*

Reuben Kush explains how painful the situation is, *“people overstay because they have no option and anyway they came to stay in Ethiopia....to be home. However, the consequence of overstay hits them when somebody in their family is sick and wants to visit and cannot; or one of their beloved ones dies and they cannot attend the funeral due to financial problem to settle the insane penalty fees and consequently lack of legal travel document.....this is painful.”* Therefore, the debt cancellation privilege unburdens the community’s nightmare that chokes them whenever they think of flying out of the country for urgent familial reasons. Despite the preceding ray of seemingly pros and opening opportunities stated in the directive, it should not be forgotten that eligibility of these privileges is only to be relished to solely those who satisfy the demands set by the state.

### **Shortcomings of the Guideline**

Article 8 (8) of Proclamation 270/2002 has clearly stated that albeit its Article 2 (1)<sup>175</sup> states that foreign national of Ethiopian origin, when the Ministry and Authority find it necessary they can grant equal rights and privileges to foreign national inhabiting in Ethiopia. However, the topical investigation to be followed unravels the contradictions within the directive.

#### *Articles contradicting other articles within*

In the Directive, Article 3 states *“scope of application is to the Rastafari who lived in Ethiopia for many years without resident identification card; or travel document (passport); or expired travel document.”* The guideline flatly contradicts itself when the first requirement in Article 6 writes

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Ras Kabinda, Shashemene, 20 January 2017.

<sup>175</sup> See footnote 167.

the identification card can be obtained only if the applicant can submit a six-month valid travel document.

### *Ambiguous phrases....ambiguous meanings*

Article 4 reads that identification card is issued only to those who meet the criterion stipulated in Article 6, but when proved the applicant lived in Ethiopia for *many years*<sup>176</sup>. This ambiguous phrase is mentioned seven times in the seven-page guideline. Appalled by the Ministry's choice of vague phrase in such a legal document relevant to legality-of-foreigners in the country, I asked Ato Tebikew what "*many years*" represents in the directive. He answered:

*It is true that the guideline lacks some clarification.... Basically, we are thinking of those who stayed in Ethiopia for 15 years or so. The joint technical committee takes into consideration that those who stayed for 15 years or more out numbers. Remember the length of time is irrelevant; what is important is what they contributed to Ethiopia. .... Thus, anyone with less than 15 years stay in the country should bring evidence of his contribution to this country.*<sup>177</sup>

His answer advocates for paradox and contradiction with what he said previously and what is declared in the preface of the first page of the Directive which underlines that one of the reasons to formulate this guideline is considering and strengthening the historical relation of the Rastafari with Ethiopia but not their economic contributions to the country. The state is once again contradicting itself with rapid development and expecting a contribution from the members of the community who have overstayed for 15 years or so and hardly can feed themselves, let alone to contribute to the development of the country, are handicapped by the state to contribute in any means due to lack of residence and work permit. Their persistence to stay in the country despite their trial and tribulations is a manifestation of their resistance to not lose the knot of historical, physical, and spiritual connection that they claim inherited before the time of slavery. And that should be taken into account.

### *Exceptions*

Article 5(2) states that "Notwithstanding with article 5(1) the member of the community shall have no right to vote or be elected to any office at any level of Government and to be employed on a regular basis in the National Defense, Security, Foreign Affairs and other similar political establishments." Even though Rasta movement and its members are known to be non-political, it is historically recorded that the cultural resistance movement which laid foundation for Rastafari movement (Campbell 1987) has evolved to political movement through time (Tafari, 2001, p.40). Bailey writes that as citizens of nations, they become subjects of nations' law and regulation, in many cases there are laws specifically regarding their rights and freedom both positively and negatively ([www.debate.uvm.edu](http://www.debate.uvm.edu) viewed 3/5/18). Discontented by the

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<sup>176</sup> The emphasis in italic is mine.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Ato Tebikew, Legal Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, September 2017.

restrictions, a member<sup>178</sup> of the Rastafari global community who reads the post of Dr. Desta Meghoo commending the fact that factions of the Rastafari are coming together to have one voice for a speedy implementation of the directive, comments the following:

*Raswad Nkrabea: "HIM... [HIM referring to Emperor Haile Selassie]. SAID... EVIL PREVAILS WHEN GOOD MEN STAND BY AND DO NOTHING" give thanks Empress for all the sacrifices you and others have made for our RIGHT OF RETURN!!!! JAB LESS YOU!!! HOPE THIS WILL BE A LESSON FOR THOSE WHO SIT BACK AND SAY....." LEAVE IT TO JAH" finally, these African governments should be ashamed of themselves!!! I am not giving them any props!! **Next move is our political Rights!**<sup>179</sup>Our right to be fully involved in the political process!!! Otherwise, they can revoke this token they have given us. Shame on them! Nonetheless, we give thanks for this Victory! The struggle Continues!!!!!!!!!!!!!!<sup>180</sup>*

There is a valid concern in what Raswad posted. For the Rastafari returnees in Ethiopia or anywhere in Africa, unless the community members have a political power, it is highly doubtful to sustain the rights and privileges they have been granted and to have a voice in matters that affect them as the country changes its political dynamic. For instance, the land grant by Haile Selassie is denied by its successors. Responding to the above comment, Dr. Desta wrote:

*Desta Meghoo: I overstand [Rasta vocabulary for understand] your thoughts on this Raswad Nkrabea. I have a different perspective in that I am African returning home to my long lost land and family...these governments are our governments and our people same way. So we give them props cuz they did see and they did...so morality has been the order of the day hence we give thanks. This may not be the perfect way but I can assure you that our relations with these governments is one of mutual respect as we try to overstand and get to know each other after centuries of separation.<sup>181</sup>*

Dr. Desta has relatively a different perspective or as she calls herself a “strange voice” in this whole research. She insists that credit should be given to the government considering that it has shown its recognition already by not deporting any community members. She is not the only one, Sr. Ijahnya Christian, Rastawoman from Shashemene share her view. Dr. Desta believes that in fact, the delay for full integration with the native Ethiopian is because the community is not ready to give up, she adds. In terms of the political aspect, she identifies two faults from the community side; one is not approaching the government and the community secluding itself from the local, and she asks in the absence of this “how come we expect to see ourselves integrated politically?”

<sup>178</sup> I assumed that s/he is a member of the Rastafari, since in the comment the word “we” is used- seeing herself/himself as one of the community members.

<sup>179</sup> The sentence is made bold for emphasis by the writer.

<sup>180</sup> Facebook post taken from Raswad Nkrabea on the page of Mama Desta, permission granted.

<sup>181</sup> Facebook post from Mama Desta, permission granted.

*“Sitting in a Limbo<sup>182</sup>”*

Article 6 is the major discrepancy of the directive among others. It consists of requirements pertaining to acquire the national identification card. These are: 6(1) at least a six-month valid passport; 6(2) birth certificate original with two copies; 6(3) document that evidences s/he lived for many years in Ethiopia, such as property ownership, agriculture, community participation and other supporting documents; 6(4) in the absence of the above documents, to bring three witnesses to testify s/he is a resident in the community; 6(5) and two recently taken pictures.

Among the above sub-articles, 6(1) is impossible to fulfill for most of the community members. Speaking to Ato Tebikew, he underscores that it is one of the mandatory requirements and without it no identification card is issued. This not only disclaims what is stated in Article 3(1)<sup>183</sup>, but also blocks the implementation of the directive since many returnees do not have valid passports. Wordless, as I am by the lack of flexibility of those who formulated the guideline, I asked him, “What is the solution for those who fail to submit valid passport?” He responded saying that the Rastafari community member should renew the passport in their embassies or consulates in Ethiopia. He underlines that people with invalid passport and who are not able to renew are threats to the security of the country. To give light to my blank face reaction, he adds, *“I am sure the first document you are requested before you get your visa when you got your scholarship is to present a valid passport.”* Although I nodded in agreement, I could not make the connection of the Rastafari case to my own.

In the last-round discussion with Ras Kawintseb and Ras Ibi, I brought up the proposal made by the ministry to solve their decades-long-expired passports of the community. Ras Kawintseb explains:

*“I came to Ethiopia to be Ethiopian....I was told by the Ethiopian embassy consular that I can acquire that upon arrival. But here they told us we have to stay at least for five years and be able to speak and write one of Ethiopian language. I applied for my Ethiopian passport once I met those conditions, but immigration told me I have to bring a valid passport....after six years how can I have a valid passport?....we are sitting in a limbo. Now that finally the state recognizes us and came up with this directive, but again we are met with the deadlock of the compulsory valid passport. I cannot renew my passport because there is no Trinidad and Tobago embassy or consulate in Ethiopia and in fact, even if there is, it does not change the situation, because as per new law in Trinidad, one has to go to Trinidad immigration office in person because your eye or*

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<sup>182</sup> The title is taken from the song of Jimmy Cliff from his album “The harder they come” in 1972.

<sup>183</sup> “Scope of application is to the Rastafari who lived in Ethiopia for many years without resident identification card; or travel document (passport); or expired travel document.” Also see page 8. Articles contradict each other articles within the document.

*something should be scanned<sup>184</sup>. Our situation is catch 22. Mine is even a double standard catch 22 as I cannot get the national ID or Ethiopian passport.”<sup>185</sup>*

Ras Kawintseb's situation is shared by many of the community members. They are mostly either from the Caribbean or from the West. None of Caribbean islands have either a resident-embassy or a consulate in Ethiopia ([www.embassypages.com](http://www.embassypages.com), viewed on 4/5/18). Dictionary.com defines catch 22 as a frustrating situation in which one is trapped by contradictory regulations or conditions ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) viewed 4/5/18). In the same vein, the Rastafari situation is entangled by the illogical regulations stated in Article 3(1) and 6(1) in the Directive 21/2009. One of the recurring phrases I was caught up with my conversation with Ras Kabinda was “vicious circle”. He used this phrase to demonstrate how all their problems are caused by lack of recognition or the legal status and now when the state decided to grant them the long awaited acknowledgment, they are again faulted by not having a valid passport. Though vicious circle and catch 22 have different meanings, they both convey something negative where one problem is related to another directly or indirectly.

Whereas on the Proclamation 270/2002, the requirement for foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin states that one is eligible as long as the applicant attests s/he is Ethiopian origin (Article 8.1), unlike the returnees who are required to submit a list of documents including impossible mandatory requirements. Sarcastically, this illustrates the contradicting joint working of the Ministry and the Authority. To identify which member of the community stayed for how long in the country, there is no better way other than collecting information from the immigration office at the airport given that they have a record of who entered in and left out of the country. For the Rastafari in Ethiopia, this is ultimately a situation they cannot control and in which there is no progress or improvement to their tribulation.

#### *Uncovered issues*

Though marriage is not formalized as in the western Christian way, establishing family life in Rastafari way of life is very important and taken very seriously. Murrell et al (1984, pp.72-88) demonstrates in its chapter of Gender and Family Relations in Rastafari that in a Rastafari culture whether it is monogamy or polygamy and regardless of the houses of the Rastafari, unification of the male and female reproduction is important. Abortion and contraception are forbidden ([www.philtar.ac.uk](http://www.philtar.ac.uk) viewed on 8/5/18). In explaining the significance of family in a monogamous relationship, he referred to Emperor Haile Selassie I and Empress Menen as their example though the community members practice polygamy.

Sub-articles 8(3) to 8(7) discuss in detail who is eligible for identification card such as a spouse whether it be local or foreigner and children. However, in the guideline for the Rastafari apart

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<sup>184</sup> The Immigration Division Minister of National Security of Trinidad and Tobago writes on its website: “All first-time applicants for the Machine passport MUST appear in person at the designated.”

<http://www.immigration.gov.tt/Services/Passport.aspx> viewed on 4/5/18.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Ras Kawintseb, Addis Ababa, 28 January 2018.

from the applicant- the community members are mentioned nowhere in the directive. And this leaves the fate of the applicant's family members hanging in the air.

Prior to the Ethiopian government's announcement of recognizing the community, a number of returnees including those who stayed for more than decades have left the country as a consequence of hopeless situation of becoming a legitimate repatriate in Ethiopia. The directive does not explain what happens in such instances. Nevertheless, the Proclamation issued for foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin, Article 9 distinctly states that the Ministry and Authority issue identification card when the foreign national is inside and outside the country, however the directive did not communicate what happens for a Rastafari member who is outside of Ethiopia in the event of s/he left the country after staying "many years."

Furthermore, the directive fails to comment on the land grant which is the core of the repatriation for the community. "No repatriation without the land grant" is the motto of some of the members of the community. The bequeathed 500 acres of land to the returnees of black people of the west is by the emperor. However, most of the returnees are not happy because the state has not included the fate of their land grant in the directive. I bring the subject into play in my interview with the ministry officer. He highlights "We all should bear in mind that the dynamic of Ethiopia is changed now, and so is the law on land. After the downfall of the last monarchical rule, the communist party took land and distributed it to peasants and same thing continued in this regime. People can possess land but not own it." Ethiopian law, Proclamation 769/2012 exceptionally allows investors to own immovable properties, but in general foreigners including the Rastafari, are not allowed to own immovable properties like land and house. According to Article 40 of the Constitution, land is owned by the government. People have the right of possession but no ownership<sup>186</sup>.

One of the privileges for the community is to be able to work without work permit. As explained in chapter 4, one of the challenges for those who have managed to get the resident identification card is unemployment which according to them is a result of their appearance, such as wearing dreadlocks, for women wearing long skirts and head-raps, and selection of cultural dresses over western culture. Since the guideline does not contain any dress code for the Rastafari, the encounters in the job market add fuel to the fire for the Rastafari conditions. For clarity and legal reinforcement, I drew Ato Tebikew's attention to this topic to tell me how the Rastafari members can defend their rights. He comments:

*There are some exceptional employers who have their own dress code, like, Ethiopian Airlines and banks, but even then I don't think they have a hair-code so to speak... So, as long as the member of the community is fine with the dress code, s/he should be able to work. Besides those two companies, with others they should not have any problem.*<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Interview with lawyer Kiya Tsegaye.

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Ato Tebikew, Legal Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 2017.

However, I insisted and asked him, *“But if they do have a problem, is there any legal protection? Or if such a thing happens, can they sue the company?”* He affirms that they have every right to take the case to court if such thing happens. However, this research believes that it is highly doubtful they will be accepted by employers who are part of a society that estranged them because of their cultural expressions.

The word Rastafari is used in this directive in the topic and texts a number of times to represent the community and individuals. But it fails to define who a Rastafari is and what it constitutes at least from the government point of view. Failure to define would lead to exploit the directive by those who are non-Rastafari and want to get the identification card by any means. And this fear is shared by the community members as well.

### *Fees*

Repatriation of Rastafari to the land of redemption- Ethiopia, is spiritually and ideologically oriented journey to the land granted by Haile Selassie I. Their migration is distinct in the sense that its destination is to the global south as opposed to the common global south to north migration. Their exodus to Africa or Ethiopia is tied with historico-cultural connections imbued with spiritual and historical; whereas the south to north migration is economical and in some cases political. Relevant to this sub-topic, it is even more distinct because the movement is not motivated by economic concerns (Gomes, 2011, p.4), but rather by spiritual and cultural ties. Along the same line, the Ethiopian government’s recognition of Rastafari returnees is acknowledging the historical tie the community maintained and strengthening that tie. But not because of their contribution to the development of the country which is the underpinning requirement for granting Ethiopian national identification card for a foreigner who lives in the country<sup>188</sup>. In the Directive, Article 7, the word “fee” does not specify the amount payable for the issuance of the identification card, but this seems clear as per the response from the ministry that the amount imply to the 200 U.S. dollars<sup>189</sup> that foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin pay. It may be only fair for the Ethiopian government to fix the same amount with that of foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin for the issuance of the identification card.

Nevertheless, as a consequence of denial of legal status for decades followed by non-enabling working conditions and limited movement in the country, the community members hardly earn any living. The majority of the Rastafari disciples often live hand-to-mouth from their farming. And this has a direct an implication on off-farm employment opportunities. That is to say, even when qualified to apply for a high paying job, it is unrealistic for them to pay 200 U.S. dollars (equivalent to Ethiopian Birr 5,510 ([www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com), exchange rate of 26/5/18). Needless to say, the state is eating its words as it controverts the foundation of what led the state to acknowledge, that is limitedness of the community is to strengthen the historical tie as opposed to economic contribution which is the case for other foreign nationals. In the beginning of July 2018, I spoke

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Interview with Ato Zekirstos, Foreign Affairs Department, Immigration Authority, 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018

to Ras Kawintseb and he told me that one of the reasons restricting him to go to the authority to apply for the ID, in addition to not having a valid passport is, the money issue. He said that many of the community members say that even if the government becomes flexible with the mandatory requirements the money issue needs to be solved. To make it worse, the exchange rate gets higher everyday and people can earn in Ethiopia only in Birr, thus the above mentioned amount gets higher every day. Therefore, the community members insist their case to be seen exceptionally.

### *Flawed articles*

Article 6(4) states that due to failure to submit the required documents that proves the applicant Rastafari has lived in Ethiopia for many years, s/he can bring witnesses from the area where s/he is based. This particular article leads to the production of false testimonies by foreigners who are non-Rastafari to misuse the opportunity and the rights of the Rastafari enshrined in the Directive.

### *Cancellation of Identification card (Article 12)*

Article 12 depicts conditions for cancellation counting to nine sub-articles in it. This research focuses on sub-articles that are inconsiderate of the Rastafari culture and inconsistent with what is written in other articles. Sub-article 2 asserts *“If the holder of identification card has been convicted for crime of terrorism or smuggling of narcotics or armament”* as one of the conditions for the revocation of ID. As noted elsewhere in this anthology, according to Ethiopian law, the term narcotics refers to ganja or cannabis as well<sup>190</sup>. Ganja in Rastafari culture is smoked as a sacrament and is believed to be the source of healing and insights (Murrell et al, 1998, p.355). Explaining why the guideline did not consider the returnees’ cultural expression, Tebikew underscores: *“Directives are not to revoke constitution. They are there to facilitate implementation of a constitution.”* Meaning, according to Ethiopian constitution, it is prohibited to smoke or to be found with ganja. This very much tells that acceptance of the community by the state is without taking into account their cultural manifestations imbued with their spiritual practices. Apparently, the government has taken a firm and uncompromising stance as the article further declares on sub-article 12(6) that if the holder of the ID is proved to be addicted of drugs, it will result in the revocation of the identification card. Thus, holding of the identification card brings to a member of the community freedom of movement but not freedom of expression and practice of culture.

Another circumstance which would refute the identification card is: *“If the holder of the identification card is a citizen of any country at war with Ethiopia or is found willingly helping such country”* that reads under sub-article 3. As much as this sounds like what is practiced in any sovereign country, it lacks clarification as whether the said war is before or after the issuance of the ID. For instance, Ethio-Eritrean war 1998-2000 but that has left the leaders of the two states in no speaking terms, supplemented by cultivating oppositions of each other’s on ongoing manner for the past 20 years. Although this has changed and Ethiopian and Eritrea have signed

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<sup>190</sup> Interview with Ato Tebikew, Legal Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 2017



a peace deal in on 8 July 2018 ([www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com) viewed on 16/7/18), does this mean a Rastafari from Eritrea is not welcomed? It is true that after the last battle of Adwa in 1892 in which Ethiopia defeated the invader Italy, the two countries have a peaceful relationship. But would this mean an Italian who was in military and now a Rastafari can be one of the beneficiaries of the rights and privileges granted under this directive? All these remain unanswered as the officer reserves from commenting on this for fear of committing political incorrectness.

Serving in a regular army or intelligence of another country comprehensibly has the consequence of nullification of identification card (Article 12(4)). This becomes contradicting when the state is exempting a certain group of people from this stipulation. A relevant instance is the Israelis of Ethiopian origin. Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) on 28 July 2017 evening news feed broke the news of its preparedness to issue national ID to Rastafari community and Ethiopian Jews ([www.ena.gov.et](http://www.ena.gov.et), viewed on 8/5/18). Remarking some of the highlights, Ato Meles Alem, spokesperson of the Ministry mentioned the legal ground for the government's decision to issue the identification card, the benefit it would bring and exceptions. He added that the guideline got its blueprint in collaboration with the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). It is an open secret that every woman and man in Israel is required to serve in the army from the age of 18 before joining higher education ([www.entitymag.com](http://www.entitymag.com), last viewed 8/5/18). This is true also for Ethiopian Jews in Israel as well and substantially the Israeli army is considered to be a melting pot where it blends together natives with immigrants. The guideline for implementation for the Rastafari returnees is prepared separately while the departure point for both communities remain the same, that is, Article 8(8) of the Proclamation 270/2002. In any event, the act of the Ethiopian government is contradictory and hypocritical when it is cautious to a certain group (Rastafari) by stating military service leads to voiding ID card, and for the other (Ethiopian Jews) lending blind eyes and deaf ears for the widely known mandatory service in the Israeli army.

Setting conditions for cancellation of the identification card of a spouse appears out of the blue since there was no article included on identification card eligibility unlike the proclamation 270/2002 that discusses eligibility conditions including spouses and children for foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin. Albeit the guideline clearly states that this directive shall come into force as of the date signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. And this was done (signed and stamped) on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2017. However, after 11 months into effect, the Authority issued the first identification card for the handful of community members on 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018<sup>191</sup>.

### **“Right of Abode” of Ghana**

For gaining a better understanding, the research examined the practice of another African state, popular and symbolic destination for the Rastafari, Ghana. Ghana allows people of African descent to gain permanent residency through its “Right of Abode” bill. According to Ghana's Immigration Act 2000 (573), it gives legal basis for foreign nationals of Ghanaian origin and African descendants a dual citizenship via this bill. As stated by the law, *“the concept of right*

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<sup>191</sup> The information was collected through the facebook page of my key informant, Dr. Desta Meghoo, from who I got confirmation via private message.

*abode under immigration law is that a person having the right of abode shall be free to live and to come and go into and from the country without let or hindrance* ([www.ghanatrade.com.gh](http://www.ghanatrade.com.gh) viewed on 14/5/18)."

Unlike Ethiopia, Ghanaian "Right of Abode"<sup>192</sup> directive allows its foreign nationals of Ghanaian origin to have dual citizenship provided that their host countries permit. This includes not only those who have blood and flesh relationship with Ghanaians but also adoptees by a Ghanaian family, and children who are born in Ghana from foreign nationals<sup>193</sup> ([www.ghanaimmigration.org](http://www.ghanaimmigration.org) viewed & saved on 11/5/18). In other words, the Ghanaian directive does not marginalize those who do not want to have dual citizenship in an attempt to address the long standing question of the African descents including the Rastafari who repatriated to the western African country.

Of a like nature, Immigration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are the primary members of the Immigrant Quota Committee that deals with foreign nationals in Ghana. However, different from Ethiopia, Ghana's committee consists of Ministry of Interior; Employment and Social Welfare; Trade and Industry; Registrar-General Department, Investment Promotion Centre, bank, statistical service, and employment association. This indeed enables all concerned government offices to be informed at once with no time gap that avoids delay in the application process of the foreign nationals for their "Right of Abode" status and integration process. The absence of uniform information between the members of the joint committee of Ethiopia comprises of the Ministry and Authority has contributed to the delay of the implementation of the directive. In January 2017, during my last round visit to the Ministry to ask about any developments in the implementation of the guideline Ato Tebikew said: *"We have completed our side of the work regarding the ID, now everything depends on the Authority of the immigration."* Even though I was at the Authority before for the research which I tricked them to enter, when I went for the second time, I could not even pass the gate check-point. It turns out that I had to bring a letter from my university directly addressed to the Authority of the immigration. With a prompt response from Leiden University, I got the letter within 48 hours. With the letter, I managed pass the gate check-point during my next visit, and waited for three hours for Ato Zekirstos from the Foreign Affairs Department of the Authority, fearing he might tell me he had to attend a next meeting. So, I quickly introduced myself and asked why they did not start to issue the said national ID to the Rastafari community in Ethiopia. He replied: *"We are waiting for a complete list from the Ministry; and unless we receive that, it will be difficult for us to issue the ID. We do not want to check who is eligible or not; we want an authorized list from the Ministry."* However, for my information Ato Zekirstos, together with his colleague, revealed to me that they have issued IDs to five community members. Nevertheless, the representative of the Ethiopian World

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<sup>192</sup> Ghana Immigration ACT (573), Section 17, Right of Abode, sub-section 1, paragraph b: "A person of African descent in the diaspora."

<sup>193</sup> Ghana Immigration ACT (573), Section 17, Right of Abode, sub-section 1, paragraph a: "A Ghanaian by birth, adoption, registration or naturalization within the meaning of the citizenship ACT who by reason of his acquisition of a foreign nationality has lost his Ghanaian citizenship."

Federation, Ras Reuben Kush confirmed that no one from the community has got it because he could have been informed as he is the contact person for the Ministry. Here we observe that the two civil institutions do not communicate the same information over the same issue and directive and not to mention the subject, the Rastafari returnees are not embodied. Despite the fact that I was told explicitly it is a joint committee from the Ministry and Authority working on the issue of the Rastafari, it is obvious information and implementation are not shared. Reuben Kush has qualms in the implementation of the directive:

*“Whatever put in place for our community, it should be translated to the Regional Government in Shashemene. We don’t want a situation where the Federal Government gives us all these different things [the rights and privileges] to integrate here, and we go to Shashemene administration and they don’t know anything about it.”*

Qualifications listed to be eligible for the identification card (for Ethiopia) and the “Right of Abode” (for Ghana) have some commonalities but also some major differences. Distinct to Ghana is the requirement by the ministry that the applicant is capable of contributing economically to the development of Ghana<sup>194</sup>. Whereas directive 21/2009 of Ethiopia remarks the rationale behind its decision is bearing the historical connection<sup>195</sup> discordant from foreign national of Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian origin<sup>196</sup>. Remarkably, the Ghanaian immigration does not require a valid passport to get the status of “right of abode” due to easy work permit access upon their arrival as opposed to Ethiopia’s strict requirement for work and resident permit.

Detail requirements are missing from the immigration Act. Two African-descended American bloggers in their travel to Ghana to gather information of requirements for the “Right of Abode” status have revealed the list of requirements ([www.therepatdiaries.com](http://www.therepatdiaries.com) viewed on 26/5/18). These are: completed application form; application letter addressed to ministry of interior; notarized letters from two Ghanaians attesting to the applicant’s good character and that they have known the applicant personally for at least five years; applicant declaration of no criminal conviction or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or more; documentation of financial standing; capability of applicant to make a substantial contribution to the development of Ghana; must have resided in Ghana throughout the period of 24 months immediately preceding the date of the application; must have resided in Ghana for periods amounting in the aggregate to not less than 5 years during the 7 years immediately preceding the 24 months in number 7; processing fees of 1000 Ghana cedi (approximately \$220 USD). Comparatively the amount of fee is relatively similar with Ethiopia. However less number of years of staying in Ghana is required to obtain the “Right of Abode” status. Furthermore, the rights and privileges granted to the repatriates in

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<sup>194</sup>Immigration ACT, 2000 (573), section 17, sub-section 3, paragraph d: “he is in the opinion of the Minister capable of making a substantial contribution to the development of Ghana.”

<sup>195</sup> Preliminary of directive 21/2009: “Whereas it is necessary to strengthen the historical relation between the Rastafari community and Ethiopians;”

<sup>196</sup>Interview with Ato Tebikew from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, September 2017.

Ethiopia and to the African descendants in Ghana are the same apart from the act of the latter stipulating the inherent eligibility of the dependents of the applicant<sup>197</sup>.

Conditions for revocation of the status of “right of abode” are not far from each other. Nonetheless the Ethiopian guideline points out crimes that lead to cancellation of the identification card of the Rastafari members<sup>198</sup>. Among the listed crime acts are: terrorism, drug addiction, drug smuggling, and drug possession. In this respect, the Ghanaian government has recently made amendment of the act and listed smuggling of migrants as one of the conditions for revocation of the status ([www.pambazuka.org](http://www.pambazuka.org), viewed on 26/5/18). Furthermore, revocation of the status in Ghana would by default include dependents enrolled under the status holder<sup>199</sup>, whilst Ethiopia just looms a softer-heart to the dependents as it hints the possibility of spouse’s application for re-consideration being accepted after the joint committee reviewing the reasons presented by a spouse<sup>200</sup>. As mentioned earlier, the directive does not mention the status of dependents prior to the cancellation article, thus, it is uncertain.

The Immigration Act 2000 (573) of Ghana specifies that removal of illegal immigrants when found unlawful persons as per the law of the country. These statements answer by who, why, when, and how including condition where detention is applied until deportation is arranged and such power is given only to immigration officers<sup>201</sup>. This is not marked explicitly in the Ethiopian guideline. Such information would benefit the holder of the identification card to know who has the right to detain her or him and avoids misconducts of policies. As per my observation in Shashemene, though they know the Rastafari use cannabis ritualistically and there is some understanding compared to previous times. However, sometimes random search by a police are observed in the yard of a Rastaman, usually aimed at getting bribes. Failure to bribe them results in arrest and a possible unnecessary stay in jail before the trial. Checkpoints on roads and highways are another targeting place for harassing Rastafari members. The harassment could also happen while walking on the street. For instance, when a city is in security alert, residents in the city are required to show a valid identification card. In such situation, a Rastafari who does not have legal documentation becomes the most vulnerable for imprisonment and malfunctioning judiciary system of the country.

### *Loopholes*

Commendably, the eastern and western African states have achieved and fulfilled the call of their pan-African leaders, Emperor Haile Selassie and Kwame Nkrumah. However, the law should be revised before running a risk at their respective country’s expense. Ghana’s “Right of Abode” status may attract more black people from outside the continent, but it is marred by loopholes.

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<sup>197</sup> Act 2000 (573), section 18, sub-section 2-4:

<sup>198</sup> Guideline 21/2009, article 12, sub-articles 2-4 and 6. See above in the section of Cancellation of Identification card.

<sup>199</sup> Act 2000 (573), Section 20, Sub-section 5 and 6

<sup>200</sup> Guideline 21/2009, Article 12, Sub-article 7 and 8

<sup>201</sup> Act 2000 (573), section 21 and 22

As reported by Rastafari .tv online news ([www.Rastafari .tv](http://www.Rastafari.tv) viewed 26/5/18), Nana Adjoa Kwarteng observes *“There is a possibility that someone will attempt to challenge such a rule on the grounds of racial discrimination.”* Here she is referring to what the definition of African descendant is, and what percentage of African-ness in one’s DNA is needed to be African descendant. This will create the opportunity for misusing the status provided in the laws unless bounded by specific meaning of the terms. On a similar note, lack of specific and detail definition of who a Rastafari is, leads to future loopholes of Ethiopia’s directive as well as Ghana’s right of abode. For instance, the Proclamation 270/2002 in black and white states that foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin should be traceable and be able to prove that at least one of their great grandparents is an Ethiopian.

With regards to the Rastafari, the guideline repetitively used the word Rastafari without defining the term. Questions like, who the Ministry and Authority is referring to using the word Rastafari? What kind of feature is the joint committee looking for one to be a Rastafari? Is it their cultural expressions? Any foreigner who lives in Shashemene? Foreigners who came from Caribbean? Clarity can only be achieved by bounding these answers, hence avoiding possible abuse of definition of terms in the guideline.

Implementation delays are another obstacle. Since Ghana has introduced “Right of Abode” policy in 2000, the only person who was able to get that entitlement is Sister Rita Marley who is the spouse of the late great Bob Marley (ibid.) while those who made their way to Ghana and others outside are waiting in vain for the effectuation of the law. It was reported that the process to acquire the “Right of Abode” is long and frustrating. An official from the ministry of interior of Ghana said “more needs to be done to make returning African brothers and sisters feel welcome back on the continent, if Africa is to benefit.”

## **Conclusion**

Awakening from its sleep for 50 years, 28 July 2017, the Ethiopian government has announced to issue national identity cards to members of the Rastafari community who for so long have been stateless in the Promised Land. This will not make the first, the second or the third generation of the community to become citizens, but, as demonstrated, that is only to benefit a minority within a minority. The recognition comes at a time of the testament of the returnees’ greatest trial and tribulation for half-a-century. This research contends that the directive is not inclusive of the majority of the community due to the impracticality of the mandatory requirement (Article 6(1)) to submit at least a six-month valid passport.

The directive 21/2009 stems from the legal bill of Article 8(8) of the Proclamation 270/2002 that provides foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin with certain rights to be exercised in their country of origin. According to my interview with the representative from the Ministry and as the particular article states the ministry and the authority when finds it necessary grant rights and privileges accorded to foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin.

The stipulation of “Right of abode” to African descendants in Ghana and rights and privileges provision of the Rastafari in Ethiopia, the two together can be put in context as recognizing the African history with a pan-African approach, fulfilling their pan-African leaders’ of Emperor Haile Selassie I’s and Kwame Nkrumah’s wish to bring African descendants back home. Ghana has taken the lead to take the bold initiative to provide right of return for African descendants indiscriminately. Recently also the country announced its commitment to the Right of abode and decalred “2019 diaspora return year.” However whether there is a change in the law or not needs further research ([www.busineesghana.com](http://www.busineesghana.com) viewed on 1/11/18). launched that the year of 2019 however Ethiopia’s approach is limited to the Rastafari community in the country, but interestingly but also bewilderingly, regardless of one is African or not or black or white, what the Ethiopian government emphasize is a Rastafari who lived in the country for “many years.”

Undoubtedly, the holder of the identification card in both countries’ case is entitled with privileges of no entry visa, working without permit, lifting of back payments for overstaying, but this is only if the applicant meets the prerequisite in the guideline. Thus, realistically, the mass of the repatriates is excluded on account of inflexible requirements, as the directive of Ethiopia includes contradicting articles within the directive, limitations caused by restriction on political movement which prevents of becoming the aspired Ethiopianness before repatriation, the calculated negligence on the cultural expression and the land grant, and conditions of cancellation of the identification card that do not comprise of their cultural expression.

On the one hand, it claims exercitation of the application is to the community who lived in Ethiopia without or with expired travel document. On the contrary, it disclaims it with a compulsory article of submission of a valid travel document. As said, if the government is to fortify the longstanding historical and cultural connection with returnees then it should also be considered and ready to be flexible and work towards political embodiment and citizenship. Recognition of their legal status without reinforcing their cultural expression by law will erode the cultural diversity that has become emblematic of the country. Being unapologetically of their appearance, children of Rastafari should indiscriminately be accepted to school, and employers should no longer have excuses to hire dreadlock women and men of Rastafari. From my experience, both the federal and regional governments are cognizant of the 500 acres’ land grant by Emperor Haile Selassie I. Either rejection or acceptance of the land grant has to be stipulated by law in order to enhance integration of the community with the native people in Shashemene and to pave the way forward. It is a supposed secret and at the same time a known fact that the Rastafari use ganja for spiritual purpose. To deny their right of spiritual practice would contradict with the religious freedom assigned by law<sup>202</sup>. Thus, it is advisable if the state is respectful of their

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<sup>202</sup> Ethiopian constitution, article 27: freedom of religion, belief, and opinion. Article 27(1) states: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.



spiritual practice and allows them for a personal ritual use instead of using it as a basis for annulment of their identification card.

If Ethiopia and Ghana project the provisions on the law, they have the potential of attracting many successful persons of African descent in the diaspora to look at these countries as their home and motivate them to take partnership in the contribution to the development of the countries and obtain ownership of its prosperity. And unless amended, the directive will end up serving the few in the community who have already a renewed passport because they have investor status in the country. Doing so, also translates to allotting the rich to become richer while the privileges entitle them to set up business with minimum capital like that of the citizens whereas the poor get poorer denied of basic human rights of right to work and freedom of movement.

It is paradoxical for Ethiopia to be the founder of African Union (formerly Organization of African Unity), and with that said, to have an approach of a closed policy in terms of visa towards its African fellows while it grants visa on arrival for the non-African western countries. At the very least for a country that is known to be a Pan-African and supporter of its icons, to be unfriendly to the Rastafari who identify themselves as an Ethiopian and a living example of a Pan-African society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is an ultimate oxymoron.

For the case of African travelers who holds African passports, however, this seems to change. The six months old of the new Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia seems a promising one and a change-engine to the country that even got the attention of the oppositions inside and outside of the country. He addressed to a number of the nations' demand that has been also a cause for the three years' political unrest in the country. Such as, releasing political prisoners in the country; releasing of thousands of jailed Ethiopians in neighboring countries like Kenya, Sudan and Egypt; reaching an agreement with Egypt with regards to the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam; his peace deal with neighboring Eritrea are the few among others. On May 26, 2018, during a state banquet held for president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, who had a three-day working visit in Ethiopia, the Prime Minister Abiy revealed Ethiopian's plan to allow Africans to travel to Ethiopia without visa ([www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com) viewed on 26/5/18). This hint goes practical after four months when the country launched its visa on arrival for African citizens ([www.africannews.com](http://www.africannews.com) viewed on 19/10/18). Nonetheless, Africans from the outside of the region, particularly the Rastafari case remains the same.

Following the current wave of change and the country's opening of its doors for those who exiled, the Ethiopian diaspora, is pushing to be called Ethiopian which essentially will lead pushing for Ethiopian citizenship through dual citizenship. Under the condition that the directive 21/2009 is to enable the Rastafari to grant the rights and privileges given to foreign nationals of Ethiopian, then, by implication the Rastafari would as well get Ethiopian citizenship. Yet again the requirements may hinder the adherents from getting one in the absence of valid passport.

Whether the ongoing-current-of-change hits the case of the Rastafari in Ethiopia, or the country sleeps another decade(s) before amending the guideline for the inclusion of the majority of the community members and opt to unpuzzle the catch 22 of the Rastafari soon, only time will tell.



*Rastafari is a new race! You gonna fight it, you gonna do each and everything you gonna do but at the end Rastafari will prevail. That is worldwide. That is a fact. It is a new race. It has no geographical limitation, no race discrimination. ...If you are all about good and positive, that is Rastafari. It is a spiritual uprising. It is unconquerable!*

*Jonathan Dyer*

## **Chapter Seven: Observation: Transnationality of the Rastafari in Ethiopia**

### **Introduction**

The Rastafari movement is only a decade away from becoming a century old movement. Regardless of the saga of the hardships, the legacy of the movement lives not only in the Caribbean where it was given birth to but also evolved to a transnational movement (Hansing, 2010, p.733). The Rastafari community in Ethiopia has recently begun to demonstrate a boom of international connections with its diasporic Rastafari community and embarking on finding opportunities of a transnational entrepreneurship. This boom is attributed to different factors enhancing the internationality of the movement.

The findings of the research prove the cogent account of the interplay between the viciousness of the Rastafari adversities and paradoxes of their situation is not limited to Ethiopia or Africa, rather, universal. Consequently, this research preeminently begs for an answer to a question: “What the community does in the absence of full integration in Ethiopia and if it is leveraging from its international relation in any event?”

First of all, it is worth clarifying that the research did not conduct an exhaustive research on the worldwide movement of the community, but some of the observations, reading the notes, listening and watching the recordings necessitated to share the views as a departure for those interested in further investigation on the subject matter. The fact that this chapter comes at the end tells it was not part of the original structure of my project until I had one of my regular meetings with my advisor Prof. Mirjam de Bruijn. The meeting spelled the thought and word to manifest in this chapter of the thesis. While discussing with here on Chapter five, she suggested if I could include on “transnationality” of the community in a chapter, then the work would be complete. Since there was a lot to share, I took the liberty and dedicated a chapter for it.

If you ask me why wasting time if there is no in-depth investigation, my answer is: I strongly believe that it would be great ignorance of the research outcome not to record this monumental time of the Rastafari in expanding its horizon of transnationally, but, this time, in a centralized fashion. Furthermore, the research testimonying this event firsthand obligates to say something.

The chapter offers a brief background on the general overview of Rastafari's worldwide movement. The subsequent discussion is on the transnational connection of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia. To demonstrate this, it looks into the various manifestations of the connections of the community to international institutions and foreign offices like diplomatic corps. Wondering how their status is considered in the eyes of international organization, the research delivers the view of the United Nations International Organizations for Migration (UN-IOM). Further it examines the embedding of a transnational entrepreneurship through the formation of centralized annual meetings like All African Rastafari Gathering (AARG) and Rastafari Continental Council (RCC).

## Synopsis

Predominantly, reggae music and its popular cultural expression, the dreadlocks and the Ethiopian flag (green, yellow and red coloured) are catalysts for the international spread of the movement. However, the international and apolitical evolution of reggae did not come overnight ([www.sdcitybeat.com](http://www.sdcitybeat.com) viewed on 22/8/18). The movement through its music genre reggae and its teachings preaches for unity, peace, justice and equality. It equally and publicly condemns a system working against these irrespective of race and religion. Commenting on why I should not be surprised that Rastafari is a global movement, Ras Kawintseb said, *"It is the oppressed who break the cycle of oppression. Not the oppressor"* referring to that people in the world with common issues regardless of their differences. It is typical of the movement and its adherents if they become one under the umbrella of reggae because that is their voice. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* also provides the definition of the transnational social movement as: *a collectivity of groups with adherents in more than one country that is committed to sustained contentious action for a common cause or a common constellation of causes, often against governments, international institutions, or private firms* ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com) viewed on 10/9/18). The Rasta movement is not yet centralized, but with the current mobilizing and organizing through AARC and RCC, it appears that it is changing gear.

It may sound strange for non-black people to embrace a black-God-faith and an Afro-centric movement. But the truth of the matter is the movement has followers worldwide, including white people even though the majority are black Rastas. In fact, it turns out that the biggest reggae concerts are organized neither in Africa nor in the Caribbean. They are rather organized in Europe like the Summer Jam in Germany, and Rottotom in Spain. Moreover, the Caucasian or the non-black adherents of the Rastafari, equally, participate in spiritual rituals, take part in Afro-centrism events, and condemn slavery. Therefore, this is another evidence for claiming that the transnationality of the movement is not only in popular culture but also in terms of spreading its basic ideologies.



Fig. 44. Ras Ibi<sup>203</sup> (in the middle) from Ethiopia, lecturing about Rastafari Ital livity @Rototomsunsplash, Reggae concert in Spain on 21 August 2018.

Picture credit: from Ras Julio facebook page with the permission of Ras Ibi who is tagged on the post.



Fig. 45. Rastafari of all race playing the Nyabingi chanting @Rototomsunsplash, Reggae concert, Spain, 19 August 2018.

Picture credit: from Ras Julio facebook page with the permission of Ras Ibi who is tagged on the post.

What is more, white reggae artists are as accepted as black reggae artists. To name a few: Gentleman from German; Alboroise from Italy; the Jewish-American, Matisyahu; Tribal Seed; and Iration are among many.

### Transnational connections of the Rastafari in Ethiopia

<sup>203</sup> Ras Ibi is a repatriate Rastafari from Ethiopia, originally from Sweden (See Chapter 4).

One of the striking observation, if not a signal, I had during my fieldwork, , was the increasing alliance between the 'homeland' Rastafari community in Ethiopia with the diaspora and a booming of Rastafari organizations.

As discussed in Chapter Five, I had the opportunity to participate in the first All Africa Rastafari Gathering (AARG), held in November 2017, in Shashemene. This conference unraveled the international cross-border connections of the community from Africa, Caribbean, Europe, North and South America. The conference was organized under the theme of Intra-Africa Trade for a Self-Reliant Rastafari Nation. One of the declarations of the conference reads that it is determined to urge *the African Union, regional and international financial institutions, other relevant regional and international institutions as well as non-government organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, and all sectors of civil society, in cooperation with governments, to fully commit themselves and contribute to the implementation of this declaration* (See appendix 1).

Primarily, it comes with a surprise that the Rastafari community that has not organized such a conference to enhance integration with Ethiopians at home organizes international conferences. What is again surprising is the fact that the number of Ethiopian participating in the conference was minimal given the organization of the conference in Ethiopia. Thus, this research contends that in the absence of fully fledged integration accompanied by the vicious circle of challenges, they look for a 'home-diasporic' relationship. These connections are displayed in the form of networking with international organizations and diplomatic missions.

#### *Reaching out to International Organizations*

Seeing or perceiving inseparably from imagining is grounded on what we consider as true in our lived experiences (Macleod, 2014; 7). The great Marley in his song Exodus, chants "*we know where we're going; we know where we're from; we are leaving Babylon, y'all; we're going to our Father's land.*" Similarly, Dennis Brown, a renowned reggae artist, sings "*Going to the Promised Land...Make a step down to Wasmara, then we stopped in Addis Ababa, made our way to Shashemene land, riding on the king's highway...*" This does not mean that either the singers or the audience have seen Ethiopia. What it means is that they have their own imagination and perception based on their lived experiences. On the other hand, relationships become paradoxical in the absence of what is imagined, perceived or seen as 'home' (Weingrod and Levi, 2006, pp.691-716). The Rastafari in the process of settling in their imagined home, and in the attempt to retain significant ties to their previous place (global Rastafari diaspora), they exclude their host community. This is largely a result of their expectation failing to meet the reality on the ground. Moreover, their relationship with the local has become difficult and uncertain. This demonstrated the hardships they face with their host irrespective of location.

Moreover, some of the recurring phrases of the participants lead to the above argument of the research. One of the informants, Ras Faya [name changed] expresses the need to

approach the African Union Commission because of the frustrations they face in Ethiopia. He explains that the first strategy is through the principles forwarded by the very commission itself. The strategy is that the Caribbean and African diaspora are considered the sixth region of the African continent. This will enable us to lobby the host countries to grant African citizenship of the African diaspora when they repatriate to the continent. But the second reason to turn to AU. For AU, he believes that Ethiopians have “a very low African consciousness.” As Ethiopia is the capital of Africa, it should take a leading move to welcome the African diaspora, he adds. The AARG declarations also underscores that its determination to press for membership of the African Diaspora as the 6<sup>th</sup> Region of the African Union.

### *Babylon to Saviors*

The international connections go as far as bonding with their previous colonial masters’ representatives in Ethiopia in terms of bringing a solution for their hardships. Rastafari movement is created as a cultural resistance to colonialism and it is a revolutionary reaction to slavery, down-pressure<sup>204</sup>, and the tenacious poverty. It is relatively understandable for the Rasta to reach out for the diaspora Rastafari community. However, it is thought-provoking when they reach out for their previous colonizers to be their saviors in the Promised Land in the light of the community was considered to be a threat to these governments in the West Indies during colonialism. During my fieldwork, I had a chance to conduct an archival research in the EWF in Shashemene with the assistance from the local representative Ras Paul. Although I was not allowed to make copies of the documents, I could fully take notes. Many of the documents are confidential since they tell the view of the British government, the then colonizer of Jamaica, towards the Rastafari movement. A correspondence made in 1959, on 1<sup>st</sup> January, between the high commissioner in the island and the headquarter back in England reveals that a close watch was always maintained on the activities of the movement with the involvement of the security liaison office and the local Standing Intelligence Committee. Additional confidential correspondence proves that the concern on the movement’s activities was shared with the U.S. government as well. A correspondence carried out on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1966 discloses the surveillance on Emperor Haile Selassie’s state visit to Jamaica from 21-24 April 1966. The summary of the report includes the speech of the emperor and his reference to the Rastafari and to the British policy in bringing colonial territories to independence. Therefore, this proves that the Rastafari are not certainly welcome by the British government.

Repatriation is considered to be a cornerstone of the followers’ belief, to be out of captivity by a return to Zion. However, when their imagination of the Promised Land became a Cursed Land, and the challenges remained unbearable, the community reached out to embassy representatives, in which, some of the western embassies still represent their previous colony islands. The local representative of EWF, Reuben Kush, explains that was difficulties to deal with the regional administration in Shashemene on issues like issuing ID, building permission

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<sup>204</sup> The Rasta vocabulary for oppression.

because of the interventions of British, French, and American embassies. He adds, the efforts were not successful:

*We have asked all those embassies to agitate on our behalf. ... We have got those embassies to bring them down to Shashemene and meet the local mayor local kebele<sup>205</sup> officials and after all these meetings it always comes to the same thing- Which they can't agitate on our behalf.<sup>206</sup>*

Another occasion that the reaching out for intervention becomes frequent is when members of the community are arrested mostly related to marijuana possession or trading and thievery that targets them. In the context of what other alternative institution or international organization can be a partner in bringing an end to their adversities, the research tried to reach out the African Union Commission. Since this attempt did not work, the study resorted to UN-IOM.

### **Rastafari in the eyes of UN-IOM:**

The interview with IOM was held in January 2018 with the Communication Officer, Alemayehu Seifeselessie. The UN agencies usually work with the government. The IOM in Ethiopia operator in four areas: *refugee, diaspora, returnees, and Internally Displaced People (IDP)*. From all these programs that the organization is engaged in, the program for returnees seems closer to the Rastafari case. According to Ato Alemayehu, with respect to returnees, it deals with irregular migrants and forced returnees. IOM's mandate allows it to act only before deportation and they have to be Ethiopians. However, even then, IOM's assistance is rendered only when approached by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia.

In the event of Rastafari, Erin MacLeod (2014, p.1-30) argues that Ethiopians see Rastafari as immigrants whereas the Rastafari see themselves as returning member of the Ethiopian diaspora. The way the majority of Ethiopians view this community reflects the state approach towards this society. The Rastafari whose current status is not Ethiopian translates to not an Ethiopian returnee, which disqualify them from the above IOM program's beneficiary lists. As a result, this makes it difficult and, indeed, pointless to have connections with the IOM. The African Union has decided to adopt the Caribbean and the African diaspora as the sixth region of the continent, but it is not supported constitutionally. The Rastafari gathering calls for international organizations to finance the Rastafari initiative. Given the above explanation, the search for self-reliance and a transnational economic cooperation through intra-Africa trade seems the natural result of the process. As Ras Ruben rightly pointed out, at the end the community has to agitate for themselves and rely on no state.

### **The boom of Rastafari Transnational organizations: Transnational Entrepreneurship**

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<sup>205</sup> *Kebele* is Amharic word referring to the smallest unit of administration in the government system.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Reuben Kush, Addis Ababa, September 2017.

*“We have been only consumers. We can put the bigger hat and become entrepreneur.”*

It seems that the Rastafari movement, after its close-to-a-century-old-decentralized-movement, is having the urge to centralize. In less than a year, it has successfully launched two Rastafari congregations in the continent. The first one is All Africa Rastafari Gathering (AARG) and Rastafari Continental Council (RCC). While the former kicked off in Ethiopia, the latter erupted during the AARG inaugural but officially launched in South Africa in May 2018. Both meetings are deliberately coincided with the celebration of the two creeds of the Rastafari movement, the coronation anniversary of Emperor Haile Selassie, November 2, in reference to the spiritual aspect, and Africa Day, May 25, the day African Union (formerly known as Organization of African Unity) is established, relating to its pan-Africanism commitment. This section will look further into the AARG and RCC and intra-Africa trade associated with them. The research contends that alliances formed with the diaspora Rastafari community justifies the plan of the community at home in endeavoring to find a resolution as a result of triumphing over difficulties and adversities. The conversation I had with Sr. Ijahnya asserts this argument. Discussing about resilience and how amazing their endurance of the community, she throws: *“It is not such great endurance to stay home and know that our future lies in and with Ethiopia’s. Hopefully, we are learning as we go.”* Therefore, by spreading their network and becoming more centralized, they can rule their destiny. When I further asked her to explain what she means with that? She said that we came home to be at home, *“not to run back to anywhere in times of trouble.”*

#### *Few words about the architect of AARG*

The All Africa Rastafari Gathering is the brain-child of Ras Mweya Masimba who is a repatriate Rasta to Ethiopian since 1992, the same year when Ethiopia saw the largest number of Rastafari returnees to the Promised Land. Ras Mweya unfortunately transitioned in Ethiopia in September 2016, the year before the actual inaugural of the gathering. He was an artist, a filmmaker, and above all, a man with apparent mixture of humbleness and toughness that come from his deep belief in Rastafari movement. It was a privilege for me to have met him and have him as a speaker on the first public lecture that I organized at Addis Ababa University with other Rastafari members.





*Fig. 46. Ras Mweya Masimba*  
*Picture credit: Ras Mweya home facebook.*

Having said this, the AARG was formed with an intention to bring together Rastafarians from across Africa to Shashemene, the Mecca of Rastafari movement. As per the report<sup>207</sup>, the objectives of the gathering were to primarily introduce fellowship among the adherents of the community within and outside the continent, in addition to essentially forming to explore and exploit opportunities for intra-Africa trade. In this context, exhibiting and trading of the Rastafari producers are the main event of the seven days long conference alongside other activities (Report, p.10).

#### **AARG**

One of the prominent figures of the Rastafari movement, Marcus Garvey's attempt was to create a self-reliant and self-determinant black nation. It was against this background of Garveyite principles of self-reliance and self-determination the AARG was formed. According the report of the gathering (pp.11-12), the AARG is a double-focus on Representation for Repatriation and Intra-Africa Trade. But, the latter, as the report states, is born out of the long and slow process that requires faith and patience of the community members, particularly those in Ethiopia. The absence of recognition as returning Africans denies them to sustain themselves economically and halts their development. Therefore, this activated the need to

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<sup>207</sup> The 95 Report on All Africa Rastafari Gathering was emailed to me by the Chairperson Sister Ijahnya Christian on 21 August 2018, after insisting for some of the documents I have initially have no details.



answer how the Garveyite principles for development of Rastafari nation can be applied in the midst of their miseries. This culminated the formation of Intra-Africa trade bazaar.

### *Why Intra-Africa trade*

The Rastafari cleverly have foreseen the opportunities around Intra-Africa trade. One of the major reasons for AARG to promote intra-Africa trade is because African economies are generally extraverted as a result of very low intra-trade within the continent (AARG report, pp.12-13). In this regard, the Rastafari nation is ready to take a part in enhancing it. There are a number of reasons for the very low intra-Africa trade but the main one is lack of commitment by governments to boost such trades by elevating trade barriers such as lifting the high cross border tariffs (ibid). Both of the international organizations like the African Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)<sup>208</sup> promote intra-trade within the continent. For instance, the AU Agenda 2063<sup>209</sup>, relatively new, aims for Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) which is signed by 44 African countries in March 2018 in Kigali, Rwanda ([www.newtimes.co.rw](http://www.newtimes.co.rw) viewed on 22/8/18). Furthermore, the African Union has recently introduced issuing African Union passports for African citizens. This means that the Rastafari will again experience serious problems in getting the African Union Passport as their national IDs as the diasporas are foreign nationals. In order to solve this, first of all, the Rastafari should be able to get representation at the commission in order to push the agenda of constituting the recognition of the African diaspora as Africans, and this is where Rastafari Continental Council is expected to play a role. Amidst the hopes and despair of the implementation of intra-Africa trade by the AU, the AARG is showcasing the intra-Africa trade in its seven days long gathering by organizing a bazaar for the participants to sell and buy African products produced in the continent among each other and with the host community.

The embedding in entrepreneurship is also observed during the open interview with the participants already engaged in business. Ras Reuben speaks that one of the things he is deprived of by not having the Ethiopian national ID is to be able to use the business opportunity given for Ethiopians which is much less start-up capital requirement compared to foreigners. However, what is intriguing is that they want to be Ethiopian without giving up their foreign passport. This asserts their desire to leverage from both identities.

## **Conclusion**

Reggae is indeed one of the vehicles through which the Rastafari movement gained its popularity worldwide. Messages conveyed through the hymns of reggae focusing on blackness, Africa, anti-racist, pan-human, have accommodated all races of people in the

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<sup>208</sup> UNECA is Established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (UN) in 1958 as one of the UN's five regional commissions, ECA's mandate is to promote the economic and social development of its member States, foster intra-regional integration, and promote international cooperation for Africa's development

<sup>209</sup> AU Agenda 2063 is It is a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years. It builds on, and seeks to accelerate the implementation of past and existing continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development (<https://au.int/en/agenda2063> 22/8/18).

world. The heart of the Rastafari movement, repatriation to Africa, notably to Ethiopia from which its identity is reconstructed, mainly triggered by the Land Grant, but the land grant was grabbed from them and their lives in Ethiopia was embedded in abyss of miseries for the past five decades. The deprivation of their land grant, freedom of cultural expression, freedom of movement and legal status have put their lives in a limbo. Their transnational connection reaches to its peak when they reach out to their previous colonizers in the attempt of solving their challenges in Ethiopia, of the island in the Caribbean that they ran away from. As a result, the Rastafari in Ethiopia are turning to their diasporic identity and leveraging from international network to bring an end to their trials and tribulations. Furthermore, the community capitalizes their foreign-ness and Ethiopianness at the same time in their endeavor to use the window of opportunity they see in the country. Capitalizing on their foreignness and Ethiopianness, the transnational Rastafari community is aiming to find a happy ending of triumphing over difficulties and adversities.

## Recommendations and Suggestions

### Recommendations

The aim of this study is to explore the challenges and paradoxes of belonging of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia. However, reviewing the evidence presented in the data collection, the research has identified subject matters that are worthy of further research.

First of all, the research has identified that the Rastafari women are discriminated in various ways against what the Rastafari preach about: anti-racism, inequality and injustice. Among these discriminations are observed in ritual ceremonies, they are not allowed to lead prayers in the tabernacle and play drums. Although Rastafari women are referred to as queens, they have secondary or subordinate relationships with their husbands and in their *livity*. In most cases, they are referred to as baby Mamas instead of empress, in lieu of wife. Furthermore, women are not allowed to use birth control and should abstain from abortion. So, basically, their work is to raise children and housekeeping. During their menstruation, they are not allowed to cook for their husbands. The funnier thing is, as Sister T from Shashemene explains, *"He goes to a restaurant to eat while not knowing whether the cook in the restaurant is menstruating or not."* Therefore, the research suggests that greater attention should be given to the women of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia.

The development of the patriarchal and "chauvinist" Rastafari movement is interesting (Murrell et al, 1998, p.2). In this domain, women are allowed to take the leadership role in the organization of such conferences as in All African Rastafari Gathering, 2017. In this regards, Mama Ijahnya Christian, Queen Mother Moses, and Mama Dr. Desta Meghoo, in organizing, consulting and chairing the conference, other sistrens in the kitchen cooking for the participants have all done a phenomenal work. Thus, it is my suggestion that as equal focus as the discrimination of women mentioned above, should be given to the transiting roles of women in the Rastafari movement.

Confidence in the collected data enhanced the suggestion of the polygamous relation in the Rastafari in the community in Ethiopia. This relation is abusive in the community. Eyerus, 24, an Ethiopian woman who had a relationship with a Rastaman shared her experience with me saying that a Rastaman impregnated her when she was a high school student, but after a few months, he became abusive to the extent of beating her many times. In addition, he was having an affair with another woman after she had a child from him. An elderly Ethiopian woman whose daughtered was married to a Rastaman was full of grief and anger criticizing the Ethiopian government saying that it should not allow the Rastamen to stay in the country when they behave immorally. The old woman testified that he has quite a few concubines but the reason her daughter is with him is because of their two children. Such stories are not confined to Ethiopia. They are also heard from repatriate Rasta women whose kingmen have affairs with other women. Details have not been explored in this study. However, the apparently consistent data begs for future research and interventions.

Furthermore, Rastafari is a movement that changed the narrative of migration. It defied the global outward migration from the continent to the west to its flip flop side by pulling the migration orbit from the North to South. It demonstrated that Africa is, too, a destination. Therefore, the research recommends that Rastafari movement defying the mainstream south-north migration to north-south is a potential and timely research to be unveiled to the world.

### **Suggestions**

H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the current Prime Minister of Ethiopia, in his first speech at the parliament (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzUhUVRGaZA> viewed on 14/9/18) during the swearing ceremony, addressed all parts of the society in Ethiopia, neighboring countries, and Africa at large. But, his speech didn't incorporate the Rastafari repatriates in Ethiopia as a distinct category of fellow citizens. I am not sure of what this exclusion signals to the Rastafari in the country, but I suggest to the Rastafari community to set aside their differences and unite and send a representative committee for a courtesy call with the prime minister for a discussion on their current situation and their future plans and expectations before the next national election is held in May 2020.

To enhance integration between the locals and returnees, this research suggests to the Rastafari community to be proactive in facilitating platforms that bring together the local and the Rastafari returnees for better understanding of each other. The community should put aside its factional differences and centralize in order to have a united representation in the face of government. Brother Reuben Kush said, *"The acknowledgement of the Rastafari by the state is in fact the beginning of another chapter of challenges"* as there are discrepancies and still limitation of in the exercise of their rights.

Furthermore, the research noted that the Rastafari are abused by not knowing the law of the country. It is important to study what are the rights and privileges and also obligations for citizens and residents in Ethiopia. For instance, what happened with my child, had I knew at that time what the constitution says, would have been preventable. I certainly would have taken to media. And that definitely changes the game.

## Conclusion

This scientific study is built on a cultural anthropology. The research aims to describe, in the broadest possible sense, the historical background and definition of what constitutes single Rasta community, its cultural and religious aspects, sects, interaction with the local people and the state's attitude towards the Rastafari community, the hardships in the face of integration, assessment of the law and directives, and the loopholes related to the implementation. The descriptions provided in the research are supported with comparison with the Rastafari community worldwide and the law and guidelines issued by states concerning the community. Moreover, its ethnography encompassed the study of a community through direct contact with the community's cultural aspects and life. The researcher, being a quasi-member of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia, has greatly contributed to the fieldwork. One particular aspect of this research is its contribution to knowledge production in the contemporary story of the Rastafari community through visual media. The research engages media, a relatively new field in the cultural anthropology that contributes to new kinds of knowledge. Therefore, this study is interdisciplinary comprising culture, anthropology and contemporary history with media.

### *The Thesis in Paragraph*

The aim of this study was to explore focusing on the challenges of the Rastafari community, a small-scale study, compared to what it came out to be. However, confidence in the abundance data collected enhanced unintended findings that were perfectly coherent to the main findings and to one another. The research brings fresh knowledge and new thinking in a timely manner on the lives of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia. This was obtained using ethnographic investigation. Its scope includes discussions pertinent to the history of the Rastafari's socio-cultural and political movement. Contemporarily, it investigates the state's approach towards Rastafari returnees and the existing experiences of the community members, supported by a six month anthropological field research. The examination encompasses narratives of Rastafari members from African countries in order to emphasize their shared challenges including local Rastas from Africa. It is recalled that the Ethiopian government has issued a directive, No. 21/2009, which grants the Rastafari the rights and privileges accorded to the foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin. Along this line, this research conscientiously investigates the Ethiopian government's attitude from legal perspectives pertaining to the implementation of Article 8(8) of the Proclamation 270/2002 of the directive 21/2009 by further bringing into the discussion the Ghanaian "Right of Abode law." The chapters in this research revolve around the adversities and contradicting situation of the community. The attributed descriptions manifest the central topic, challenging thereby unfolding the paradox in their lives. The persistent and apparent transnationality of the Rastafari cannot go unchecked in this study.

### *The Epistemology and Approaches*

The epistemology of this research is framed by a cross-disciplinary study focused on description of the challenges and paradoxes of belonging of the Rastafari in Ethiopia. In order to analyze the findings, the research takes into account the theories of identity through collective memory by Horace, cited by (Macleod, 2014), belongingness (Nyamonjah 2006), homeland-diaspora relationship (Weingrod and Levi 2006); and zones of transit of Akinyoade and Gewald (2015). The ethnographic research capitalized from the reasoning culture of the community. To that end, open-ended interviews were largely employed. Guiding by theory is the underpinning of conducting a research, on equal footing the research underscores the lived experiences of the community as a demonstration for making its argument.

Participants are drawn both from the Rastafari returnees and the host, from younger and elder generations and Ethiopian authorities. The mode of data collection was the exciting part of the investigation. In addition to verbal interviews, it has employed visual methods to explore experience and meaning. It uniquely attempted to construct the thesis by integrating the video footages with the text. Further, due to some findings, particularly the issue with granting the community national ID, the study has profited news from social media. As a quasi-member of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia, I have conducted this research as an insider and outsider. In fact, personal stories, from which the motivation of this research comes, are shared and compared.

### *The “Land Grant”*

For the Rastafari, Ethiopia is the Promised Land where they hoped to be relieved from all the tribulations they faced in the past. When they arrived, they imagined that they would live on the land grant- farming and living by the river bank in the dream land far from the Babylon system and uniting with their distant relatives that they presumably left because of slavery many centuries ago. However, a close examination of the Rastafarian situation in Ethiopia reveals that the community is still suffering from all hardships in the supposedly Promised Land, Zion, home, and motherland. To their dismay, the land grant was revoked in 1974 when the Communist Party took over power from the last monarchial ruler, Emperor Haile Selassie I, and has never been restored since. They have become the ‘other’ in constantly changing narratives by the natives, but persistently referring to the same meaning- othering them. Legitimately, it is a virtuous responsibility for native Africans and their leaders to grant them a land or respect what was promised so it can greatly help the Rastafari adjustment with the natives.

### *The Paradoxes*

Rastafari movement is paradoxical. It is a socio-cultural movement that combines both mental and physical repatriation to Africa, particularly, to Ethiopia. However, presently, the physical

repatriation is absorbed by a mental repatriation, namely, 'African consciousness' which necessarily do not assert physical repatriation. Rastafari movement is a pan-African movement that embraces African rituals and beliefs. This is true to the Rastafari in Ethiopia. Albeit, the Rastafari in Ethiopia have fulfilled the physical repatriation by reaching the horn of Africa, and found home not being home as they are challenged economically in the supposed home. Their advocacy for 'Africa Unite'<sup>210</sup> did not make its way to the actual unification of Africa and its people as much as the theme is echoed in several reggae tunes. Their view of Haile Selassie I, king of kings, Lord of Lords of the tribe of Judah, as God in which they hoped for his eternality has not been so, though this is debatable. The social, cultural and political dynamics in Ethiopia, since then, have, contributed to the contradictions encountered.

*Challenges on the way to Integration: Ethiopia, Africa and Worldwide*

Historically, the black Jamaicans always lived in a constant state of resistance ultimately birthing the Rastafari movement. Broadly, today, Rastafari is referred to as resistance to Babylon, or systemic oppression and corruption regardless of race. However, in the beginning, Babylon connotes the white political power that was down-pressing black people. Not only in Jamaica but also globally, the Rastas uncompromisingly fought, and still continue to fight, the Babylon system. Their repatriation to Ethiopia was equated to the return to homeland after many years of enslavement in exile, like the Jews in the bible. And yet, their repatriation to the Promised Land was met with a plethora of afflictions that limited their integration. Based on empirical data analysis, the first category of challenges is the rejection of their cultural expression by the local people and Ethiopians such as stigmatizing dreadlocks, smoking ganja, exercising the freedom of belief, and sacred practices like smoking marijuana; and issues related with land for their faith practice. Their calamities are also demonstrated in the form of misperception by the native Ethiopians: corruption and burglary. The contradiction between Rastafari community and the non-Rastafari society mainly arises from misunderstanding Rasta. The host looks at it as only religion while others are blinded by their selective understanding that it has to do only with ganja and Bob Marley. Their repatriation has been met with the nationalism and citizenship crisis of Ethiopia and home does not feel like home. Surprisingly, in spite of the difficulties, they continue to call it home. For the returnees, failing to actualize the land grant is another grappling that prevents the full sense of repatriation. During my fieldwork in the community and the surrounding area, I observed that there is a lot of land reclaiming going on by the local people. Decentralization within the community caused by conflict of interest between the different mansions of the Rastafari has slowed down the process of and failed to present a united voice in the face of the state. Indeed, the root cause of the challenges was non-lawfulness of the repatriates. This is settled by the government of Ethiopia in July 2018, but its practicality stands far from inclusion of all the community members owing to the flatly contradicting articles within the directive issued by the government. In consequence, this hindered the integration process. Nonetheless,

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<sup>210</sup> Taken from Bob Marley's Africa Unite song title, from Survival album, 1979.

despite their trials and tribulations, one of the striking findings of this research has been, the community is determined to stay in Ethiopia and continue to call Ethiopia the Promised Land. “*Challenges are everywhere ....so better to face them at home*” were the persistent expression uttered by the participants. This beyond belief determination emanates from their spirituality that helped them to shield their destiny with courage, faith and perseverance. But the hardships are not unique to them. The research that took advantage of the international conference organized by the community, the All African Rastafari Gathering, has been able to identify the challenges shared by African local Rastas, repatriated to the continent and internationally.

### *Living in a limbo*

Although it has taken a generation, this research compliments the Ethiopian government for reaching a decision to legislate the Rastafari community in Ethiopia from the point of view of that it profoundly can change the community’s deteriorating situation in the country where they say they belong to. This would ultimately not only alter the poverty and dependency of the community members but also significantly create opportunities for the returnees to become part and parcel of development and prosperity of the country. Nevertheless, this can be achieved only when the government revises and amends the guideline to be inclusive for all the community members to become beneficiary of the rights and privileges granted in the directive.

### *Internationality of the Rastafari*

Historically, and to a lesser degree in contemporary times, the Rastafari have suffered considerable discrimination and prosecution on the Caribbean islands, particularly, in Jamaica. But this did not stop the increasing numbers of followers. It is one of the extraordinary attributes of the Rastafari movement that it is not centralized and hence without a centrally leading figure. However, the community still shares consciousness and through the vehicle of reggae music, maintained followers from all parts of the world. It is also in act to recommendation of follow up research in this trend of newly formed alliances amongst the adherents of the Rastafari movement.

In conclusion, Rastafari returnees are neither conformingly immigrant nor long-lost sons and daughters who have returned home to pick up where they had left off in the literal sense. For me, it seems that the local communities are perplexed by the repatriated Rastafarians when they found Zion or the Promised Land in Africa because it essentially reverses the dream of many Ethiopians and Africans in which Zion is imagined outside home, typically in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, unmistakably, the Rastafari community remains radiantly optimistic. Their faith is the backbone of their endurance. Their continued challenges demonstrate that the allegedly ‘home’ does not feel like home, but for them, the dream does not fade away, rather it constantly redefines as they try to negotiate to integrate. This is why White (2007: 685) claims



that “Rastafarianism” is an anchor that continues to provide meaning and direction for adherents to negotiate life and reach out to fellow Africans in Zion. As many of the community members say, Jah Rastafari is their guidance. Nyabinghi chants from the tabernacle of Shashemene are the heartbeat of the Rastafari.

Will the Rastafarian community, in the wake of Dr. Tewodros’ successful designation at United Nations election and under the new progressive and charismatic leadership of Ethiopia under H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed, be granted citizenship? If the directive issued by the state of Ethiopia becomes flexible and inclusive of the majority, can this mean an end to their hardships in Ethiopia? When the common challenges of the transnational members of the community are shared to the African people, will it lead to building empathy and understanding? Will the new boom of the Rastafari organizations become the avant-garde of the movement? What are the benefits and implications? All these and others need further investigations.

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Eyerus

Kinini

Ras Bosco Ocansey

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Ras Kesh

Ras Paul

Ras Royal Kofi

Thau Thau Haramanuba

Sister Tarikua

Sister Thipokazi

Sister Tibebe

Sister Welette,

Sister Wendy

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## Abbreviations

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AU: African Union

RCC: Rastafari Continental Council

RUF: Rastafari United Front

UNECA: United Nations Economic Commissions for Africa

UN-IOM: United Nations International Organization for Migration

WHO: World Heald Organization