

Association of Rastafari Media (ARM)

Until the lion tells his own story tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. The great hunt of the European nations lasted 400 years. During that time Africans were trapped, captured, caged and transported in unspeakable conditions to become chattel slaves in the West.

Here Africans were reduced to a status lower than that of beasts. The cruelties we endured for almost half a millennium were the most barbaric, despicable and brutal in the annals of human history. There were no depths to which our oppressors did not sink in creating the tortures they inflicted on fellow human beings. Our oppressors exceeded themselves in their inventions: their innovative machines, devices and cunning apparatuses; ropes, whips, chains, manacles, iron fetters and face-locks; burnings, brandings, amputations, lynching, drowning, mutilations, suffocation and disembowelment, all randomly applied as a matter of daily routine in the killing-fields of the West Indies and the Americas.

We look back at this heinous chapter of history in sheer horror, revulsion and disbelief, in outrage and incredible in-rage at the satanic vision of man's inhumanity to man. How was it possible? How was it allowed to last so long?

The tale was told by the hunter. It was comprehensive: a glorious tale of empire, a civilising mission by a superior race of beings; a tale of dark savages being brought to the light of Christianity, fulfilling a role that was their manifest destiny. The tale was further embellished and underwritten by the findings of science. It was endorsed by theories of evolution. Africans occupied a lower rung of the human ladder - just above apes. Their natural inferiority was a matter of genetic fact. Greece and Rome were the archetypes of civilised humanity from which the great white nations of Europe had sprung. Ancient Africa was shrouded in darkness. The pyramid builders were of a different race and hue. They were a freakish anomaly of history, 'whited out' and conveniently disconnected from the rest of Africa. Thus ran the writ of white supremacy.

The hunter's tale was convincing. He had the mechanism to spread his word and the fire-power to make it stand. The roar of the lion was stilled. There were no countervailing narratives to Europe's story, and where they did arise they were effectively suppressed, stifled and quelled for 4 centuries.

But how long can a lie last? Even the great English bard said Truth will out. In the aftermath of enslavement history was rewritten from the perspective of the hunted. The story of Emancipation was redefined in terms of self-liberation. It was re-presented by Black writers as a 400-year-long victorious struggle to rid ourselves of the chains of enslavement and to reverse a cycle of degradation that Africans had suffered at the hands of Europeans.

Freedom and liberty had been fought for and earned. These were not gratuitous concessions from conscience-ridden enslavers and colonisers. The false credit that was accorded to Wilberforce and other white abolitionists was replaced by a tale of relentless uncompromising struggle, rebellion, revolt and self-empowerment that brought Africans out from under the heel of the oppressor. The heroism of Nanny, Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and the long list of Black liberators right up to the present day are now given due recognition in world history. The plight and ascendancy of the Rastafari movement, a renaissance of African culture and identity in the 20th century, needs to be reviewed in this context.

The Rastafari movement suffered a bad press from its inception in the 1930s – not just from white media but from blacks whose minds had been contaminated, cloned, colonised and whitewashed by western society. The incipient movement was an embarrassment to a majority who had accepted the dictates of colonial life and to whom a vision of Africa mentally unchained was a frightening step backwards into the dark ages from which they had mercifully escaped.

Tales of the hunt resurfaced with a new twist. Rastafari, the returned lion was a victim of Babylon's expansive media machinery and its tentacles that reached out into the colonies. The Blackheart man was an excrescence, a morbid and shameful outgrowth that had no place in polite civilised Christian society. The same forces that were marshalled throughout slavery to degrade and reify Africans as mere objects of possession were recruited and updated to malign and disfigure a reconstructed African image and lifestyle. Babylon felt the threat to its stranglehold on subdued Africans and retaliated through its trained cohorts in authority - church, state, media and enforcement agencies. The aim was genocidal: to hunt down, persecute and wipe out a rabble whose pernicious intent challenged the *status quo*. InI were portrayed as a drug-crazed psychotic cult bent on overthrowing imperial authority.

Bustamante's infamous edict of 1963 to eradicate the movement in the wake of the Coral Gardens incident will be remembered in the annals of InI history. His shameful proclamation remains a stain and an indictment of the character and personality of Jamaicans in a bygone era. It will not easily be wiped away. Rastafari was publicly deemed fit for brutalisation, imprisonment and burial. These were the options sanctioned by the Prime Minister of the newly independent island of Jamaica. The cry echoed right across the Caribbean. A decade later it was taken up by Patrick John and Eugenia Charles in Dominica with the Dread Act of 1974, virtually a Rasta shoot-on-sight policy for the island's police and citizenry. Rastafari was reduced to the status of a beast crashing through the undergrowth of privileged estates, an animal to be hunted down and killed so that codes of decency and civility could be maintained.

The policy of vilification and caricature employed on a massive scale throughout slavery was refined to fit the exigencies of a new era. Rastafari was the resurrected spectre of slave rebellion. The movement needed to be put down and taken out of the societal equation so that Babylon's agenda for colonial upward mobility could continue uninterrupted.

The resilience of the Rastafari movement against all attempts to extinguish the flame of African pride is perhaps one of the unsung miracles of colonial history. That the movement today is a global phenomenon with constituencies in every nation on earth is a tribute to InI survival instincts, InI perseverance through extreme vicissitude, and InI ultimate triumph over the forces that sought to eliminate, eradicate, exterminate and erase us from the face of the earth. We were not meant to be here today. Our demise was predetermined, programmed and predicted by the policies and modalities of the colonial project.

To quote His Imperial Majesty: “Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most, that has made it possible for evil to triumph.”

And so He acted on our behalf. There can be little doubt that His Imperial Presence in the Caribbean in 1966, particularly His visit to Jamaica, was a turning point in the fortunes and perceptions of the movement. History records the tumultuous reception at Palisadoes Airport, His generous and overt engagement with the movement in full glare of the media, His refusal to deny His divinity; in fact His personal testimony of HIMself to the brethren assembled at Kings House: **“Priests, warriors, dreadlocks, I am He!”** This was the defining moment in our history. The cry that went up from Coral Gardens three years earlier was answered by His redeeming Presence and by the actions He took to ensure that evil would never again triumph over His chosen people.

Isiah 53 Verse 1, poses the question: “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the ARM of the Most High been revealed?” His Imperial Majesty was revealed unto InI as the Word made Flesh Who dwelt amongst InI. Rastafari, as sons and dawtas of HIM, are a media force that searched, found and acknowledged the needle hidden in the haystack of modern life. InI proclaimed the returned Messiah openly and unreservedly in the ears of a doubting world. And we paid a heavy price for Truth. But Truth came to set us free. In representing our Father, the Mediator of a new covenant (Hebrews 12, Verse 24), we took on His name, Ras Tafari, as a badge of identity and a mantle of kinship with the Creator. By embodying the Word we also became mediators of a new covenant in the midst of an ungodly world. Hence it is said: Let behaviour be our Saviour in Ethiopia.

The eyes of the world are still upon InI. We are a spectacle in every society where we manifest. We have burst through the film of life to stamp our ancient image anew on the mind-screen of the last days. InI are the most photogenic community on the planet. No community on earth is more ilaful than the assembly of Rastafari. Our vibrational reality changes the ambience around us. Natty Dread shake him locks and lightning clap and weak heart drop! This is the essence of media: the ability to change the elemental references of our environment, to captivate and arrest the mind, to alter the ethers and the ethos of the world around us (both the ethereal unseen and the moral order) by our thoughts and actions, even as our Father altered the world around HIM, enshrining the rule of righteousness and international morality at the highest level of global governance. Rastafari is media. Our unification creates a sacred bond of brothers and sisters, bending our combined efforts towards the establishment of Righteousness, the rule of Good over Evil. Hence in our various capacities we all constitute an Association of Rastafari Media.

I had intended to address the need for an international Rastafari press service that would link globally as an i-fficial voice of the movement, a media project that would be authoritative in its pronouncements staffed by ones with proven track-records, qualifications and expertise in the field of Rastafari publishing and journalism. The idea was first mooted in the historic conference of 1983

when *Rastafari Speaks (RS)* was an emerging journal representing the movement in the international public domain. Initiated in Trinidad and Tobago in the early 80s *RS* was one of the earliest authenticated publications from within the movement, along with *Voice of Rasta* in the UK, *Roots Magazine* (Ras Jabulani), *Rasta Vibration* and *Rastafari International News*, headed by the late great Junior Manning.

The idea is even more relevant now than it was 30 years ago, though the inspiration for this paper has shifted somewhat to a more fundamental interpretation of Rastafari as a medium for social change in a world desperately seeking moral rectitude, rearmament and regeneration.

Having withstood the extreme challenges to our existence, having achieved social legitimacy against all odds, Rastafari is now established in every land on earth. Today there is no nation without its quota of adherents to the movement. Throughout the Americas, Europe, Africa, the Middle and Far East, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands, communities and outposts of Rastafari have sprung up organically, often with their own interpretation and orientation regarding doctrine, teachings and livity. The music of reggae borne on the airwaves, though universally popular, is no longer a reliable medium for disseminating the true culture of Rastafari. Many rising communities, particularly in Africa, are prone to follow the teachings of individuals, rather than the basic tenets laid down by the elders since the inception of the movement and enhanced by the teachings of His Imperial Majesty, our Third and Living Testament. Hence there is a gap to be filled and a problem to be solved.

Often confusion arises from the diversity of doctrines and interpretations fed to gullible young minds that have not been grounded in Rastafari livity. This has created factions and divisions, both at grassroots levels and in general perceptions and responses among localised movements. The profusion of Rastafari websites since the turn of the millennium has served to exacerbate rather than resolve this issue. Social media is by nature superficial, short-term, second-hand and incapable of conveying deep or enduring messages that can feed and nurture the human spirit. Jah-rusalem schoolroom is a face-to-face experience that does not easily translate to Facebook, Twitter, U-tube and Linked-in. Though we should not disparage or reject these communication portals our usage of them should be seasoned by awareness of their benefits as well as their dangers and limitations.

The centralisation and organisation of Rastafari media needs to be administered by a duly constituted and authorised body acting under the auspices of the elders and major mansions of Rastafari. The Association of Rastafari Media (ARM) must develop a practice guided by agreed rules, guidelines, disciplines and procedures, rooted in a system of accountability, transparency and due diligence, ultimately responsible to the Word of His Imperial Majesty. The work of compiling Rastafari publications since the 1960s has already been taken up by WRAP (the Written Rastafari Archives Project), which could serve as a prototype for the ARM, providing an invaluable resource for institutions and individuals worldwide seeking authoritative information on the movement.

The impetus for ARM must be generated from the identifiable needs of the global community:

1. Communication

Rastafari communities, houses and individuals are spread across the length and breadth of the globe. We share the same problems, face the same issues, challenges and confrontations. New communities may undergo problems that have been overcome by older established ones. Communication is absolutely vital if we are to respond to victimisation with tried and proven strategies, to speak with a single voice, to react in unison, to diffuse tensions

and tribal tendencies, and to project a coherent and co-ordinated lifestyle wherever we are. Unity is our greatest strength. One Haile Selassie, One Aim, One Destiny.

2. Information

Similar to the above, clear and consistent information on the movement is necessary, particularly the history of the Jamaican movement as a crucial reference point for InI origins in this dispensation. His Imperial Majesty's exile in Britain (1936-41) when He shook the Great Powers gathered in Geneva, the valley of Jehoshaphat, and mediated in judgement for the rights of Ethiopia and for all small nations that were threatened by bullying aggressors, needs to be documented and overstood. The Shashemane experience, the story of the Gift Land of our Father, is also highly relevant to an informed overview of Rastafari today and our efforts towards Repatriation. Access to exhibition materials such as were displayed in *Discovering Rastafari* (Smithsonian 2008), the current Institute of Jamaica exhibition on Rastafari, and *The Majesty and the Movement* Exhibition planned for Ethiopia in May 2014, all provide invaluable profiles on Rastafari in the millennium. The Written Rastafari Archives Project (WRAP) will add an important dimension by compacting already published information from within the movement.

3. Mediation

Rastafari has provided the building-blocks for reshaping a new world order based on peace and love. Today we witness the crumbling of a world system mounted on capitalism, the ruthless exploitation of human and natural resources in pursuit of world domination through might and force. The predictions and prophecies of a small ostracised and demonised community – Rastafari - have become reality in today's world. Babylon the great has fallen, is falling and will continue to fall even as we speak. All her face-saving attempts to escape and preclude that fall, all her cosmetic media concoctions cannot hide the cracks in her foundation and the collapse of her iniquitous empire. A revolution of awesome proportions has galvanised the roots of global societies in pursuit of human rights, equality and justice. InI must take our place at the forefront of change. We are the forerunners who have lit the torch of revolution in the modern world. As a final line of defence for human decency and dignity we are the advocates and arbiters for righteous stewardship of our planet.

His Imperial Majesty urges us to speak out on global issues in blunt terms of right and wrong. The proposed ARM will be a forum for Rastafari works, thoughts and opinions on world affairs. His Imperial Majesty urges us to stamp our imprint on the present as it moves inexorably towards the future. Informally, we have been a force for change and moral re-adjustment in global communities. It is no co-incidence that the sound of Rastafari music is heard in world revolutions today – from the Middle East to Greece and Turkey, the strains of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Culture, Lucky Dube *et al* fill the airwaves of protest. We must go further. Formally, and with bold intent, we must influence world opinion at the highest level as a strident voice in the councils of nations. As He is so are we. As He has done, so must InI.

4. Education

All the above initiatives add up to a re-education of Caribbean, African and world youth as to the values of an alternative social order based on equity and peace. His Imperial Majesty's pursuit of education as a primary objective in the reconstruction of Ethiopia should find an echo in all our works. Our focus must continue to be towards mental liberation, the battle for the minds of the disaffected. The Rastafari Creed must invoke a new curriculum: that the

hungry be fed, the naked clothed, the sick nourished, the aged protected and the infants cared for. This five-point agenda should underpin our media aspirations and empower our efforts to publicise and enshrine the writ of Rastafari in the comity of nations. No task is too great for InI to accomplish in His Name.

Ultimately, the Association of Rastafari Media must constitute a meeting point of minds, hearts and irits, locked in a singular commitment to disseminate the Rastafari message: words and works, principles, doctrine, livity, history, literature, and directives for a better world. InI victory is already assured. In this 21st century, with faith courage and a just cause, David can still conquer Goliath.

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