

Negotiating Gender and Spirituality in Literary Representations of Rastafari

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Abstract:

While the male focus of early literary representations of Rastafari tends to emphasize the movement's emergence, goals or specific religious practices, more recent depictions of Rasta women in narrative fiction raise important questions not only regarding the discussion of gender relations in Rastafari, but also regarding the functions of literary representations of the movement. This article outlines a dialogical 'reasoning' between the different negotiations of gender in novels with Rastafarian protagonists and suggests that the characters' individual spiritual journeys are key to understanding these negotiations within the gender framework of Rastafarian decolonial practices.

Male-centred Literary Representations of Rastafari

Since the 1970s, especially, 'roots' reggae and 'dub' or performance poetry have frequently been discussed as to their relations to the Rastafari movement – not only based on their lyrical content, but often by reference to the artists or poets themselves. Compared to these genres, the representation of Rastafari in narrative fiction has received less attention to date. Furthermore, such references often appear to serve rather descriptive functions, e.g. as to the movement's philosophy or linguistic practices. The early depiction of Rastafari in Roger Mais's "morality play" *Brother Man* (1954), for example, has been noted for its favourable representation of the movement in comparison to the press coverage of Rastafari at the time, while Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964) upon publication was criticized as "novelized sociology" lacking character development and narrative complexity.¹ Like many other Caribbean novels of the colonial period or directly after, *Brother Man* has mainly been read in terms of social realism.² In the historical context of cultural

nationalism, its discussion has frequently focused on language use, historicism, as well as the contentious interaction of different religious and spiritual frameworks.³ To date, *Brother Man* remains one of the most common references to literary representations of Rastafari. It is probably not least due to the critical emphasis on what Kenneth Ramchand has described as “the articulation in literature of the ordinary and historically obscured person” and “the social function of literature as one of the outstanding features of [the West Indian] literary situation”⁴ at a time when a social realist reading practice – which continues to inform ‘postcolonial’ reading practices more generally as well – had also become tied to literary representations of Rastafari. The effect of these reading practices has been a critical discussion of Rastafari predominantly through the lens of cultural alterity, often at the expense of how such literary portrayals engage with spiritual questions and debates within Rastafari.

As to questions of gender, Kwame Dawes has discussed the theme of male domination in *Brother Man*.⁵ The general male middle-class focus of pre-1970s Jamaican literature according to Dawes “generated works that are characterized by the prevalence of deeply entrenched patriarchal and misogynist perceptions of the female,” so that even in “highly political and anti-colonial texts” such as Patterson’s *Children of Sisyphus*, “the female is shown to be a doubly oppressed figure.”⁶ Dawes ties the male-female relationships in *Brother Man* back to the novel’s moralistic structure, a pattern according to which “the male identity does not require the female for its identification and completion, whereas the converse...is shown to be true: the woman needs the man.”⁷ However, for Dawes it is mainly the narrative structure of the parable that determines the representation of gender relations in the text, while Rastafari is largely absent as a frame of reference in his discussion.⁸ Not only in Mais’s specific “sexist stereotyping” along the lines of Biblical myths,⁹ but also in Caribbean literature of that time more generally, women characters tend to appear as victimized or are described as followers, thus illustrating male character development and spiritual leadership in male-centred narratives.

Rastafari Women’s Narratives as Fictional ‘Reasonings’

***EnterText*, Special Issue on “Crossing Thresholds: Gender and Decoloniality in Caribbean Knowledge,” 12 (2018): 36-61.**

Whereas the question of gender relations within Rastafari has received increasing attention in empirical studies over the last two decades,¹⁰ there is a relative scarcity of discussion of the literary representation of Rastafari women. Such analyses of Rastafari in fiction should not be simplistically correlated with the question of an author's affiliation with the movement, nor does it necessarily have to be limited to the explicit depiction of Rastafarian characters.¹¹ As Michael Hoenisch has demonstrated with regard to Erna Brodber, for example, even though (aside from the figure of Baba the Rasta in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*) "Rastafari does not have an obvious presence" in Brodber's fictional work on the thematic level, her work is nevertheless generally informed by the movement's "revolutionary change of mentality and perception."¹² Hoenisch relates this to Brodber's engagement with Rastafari's creation of the "real and symbolic territorializing of...a space of Black autonomy and self-confidence which combined social practice and the spiritual in a delicate balance."¹³

According to Hoenisch, Brodber's fiction

boldly enters the black space opened by Rastafari and constructs there a new world of people's liberation. Her fictional work is powered by the creative energy of Rastafari as a cultural grass roots movement and turns, over time, towards a concept of de-materialized spiritual revolution. Within the Rastafari project, it shifts from praxis towards the spiritual.¹⁴

While Brodber's fiction has been widely discussed in terms of the complex relation between its aesthetics and its engagement with socio-historical contexts, the issue of "language and narrative architecture as it relates to subjectivity and identity"¹⁵ has much less frequently been discussed in relation to novels which place Rastafari characters at the centre of their narratives.

In the following, I thus place the negotiation of gender relations across a selection of texts with Rastafarian protagonists that are set in different locations in England, Canada, and Jamaica into dialogue with each other, and suggest a reading of these texts as fictional 'reasonings'. The three novels under discussion – Zindika's *A Daughter's Grace* (1992), Masani Montague's *Dread Culture: A Rastawoman's Story* (1994) and Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah's *Joseph: A Rasta Reggae Fable*

***EnterText*, Special Issue on "Crossing Thresholds: Gender and Decoloniality in Caribbean Knowledge," 12 (2018): 36-61.**

(1991) – contemplate Rastafari women’s experiences and choices against the backdrop of their respective spiritual journeys into and within Rastafari.¹⁶ By claiming space for Rastafari women and questions of gender in the practice of ‘reasoning’ these novels emphasize the importance of the gender dimension within the spiritual revolution of Rastafari. The ‘reasonings’ through which the characters mediate their spiritual journeys thus become a key practice in the decolonization of gender both within Rastafari and with regard to what María Lugones calls the “coloniality of gender” more broadly, i.e. the classificatory system in which “[m]ales became not-human-as-not-men, and colonized females became not-human-as-not-women” in the logic of modernity’s dichotomous hierarchies:

The civilizing transformation justified the colonization of memory and thus of people’s senses of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality, identity, and social, ecological, and cosmological organization. Thus, as Christianity became the most powerful instrument in the mission of transformation, the normativity that connected gender and civilization became intent on erasing community, ecological practices, knowledge of planting, of weaving, of the cosmos, and not only on changing and controlling reproductive and sexual practices. One can begin to appreciate the tie between the colonial introduction of the instrumental modern concept of nature central to capitalism, and the colonial introduction of the modern concept of gender.... One can also recognize, in the scope I am giving to the imposition of the modern, colonial, gender system, the dehumanization constitutive of the coloniality of being.¹⁷

From the specific Caribbean context of the legacy of enslavement, Rastafari’s project of decolonization – which is articulated across a range of linguistic, body-political, epistemic, social and spiritual practices – has been grappling with the effects of this coloniality, including those of colonial Christianity, e.g. through Ethiopianist re-interpretations.¹⁸ One of the practices through which a critique of coloniality is performed within Rastafari is ‘reasoning’, which designates a discussion aimed at the discerning of higher meaning. As John P. Homiak phrases it,

The Rastafari are men [sic] of words who address themselves passionately not only to concerns of identity and ideology, but to concerns of communal morality and responsibility. They come together to fashion continuous streams of ‘reasoning’ in which ‘Jah is praised,’ inspiration is received and ideology is reproduced; they are also a collective of individuals who speak to each other, about each other, and about themselves and their experiences.¹⁹

According to Anthony Bogues, the notion of “grounding” that is often associated with such “reasoning” carries a layered meaning:

In the discursive practice of Rastafari, when ‘grounds’ became ‘groundings,’ the meaning was layered. Not only did it mean sociality—an equal meeting that breaks socially constructed barriers of race, class, and education—but the nature of such an encounter was marked by ‘reasonings’—a form of discussion in which each person contributed equally to the discourse without any prior hierarchical claims of knowledge.²⁰

While Bogues refers to the political practice of “groundings” in general and the engagement of Walter Rodney in these practices in particular,²¹ Lawrence O. Bamikole explicitly criticizes the fact that reasoning “is a male affair within the Rastafari movement” and that women tend to be excluded from reasoning sessions, which constitutes “a reflection of the patriarchalism of the spaces where the Rastafari live.”²² Similarly, Adwoa Ntozake Onuora considers “reasoning circles” as “the earliest medium through which Rasta elders...transmitted their pedagogy of Black/African liberation” as well as an ongoing “learning strategy” that caters to the production and dissemination of knowledge “about historical and contemporary social situations” through dialogue and critical reflection, but points out that

there ought to be a critical interrogation of the attitudes, values, and beliefs that reproduce gender hierarchies. In this regard, the reasoning circle ought to be a revolutionary space where all participants can bring their diverse social locations to bear on the existing cultural definitions of gender as well as other socially constructed markers of difference, realizing that these social [sic] constituted differences reinscribe hierarchies of oppression and marginalization.²³

***EnterText*, Special Issue on “Crossing Thresholds: Gender and Decoloniality in Caribbean Knowledge,” 12 (2018): 36-61.**

Excluding women from the practice of 'reasoning' points not only to the specific wider social patriarchalism criticized by Bamikole, but also to the "modern colonial gender system" which Lugones proposes as "a lens through which to theorize further the oppressive logic of colonial modernity, its use of hierarchical dichotomies and categorical logic [that is] central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality."²⁴

The following reading thus considers the novels' Rastafari woman characters' spiritual journeys and struggles with this modern colonial gender framework in relation to the movement's decolonial aspirations. As an expression of what Walter Mignolo calls a "de-colonial epistemic shift" which emphasizes "other principles of knowledge and understanding" as well as "other ethics,"²⁵ I argue that the representation of Rastafari spirituality in these novels contributes to Rastafari's decolonial mode of thinking and being in that they open up the practice of 'reasoning' to gender inquiry. Taken together, these novels perform a fictional 'reasoning circle' that critically reflects on the negotiation of gender relations in Rastafari while demonstrating the continuous constraints of gender as a category marked by the dichotomous thinking of colonial modernity.

'Reasonings' on Rastafari Womanhood in *A Daughter's Grace*

The most notable exception to the critical neglect of the literary representation of Rastafari women is Loretta Collins Klobah's discussion of Zindika's and Montague's novels in her comparative reading of Rastafarian womanhood across different genres and forms of cultural expression.²⁶ Collins Klobah places her reading in the context of recent attempts by researchers and creative artists "to break the code of silence regarding the gender-based double standards and patriarchal practices" for which Rastafari has frequently been criticized and which are deemed to be incompatible with its liberationist philosophy.²⁷ However, she carefully distinguishes between narrow and generic characterizations of women in much early writing on Rastafari and the more complex recent portrayals of negotiations of gender roles, which are often influenced by the women's respective geopolitical location. Citing Imani Tafari-

Ama's empirical study which places the Rastawoman in Jamaica as "rebel" explicitly "along a continuum that originates in traditional acceptance of male dominance and moves to a contemporary questioning of male-designated role definitions and an affirmation of independence,"²⁸ Collins Klobah emphasizes the "positive reasons" and benefits of Rastafari for women who pursue this "life choice."²⁹ The creative works also address the challenges of female alliance formation and "imbue the signification systems of Rastafari with woman centered meanings."³⁰ In *A Daughter's Grace* and *Dread Culture*, the protagonists are disillusioned by their experiences of "gender-based double standards, conceptualizations of the Rastafarian woman as procreator, and instances of polygyny, domestic abuse, and homophobia" within their communities.³¹ Although their journeys ultimately lead them away from their respective relationships, Rastafari remains "a vital element of their own spiritual development and healthful path of healing and living."³²

Building on Collins Klobah's reading of these texts as articulations of Rastafarian women's rebellion against male privilege,³³ their individual spiritual journeys can also be seen as indicative of struggles with the coloniality of gender more broadly. While invested in the decolonial mode of being that Rastafari promises and lives, the novels' protagonists have to confront gender dichotomies and hierarchies and negotiate their individual ways of being Rastafari, thus resisting generalizing and prescriptive versions of Rastafarian womanhood. At the same time, they frequently perpetuate the dichotomous logic of gender itself.

Set against the backdrop of Caribbean migration to England and Canada respectively, both *A Daughter's Grace* and *Dread Culture* address similar questions surrounding Rastafari women's identity formation. Caroline in *A Daughter's Grace* escapes the suburban aspirations of her Bajan parents and gradually finds meaning in Rastafari. The novel is structured through passages reflecting Caroline's identification with Nehanda, a historical Shona spiritual and resistance leader during the colonisation of Southern Africa who had oracular powers.³⁴ Invoking Nehanda as her source of strength the autodiegetic narrator traces her spiritual journey into Rastafari through a series of meditations on Twelve Tribes birth signs. Her opening meditation focuses on Dexter Simeon-Tafari Marshall, who towards the end of the novel is identified as her aborted son-to-be, and whose naming constitutes a

simultaneous blessing and self-punishment, the source of both her power and her mental fragility after her 'Kingman' Ras Ezekiel Marshal leaves her for good when finding out about the abortion.³⁵

The narrative proceeds along two interwoven diegetic levels: Nehanda's vigil in the form of her early morning sleep-deprived reflections on her relationship with Ras on the one hand, and her description of her upbringing and gradual turn to Rastafari on the other hand. The occasional temporal shifts into the present tense in retrospective narrative segments indicate these to be embedded in Nehanda's non-linear meditations, which constitute her 'reasoning' and search for spiritual meaning and ways of being. Her continuous self-affirmation as Nehanda-the-warrior eases her painful memories of a mother she could not identify with and of her father's attempts at bringing up his children "white-minded if not white," exemplified in his ranting against Rastafarians as "ganja-blowing, shiftless and dirty people" fooled by "Garvey rubbish."³⁶ Aunty Lou, in turn, embodies the Caribbean background her parents refuse to talk about as well as independent womanhood imbued with a sense of belonging.³⁷

It is during her studies in London that Caroline first meets Ras Ezekiel at a Brixton house party. Ras confronts Caroline with some of the basic tenets of Rastafari and invites her to an upcoming Nyahbinghi.³⁸ After mutual accusations of being brainwashed by western society and Rasta Theocracy respectively, Caroline contemplates her position:

Standing there at the door. Looking in. I thought, this is part of me, and yet I'm not part of it. I fitted in and yet I did not fit in. I was merely an acute bifocal observer. It magnified everything that I thought was wrong with black people; and everything that was wrong with me. I happened to have the same colour as them, but we were not the same. Anyway, my parents always told me 'if you think black it will hold you back.' So I made a point of avoiding these kinds of occasions, and people of Ras Ezekiel's ilk.³⁹

Driven by her "bourgeoning black consciousness," her curiosity and "an unexplainable search" for meaning, Caroline enters the community centre where the Nyahbinghi takes place:⁴⁰

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Inside. The Rastaman meditates on life. The world of the black man's kingdom cometh. I walked in off the cold dark and sinister streets of London into a world of burning incense, of herb and a warm, musical intensity of colours....The drums were beating out my name – an ominous calling; the vibration is in my throat, ears, curling to my scalp, a flushed tingle is released that made my knees shake. I don't know how long I stood there for. I was like a diver on the edge of calamity, calming myself before that uncertain plunge into the unknown.⁴¹

Temporal switches mirror the uncertainty of Caroline's gradual opening up to Rastafari. From initial fear to appreciation of his "gentle nobleness and dignity," Caroline develops a "nervous friendship" with Ras.⁴² Exposing her desire for acceptance as a black middle-class girl as "false consciousness," Ras puts her life into a new perspective, as she claims when justifying her moving in with him and changing her name.⁴³

Three children later, Nehanda is engaged in activities surrounding the Ethiopian Federation People's Progress initiative for a Saturday School and a repatriation fund, but is "too wrapped up with humbleness, too wrapped up with the children and too wrapped up with woman's work," but at the same time she continues to be uplifted by the rituals and the "vortex of hope" of Rastafari.⁴⁴ Her early morning hours are filled with Afrocentric historical visions, interspersed with dreams and nightmares. During these meditations she also describes how Ras "liked to call himself an old man – a wise old man; and I was his scholar, to be spoon-fed from the fountain of his knowledge."⁴⁵ Although initially eager to learn from him, Nehanda is aware of their discrepant education, which she interprets as a threat to his manliness and hence for the most part accepts his paternalistic attitude and describes him as her "future, the truth and the light."⁴⁶ Yet she keeps questioning him and when he scolds her for doing so, she responds with an ultimate declaration of contempt: "You don't want a queen, you want a slave!"⁴⁷ Reminiscent of their initial mutual accusations of being brainwashed, they argue over Biblical interpretations of male and female roles and responsibilities when Nehanda wants to discuss birth control. During her fourth pregnancy she has increasing self-doubts and suspects her Kingman of polygyny. Nehanda's attempt at confronting Ras is framed by a reference

to “Maindida,” the spirit of “a dried up, very old woman” who can possess a shamaness according to eastern Shona Karanga mythology.⁴⁸ In Nehanda’s description, “Maindida is the reproach of an older woman who sees her husband take on a second, younger and more beautiful...wife.”⁴⁹ Nehanda’s unravelling can be read not only as a form of possession or as a reproach, but also as a struggle between the different visions of womanhood she is trying to reconcile. She remains torn between her desire to please her Kingman and her own interpretation of what it means to be a mother and a queen –until she finally decides to “get away from Ras and his philosophising” in an attempt “to be Caroline” again.⁵⁰ She revisits her old university, but only to realize how far away her journey has taken her from the western academic mode of thinking. Her increasing estrangement from Ras is articulated as her unsuccessful transition into Nehanda:

For seven years I’d been Ras’ woman. Ras’ queen. Baby mother, cook, cleaner and nanny – never Nehanda. Who was Nehanda? The real Nehanda was free, strong and a determined woman. She did not spend half her life having children and worrying about how to avoid animal flesh and processed food. ...The real Nehanda was in control of her destiny.⁵¹

The notion of controlling one’s destiny is very important in Rastafari and indicates a desire to have and make choices geared to one’s own sense of freedom.⁵² Nehanda seems to take control of her destiny when she asks her mother for support in order to get an abortion. During her anaesthesia-induced dream that resembles a judgement vision, the temporal and spatial dimensions collapse. Nehanda’s ‘sin’ coincides with Ras’s ostensible murdering of his ‘business’ partner who had run away with the money Ras had embezzled from the repatriation fund. Nehanda gradually succumbs to post-abortion depression, but claims to finally be in charge of her own mind and reproaches Ras for being “a cultural supremacist,” whereas he in turn accuses her of “acting middle-class and white.”⁵³ When she unwittingly confesses her abortion to Ras and he resorts to violence and leaves for good, Nehanda yearns for self-punishment. She does not reject her Rastafarian values, but has to find a way to accept the consequences of her decision, and she does so by reframing herself as a survivor and fighter and vowing to “bring the children up to be true Africans” who “should achieve goodness, consciousness and self love.”⁵⁴ The final chapter

indicates Nehanda's claiming of "Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end" and her powerful invocation of all of the Twelve Tribes.⁵⁵ Yet, she remains torn between visions of herself as Nehanda and moments of mental fragility, succumbs to medication and decides to cut off her locks in a desperate attempt to escape her own value system.

Forced to confront her homophobia in conversation with her lesbian friend Denise, Nehanda begins to further readjust her values and her previous homophobic response to Denise's relationship. Nehanda also has to reconsider her moral judgements when it turns out that Ras had not murdered 'Greedy Grease', and when her therapist reveals her ethnic background and asks her to think of her as a "black sister" rather than a "white therapist,"⁵⁶ so that she has to also see beyond the façade of racial ascriptions. Finally, Nehanda manages to surpass guilt and essentialism and spiritually reinvents herself beyond temporal and spatial constraints:

The pain that I thought would once destroy me is now my essence, my strength and my resurrection. ...One thing I am certain of in this world – nothing is perfect. Nothing is pure. Nothing is uncorrupt and nothing is separate from anything else. The future is connected to the past – the present is what holds it together. That my soul was once connected to the first slave ships that docked at the shores of Africa and my ankles bear the shackle marks of subjugation is no coincidence. It is a real scar that I bear. History is no mystery to me – for I was there. My mind and my body are submerged with the scars of mankind's inhumanity.⁵⁷

Aligning herself with ancestral consciousness, she has indeed taken control of her destiny and become Nehanda, the spiritual leader whose advice and guidance other women now seek as well. In her own search for redemption, she has not given up on Rastafari, but instead re-created a non-essentialist version of its moral framework for herself. The novel aestheticizes Nehanda's meditations through its two diegetic levels and non-linear narrative structure. Rather than framing Nehanda's mental condition exclusively in terms of western psychology, it is the spiritual 'reasoning' with different versions of her self that allows her to achieve grounding in the present. Significantly, though, this practice of 'reasoning' necessitates a safe space beyond

the gender hierarchies imposed by Ras. In order to arrive at an empowering sense of self Nehanda has to critically reflect on the attitudes, values, and beliefs that mark her relationship with Ras and find her own way of being Rastafari. While *A Daughter's Grace* thus does not feature a communal reasoning circle in the sense of a revolutionary space beyond oppression and marginalization as called for by Adwoa Ntozake Onuora, Nehanda's 'reasoning' articulates important questions surrounding gender in Rastafari and offers spiritual validation – without, however, questioning the “dichotomous logic” of the coloniality of gender itself.⁵⁸

Female Agency in Dread Culture: A Rastawoman's Story

Montague's *Dread Culture*, set in Toronto, shares some of the themes addressed in *A Daughter's Grace*. As Collins Klobah has argued, the protagonist Sheba “bears a name suited to her desire to achieve, develop her consciousness about black history and the Bible, and gain social agency by starting a healthy daycare center for Rastafarian youths.”⁵⁹ Unlike Nehanda, however, Sheba “attends Rastafarian gatherings on her own volition” and not “under the tutelage of a Kingman.”⁶⁰ In spite of her general pride in her Rasta identity, Sheba also struggles with her Kingman's position on polygyny. Yet, in this case she is the ‘other woman’, as Iration Dread is married to a woman living in Detroit with their children. What ultimately causes her disillusionment with their relationship is his double standard when he wrongfully suspects her of infidelity and physically abuses her.

One difference between the two novels is the use and representation of language. Unlike Nehanda's estranged family, Sheba's family and community assert cultural identity also through language. *Dread Culture* also places more emphasis on the role of female friendship as a sphere for articulating gender issues, violence, abuse, and homophobia.⁶¹ Collins Klobah thus argues that these novels “negotiate a space for lesbian women within Rastafari and for lesbian Rastafarians within discursive fields of representation.”⁶² Through their emphasis on individual negotiations of identity within Rastafari, these novels further the spectrum of positions and ways of being Rastafari.

Another key difference between the novels is *Dread Culture's* multi-sited and multigenerational depiction of the movement, which is introduced in the Jamaican

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context of Sheba's transnational family. Whereas Granny Esther has negative feelings about Rastafari, Uncle Butty shows "a very deep respect" for the Rastaman Iyah Nyah, and allows Johnny and Boysie to attend the Nyah Binghi in Bull Bay.⁶³ Notably, the boys do not get into trouble at the Rasta meeting, but rather when they run into a political rally at Spanish Town Road and their friend Sala is wrongfully accused of having stolen a woman's bag. Johnny is well aware of the randomness of Sala's arrest, and although he is not eager to leave Jamaica, his mother's letter bearing his Canadian residence permit in Granny's view provides safety from gang warfare and an opportunity to "better" himself.⁶⁴

Given its multiple focalizers, this "Rastawoman's Story" is also the story of Johnny and the wider Toronto-based Caribbean and Rastafarian communities. Already at the airport, Johnny is introduced to the racist underside of life in Toronto, its economic hardship, as well as drug-related violence in the city, which call into question Granny's favourable depiction of Canadian society. Johnny's sister Sheba is introduced as "a modestly dressed Rastafarian woman,"⁶⁵ but her mother Doris, who also embraces the illusionary ideal of Canadian society where it supposedly only takes hard work to succeed, refers to her daughter as a "heathen" and rejects "Rasta stupidity," as she claims it "nuh put yuh nowhere in dis society."⁶⁶ Moving in with Iration Dread thus is also a move away from her mother's scorn for Sheba, yet she soon feels that "her life revolved around his."⁶⁷ Similar to Nehanda, Sheba meditates on their relationship and Iration Dread's Biblical justification of polygyny and finally decides to break up with him when she cannot tolerate being 'the other woman' any longer.

The interwoven strands of the narrative proceed along differently focalized chapters but are brought together when Johnny gets involved with Chuckie. As their variety store robbery does not go according to plan and their accomplice gets shot at, Johnny becomes complicit in gang activities. When the police question customers in Iration Dread's restaurant about the incident, he voices his frustration about being profiled and demands to be treated respectfully, and only Sheba manages to console and uplift him with spiritual counsel. As Johnny prepares for a Saturday night deejay competition, his mother fears for his safety, and indeed, in an eruption of violence and gunshots following an argument between the 'gunman' Rankin and the 'hustler'

Spider, a bystander is shot dead, for which Johnny gets sentenced to ten years in prison based on Rankin's girlfriend Heather's false testimony. Parallel to working on Johnny's appeal, Sheba finally manages to set up her daycare. In spite of their relationship strife, Sheba and Iration Dread manage to continuously encourage each other through Rastafari teachings until, in another spout of jealousy, Iration Dread beats her viciously. In a phone conversation Akilah, one of the daycare teachers who herself has divorced an abusive man and cut off her locks, encourages Sheba to "draw di line" like she did – as she phrases it, "Haile Selassie still in I heart, but dere were certain tings I had to reconcile fi I self."⁶⁸ Like Nehanda, Akilah and Sheba have to withdraw from abusive and oppressive relationships before they can reconcile their spirituality with their respective situations and become spiritual guides in their own right.

Sheba's role as a spiritual guide is exemplified when, in prison, Johnny begins to study the Bible she has given him, realizing "that Rastafari was the way for him" as well.⁶⁹ Johnny's name change to Menelik indicates both his transition from boy to man and towards Rastafari consciousness.⁷⁰ With the same consolation that had previously calmed both Iration Dread and herself – "Jah nuh give yuh more dan yuh cyan bear"⁷¹ – she now appeals to Menelik when she finds out about the planned prison break initiated by Chuckie and Spider. During the night before the breakout, Menelik dreams of Jones Town, the Nyah Binghi camp in Bull Bay, Iration Dread's Eglinton shop, and revisits the tragic basement dance. His dream traces his journey into Rastafari, which is symbolized by being called to read the Bible at the tabernacle by an elder at the Bull Bay camp. Being woken up by his cellmate, who is aware of the planned breakout and reveals it to be a trap set up by the guards, not only prevents Menelik from getting shot but also indicates the simultaneous workings of 'Babylon', the oppressive and corrupt western system, and 'Jah guidance' in the form of the spiritual protection experienced in the dream and through his cellmate's revelation. Yet, Menelik is nevertheless implicated in the attempted breakout and placed in solitary confinement.

Sheba's faith is also tried when, in a phone conversation with the paralegal worker Josephine, she finds out that mothers have stopped attending the support group set up by Akilah because she is lesbian. Josephine's rendition of common

Jamaican stereotypes not only points to the wide-spread homophobia on the island, but, as Collins Klobah has noted, also to diasporic communities offering a space of articulation against these attitudes,⁷² as Sheba states: “I and I will not judge her relationship. Mek she and Jah work dat out together.”⁷³ Yet, Akilah succumbs to social pressure and resigns from her teaching job. Almost all female characters in the novel have experienced domestic violence or emotional abuse, yet find ways to disengage from abusive relationships, rebuild their lives, and empower themselves spiritually and mutually.

When Menelik is finally released on parole, he is determined to prove his innocence. When Heather finally agrees to tell the truth about her false testimony, Rankin attacks her with a gun. In the subsequent commotion, Spider gets shot in the shoulder just before the police storm the building and manage to stop Rankin. The narrative, however, remains open-ended, indicating no possible closure and offering no reprieve from the violence that is nurtured by Toronto’s discriminatory and oppressive social and economic structures. *Dread Culture* thus clearly exceeds the “Rastawoman’s Story” of its subtitle and is as much a story of Menelik’s coming to Rastafari as of Sheba’s spiritual journey and trials. In its portrayal of many different ways of being Rastafari the novel further complicates simplistic moral judgements of the complex and multi-layered situations the community and the individual characters find themselves in – not least through its scathing critique of Canada’s illusory benign multiculturalism, a narrative which it counters through the exposure of racist profiling and structural disadvantages. Through multiple focalizers, Sheba’s and Menelik’s stories and spiritual journeys open up a ‘reasoning’ space of reflection and articulation in which gender roles and constellations can be discussed and hierarchies dismantled, albeit through frequently painful processes.

Spiritual Journeys in Joseph: A Rasta Reggae Fable

Blake Hannah’s *Joseph: A Rasta Reggae Fable* is mainly read as depicting Bob Marley’s rise to stardom.⁷⁴ Yet, the ‘livication’ calls it a narrative of “what could have been...what should have been” – which, like the title, points to its structure as a fable.

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While the text's allegorical revelations would arguably make it a parable, the designation as a fable emphasizes its meditation on human nature as a moral lesson.

Sister Ashanti is not only the narrator and, as phrased in the blurb, "chronicler of Joseph's rise to international stardom" in the 1970s, but also of her own and many other characters' interconnected spiritual journeys, which in sum reveal "who and what" Joseph as a Rastafari was.⁷⁵ Introduced by an extradiegetic narrator in the Prelude, Ashanti takes over telling the 'true' story of Joseph (and of herself) in chapters framed by Psalms and other Biblical verses as well as an excerpt from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's liturgy. Ashanti grows up in Kingston's Dungle with her father, "one of the first beard men," in "a happy life" until the Dungle's demolition in 1958, when they move to Eastern Kingston and she begins to follow her father's Rastafarian ways.⁷⁶ Her name, like Sheba's, signifies a spiritual ancestral link and, like Nehanda's, resistance to colonial oppression.

Ashanti grows into the Rasta community and, in 1970, meets Joseph Planter when he joins a 'reasoning' with Ras Jama and the Kings of Africa, during which he calls her Shanty, which subsequently becomes her name in the community. Focalized through Shanty, a range of events and cultural practices are presented. When Joseph is worried about an upcoming contract with a record company from which – like in Perry Henzell's movie *The Harder They Come* – the "white boy" will profit but not pay him his share,⁷⁷ he seeks Ras Jama's advice. Moments of prolepsis indicate future developments and draw attention to Ashanti's narratorial position between observation, commentary and interpretation.

Her story, however, is interspersed with episodes by different narrators. Introducing the "rich Jamaican white boy"⁷⁸ and music tycoon Busha and his lover Zuleika as the industry players behind Joseph's contract, a highly judgmental narrator demonstrates the workings of the Babylonian system through their conspiracy. Zuleika's stage name not only alludes to Max Beerbohm's satirical novel *Zuleika Dobson*, or, an Oxford Love Story (1911) but also, and in the context of the unfolding story more significantly, references the Biblical Potiphar's wife. Although Zuleika is often cast as a sinner, in some sources her motivation appears to be genuine love and her and Joseph eventually marry after she converts.⁷⁹ In this

reading of Zuleika's name, Busha is prefigured as Joseph's 'slave master', while her relationship with Joseph wavers between love, her betrayal of his faith, and her ultimate sacrifice and conversion. The depiction of Zuleika's initial sexual desire of Joseph is narratively juxtaposed to one of Ashanti's meditations on Rasta consciousness: "You know, this Rasta thing is a funny thing. Rasta is good and Rasta is bad. Rasta is beautiful and Rasta is ugly. Rasta is madness, and Rasta is so much sense, that it makes some people glad and some people angry."⁸⁰ Ashanti outlines Rastafari as "the first story black people ever heard that we are not the losers," as "high spiritual heights" and "a philosophy that appeals to the soul" as well as "a fire to point to the wickedness of this world's way of life" and a way to "see yourself, your I-self" in the Rasta "livity."⁸¹ This passage points to the exemplum and meta-narrative of the spiritual journey, while Ashanti's many references to harmonious relationships between Rastafari counter-balance stereotypical ideas of the predominance of oppressive or abusive gender relations in Rastafari.

Joseph's highly successful tour of England brings him to international attention and shows how very different audiences, from "skinheads" to "dreadlocked pioneers of the movement" respond equally positively to "the energy, the joy, the strength and the pleasure of this man's musical communication,"⁸² thus emphasizing the spiritual aspect of Joseph's career. The record company's prefigured 'enslavement' of the musicians becomes clear when, after the highly successful tour, they find themselves in debt to the company instead of sharing the profits. As he becomes more popular and interviewers flock to his new uptown house, Joseph questions their way of life instead of answering them, thus spreading knowledge about Rastafari. One of these interviewers is the US-American Sam Bergmann who, with his PhD in sociology, approaches the movement through a renowned professor, which to Joseph demonstrates how even those who cannot live it are influenced by "the power of Rasta."⁸³ Like in this instance, throughout the novel, Joseph's success is clearly attributed to his Rasta consciousness.

Ashanti's "pen and pencil" witnessing of these interviews constitutes a scathing critique of the media while adding to her own narrative reliability, whereas questions relating to gender equality in the movement are relegated to Sam's one-sided perception: "He asked Joseph how it was that he did not obey Rasta rule that

women was inferior and unclean, but instead had many women and allowed them into his inner circle.”⁸⁴ Joseph’s answer becomes an authoritative call for equality, to which Ashanti adds her personal reasons for covering up: “I, Rasta woman, prefer to keep I&I lions of Zion filled with spiritual thoughts, so that they can be strong, and win our battles. We reserve the beauty of our bodies and our crowning glory, for the sight of our King-Man alone.”⁸⁵ Notably it is also Ashanti who offers a rationale for Joseph’s womanizing by arguing that all women he lies with have to pass a test as to their spirituality, so that any one-sided gender critique from without is further complicated through demonstrating women’s highly discrepant positions on gender within the movement.

Ashanti’s King-Man Peter is also shown as a very spiritual man, yet Peter and Joseph personify different ways of being Rastafari – one who “believes that the System won’t change unless we ourselves take steps to liberate ourselves” and the other believing “that faith, prayer and righteousness were the weapons that would make change,”⁸⁶ while their working together demonstrates Rasta unity. During their stay in St. Ann, Ashanti offers another insight into her role as a Rasta woman. This time, she details the exhausting “job of cooking and organising” in a rural setting, while in spite of the hardship calling it “a pleasant activity..., serving and taking care of two such special men, who in turn were taking care of me,”⁸⁷ thus again asserting reciprocity.

Joseph’s performance at the benefit concert again demonstrates his mystical musical power to unite “herbsman, locksman, politician, dread and baldhead”⁸⁸ – until he gets shot at and barely manages to escape the ensuing frenzy. Recovering from his wound but not the betrayal of the assassination attempt, Joseph agrees to a trip to Ethiopia, especially given Zuleika’s supposed inability to take on the responsibility of “a Rastaman’s woman,” i.e. “submissively deferring to her man first at all times.”⁸⁹ In Ashanti’s words, Zuleika “did not know how a wise woman plays this role without either giving over her independence and will, nor dominating her man and emasculating him by showing independence and will too obviously.”⁹⁰ Here, the role of “a Rastaman’s woman” is presented not in terms of ‘real’ submission, but as a strategic and performative interaction within the to-be-negotiated bounds of the spiritual framework.

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En route to Ethiopia, Joseph spends some time in London, where he witnesses political and economic disenfranchisement among the Black population and, in response, envisions “Africa’s greatness” and ways “to free their minds” through spiritual consciousness.⁹¹ An ominous conspiracist, however, contrives Joseph’s downfall through false media reports of a sex- and drug-party, which later turns into a full-blown media scandal.

During their stay in Ethiopia, Ashanti and Peter experience different mystical sights, whereas the Rasta community of Shashemane turns out to be less glorious than anticipated. The different customs of the Shashemane Rastas (such as the absence of dreadlocks) represent further examples of varying influences, developments, interpretations and choices of how and why to turn to Rastafari.⁹² When Peter suggests a visit to the pilgrimage site of Lallibella, the group eagerly sets out for what turns out to be the most mystical and decisive experience of their respective spiritual journeys – as it turns out not to Lallibella, but to individual self-discovery in a valley of temples to the Saints of the Ethiopian Church, where each group member is housed in a different temple equipped with items indicative of their respective spiritual needs. There they receive mystical guidance and are to acquire “knowledge [they] will need for [their] return to the world outside this place.”⁹³ Ashanti experiences spiritual growth and “unity of minds and souls,” and at the end of their stay, Peter, Ashanti and Joseph are baptised in the fountain ‘Emmanuel’, even though this is “such an un-Rasta thing to do.”⁹⁴

Their mystical journey is juxtaposed with the fabricated media scandal Joseph faces upon return to London. Supporters and opponents alike turn up for his concert-cum-interview during which Joseph wants to disprove the accusations against him. Again, he turns the questioning around by asking the journalists what they really know about “how and what [Rastafari] think,” thus retaining agency and narrating his own version with a multi-media installation demonstrating his “dream of a special place in Africa where all is perfect love, perfect peace and perfect harmony.”⁹⁵ Joseph’s vision of the “rainbow city” ‘New Zion’ becomes a powerful tool to convince his audience of the sincere motives of the Rastafari movement and his ‘Ethiopian Repatriation Fund’.⁹⁶

Addressing the implied readership, Ashanti calls to mind the ‘known’ parts of Joseph’s subsequent illness resulting from a chest tumour, to which she adds another layer, however. Joseph is flown to the Debre Zeit Monastery in Jamaica “where the Nyabingi elders who keep themselves away from Babylon live in prayer, fasting and meditation.”⁹⁷ It is here that Ashanti’s elaboration of ‘what should have been’ comes full circle and exceeds the parallels to Bob Marley’s life story. Joseph’s ‘cold’ wife Rosy is given a chance to articulate her own version of their relationship, while Zuleika – true to her namesake – shows her love for Joseph and warms his body during his final treatment. Through Zuleika, Ashanti finds out that the temple Joseph lived in during their stay in Ethiopia was ‘The Ark of the Covenant’ with a green light inside. In accordance with this mystic revelation, Ashanti determines Joseph’s role as that of the unifying force.⁹⁸ In a meta-fictional epilogue Ashanti reflects on the writing of her story from Shashemane, the growing Holy City, to where she relocated. Ashanti’s ultimate revelation, however, is that Joseph’s treatment worked and that he is also living with Zuleika in Shashemane, whereas only a wax dummy had been buried at his funeral so that he could live peacefully and (having cut off his locks) remain unrecognized, which again signifies his dedication to his faith in what constitutes the fable’s ultimate exemplum of ‘what should have been’. Overall, the text emphasizes the importance of each characters’ individual spiritual journey in an assemblage that performs the function of a fictional ‘reasoning circle’ in that it shows what Rastafari can be to different people in different ways, which complicates any one-sided gender critique of the movement while highlighting its spiritual and mystical aspects. Through the very framing as a fable, the narrative manages to strategically suspend a critique of its romanticizing tendencies and thus can be regarded as a vision of the potentiality of Rasta spirituality and gender equality.

Gender, Colonial Modernity, and Rastafari

Taken together, the three novels under discussion constitute a ‘reasoning’ with significance beyond their individual (re-)conceptualization of Rastafarian womanhood and their meditation on gender roles. They articulate private spheres as sites of

agency and public spheres as dependant on the contributions of women. From their different locations and through their idiosyncratic ways of being Rastafari, the novels' protagonists indeed demonstrate a wide spectrum of gender roles and positions, but all three texts emphasize the possibility of empowerment through spirituality. They depict translocal Rastafarian communities that are simultaneously closely connected and marked by significant local and regional differences. As to the more general function of these literary portrayals of Rastafari, their spiritual articulations display individual ways and possibilities of testing and enacting the decolonial aspirations of the Rastafari movement as a mode of thinking and being. As Hoenisch has described it, the historical emergence of the Rastafari movement constitutes "a specific form of decolonization" in that it

did not struggle along traditional political lines for independent nation states but called on the poor to organize independent and self-confident communes here and now. Redefining themselves as followers of the African royalty which represented the uncolonized part of Africa, they started a local revolt against the global structure that defined them as colonial subjects. In the spheres of the symbolic and of praxis they struggled to create the model of a counter-empire apart from the 'West'. But they also searched for a way out of the center-periphery dualism which has imprisoned modern anti-colonial movements. The Rastafarian rejection of centralized organization in favor of grassroots self-organization in the midst of poverty, the careful distancing from hierarchies of political and economic power, the attempt to transform everyday praxis and the structure of the self at the same time have been received as signs of a possible culture of freedom and human dignity not only by the colonial subjects of this world.⁹⁹

The literary representation of the decolonial practices and spiritual frameworks of Rastafari adds to these attempts at critical engagement with and transformation of coloniality, including the coloniality of gender. As Lugones points out in her theorization of decolonial feminism, however, one cannot "search for a non-colonized construction of gender," as there "is no such thing; 'gender' does not travel away from colonial modernity. Resistance to the coloniality of gender is thus historically complex."¹⁰⁰ Similarly,

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[o]ne does not resist the coloniality of gender alone. One resists it from within a way of understanding the world and living in it that is shared and that can understand one's actions, thus providing recognition. Communities rather than individuals enable the doing; one does with someone else, not in individualist isolation.¹⁰¹

Hence, Rastafari's engagement with ostensibly 'western' religious frameworks is not indicative of unsuccessful mental decolonization, as some might claim, nor can its 'patriarchal' ideology simplistically be equated with 'western' notions of patriarchy.¹⁰² Given the implication of gender in colonial modernity as outlined by Lugones, the decolonial practices of Rastafari do not and cannot exist outside of the dichotomous system but they do resist the coloniality of gender in their individual and communal meditations on gender roles. The novels under discussion indicate that an awareness and reflection of Rastafari's decolonial practices within its spiritual framework are necessary in order to understand the articulations and representations of

the multiplicity of ways in which women in particular local secular and religious segments mediate material resources, conceptualize their experiences, and create alliances to exert control over the contingencies of everyday life and counteract objectionable local actions or national systemic/institutional policies.¹⁰³

Literary representations of Rastafari such as the ones discussed here refute simple generalizations of the movement and show that resistance to the coloniality of gender is also a complex matter *within* the "culture of decolonization" of Rastafari itself.¹⁰⁴ Overall, these novels perform the function of a 'reasoning circle' in that they claim and assert a space for the necessary and on-going discussion of gender roles within Rastafari and thus further re-figure the practice of 'reasoning'. It is their literary prerogative to articulate fictional conversations and chart life courses that point beyond hierarchical and male-centred claims to knowledge, much like the ideal 'reasoning circle' as outlined by Adwoa Ntozake Onuora above would have it.

Endnotes

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¹ Kwame Dawes, "Foreword" to *Brother Man* [1954] by Roger Mais (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2004), 6; G.R. Coulthard, "The Children of Sisyphus by H. Orlando Patterson," *Caribbean Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1964), 69.

² For Mais in the context of social realism, see e.g. Jean D'Costa, *Roger Mais* (London: Continuum, 1978), 7, and Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 2006), 53, as cited by Velma Pollard in "Language and the Downpressed: The Rasta Man in Jamaican Creative Writing," in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, edited by Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 460-69. As Kenneth Ramchand has pointed out in his introduction to C.L.R. James's 1936 novel *Minty Alley* (London: New Beacon Books, 1971), 7, social realism in the West Indian novel was established through the works of Alfred H. Mendes and C.L.R. James prior to Roger Mais.

³ See e.g. Evelyn Hawthorne, "Power from Within: Christianity, Rastafarianism, and Obeah in the Novels of Roger Mais," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 2, no. 2 (1988): 23-32. The most elaborate general discussion of Rastafari language remains Velma Pollard's *Dread Talk* (Kingston: Canoe Press, 2000 [1994]), while her article "Language and the Downpressed" specifically discusses the representation of the voice of the Rasta man in *Brother Man*.

⁴ Kenneth Ramchand, "'The West Indian Novel and its Background' – Thirty Years Later," *Ariel* 31, no. 1-2 (2000): 361, 364, 362.

⁵ Kwame S.N. Dawes, "Violence and Patriarchy: Male Domination in Roger Mais's 'Brother Man'," *Ariel* 25, no. 3 (1994): 29-49.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 33. Dawes has, however, discussed the general representation of Rastafari in the novel in "Disarming the Threat of Rasta Revolution in Mais' *Brother Man*," *Commonwealth Novel in English* 7-8 (1997-1998): 81-109.

⁹ Dawes, "Violence and Patriarchy," 38.

¹⁰ E.g. Maureen Rowe, "Gender and Family Relations in Rastafar: A Personal Perspective," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, edited by Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 72-88; Imani Tafari-Ama, "Rastawoman as Rebel: Case Studies in Jamaica," *Chanting Down Babylon*, 89-106; Carole D. Yawney, "Moving with the Dawtas of Rastafari: From Myth to Reality," in *Arise Ye Mighty People! Gender, Class and Race in Popular Struggles*, edited by Terisa E. Turner (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994), 65-73; Loretta Collins, "Daughters of Jah: The Impact of Rastafarian Womanhood in the Caribbean, the United States, Britain, and Canada," in *Religion, Culture, and Tradition in the Caribbean*, edited by Hemchand Gossai and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 227-55.

¹¹ For the points raised in my discussion I consider it secondary whether the authors identify as Rastafari, have done so at one stage in their lives, or have an in-depth engagement with Rastafari communities without necessarily identifying as Rastafari, as I do not focus on the question of whether these constitute 'authentic' perspectives.

¹² Michael Hoenisch, "Rastafari and Erna Brodber's Black Space: Symbolic Strategies," in *Rastafari: A Universal Philosophy in the Third Millennium*, edited by Werner Zips (Kingston and Miami: Ian Randle, 2006), 60. Regarding Erna Brodber's membership in the Twelve Tribes, see Evelyn O'Callaghan, "Erna Brodber," in *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Daryl Cumber Dance (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 73. The Twelve Tribes are associated with a middle- and upper-class following, see Frank Jan van Dijk, "The Twelve Tribes of Israel: Rasta and the Middle Class," *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 62, no. 1-2 (1988): 1-26, www.kitlv-journals.nl (3 September 2013)

¹³ Hoenisch, "Rastafari and Erna Brodber's Black Space," 60-61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66

¹⁵ Kevin Arthur Cryderman, "Jane and Louisa: The Critical Paradigms Revisited," from "'My Dear Will You Allow Me to Discuss the Politics of Reading and Writing?: An Exploration of Language and Narrative Architecture in Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*" (2000), n.p. <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/caribbean/brodber/kcry4.html> (1 September 2016).

¹⁶ Masani Montague, *Dread Culture: A Rastawoman's Story* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1994); Zindika, A

Daughter's Grace (London: Karnak House, 1992); Barbara Makeda Blake Hannah, *Joseph: A Rasta Reggae Fable* (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2006 [1991/1985]).

¹⁷ María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010), 744, 745. In her use of "coloniality of being" as a concept Lugones refers to Nelson Maldonado Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹⁸ For a general discussion of Rastafari in a decolonial perspective, see Annika McPherson, "Rastafari and/as Decoloniality," in *Postcoloniality – Decoloniality – Black Critique: Joints and Fissures*, edited by Sabine Broeck and Carsten Junker (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2014), 353-67.

¹⁹ John P. Homiak, "Dub History: Soundings on Rastafari Livity and Language" in *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews*, edited by Barry Chevannes (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 130; also cited in Lawrence O. Bamikole, "Rastafari as Philosophy and Praxis," in *Rastafari in the New Millenium*, edited by Michael Barnett (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 137.

²⁰ Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York and Lodon: Routledge, 2003), 129.

²¹ See Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture Publications, 2001 [1969]).

²² Bamikole, "Rastafari as Philosophy and Praxis," 138.

²³ Adwoa Ntozake Onuora, "Exploring Rastafari's Pedagogic, Communicative, and Instructional Potential in the Caribbean: The Life and Works of Mutabaruka as a Case Study," in *Rastafari in the New Millenium*, edited by Michael Barnett (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 146, 156, 156n5.

²⁴ María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," 742.

²⁵ Walter Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007), 453. See also Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) and Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, edited by Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (London and New York: Routledge), 22-32.

²⁶ Loretta Collins Klobah, "Journeying Towards Mount Zion: Changing Representations of Womanhood in Popular music, Performance Poetry, and Novels by Rastafarian Women," in *The Globalization of Rastafari*, *Ideaz 7*, edited by Ian Boxill (Kingston, Jamaica: Arawak, 2008), 158-96.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁸ Tafari-Ama quoted in Collins Klobah, "Journeying Towards Mount Zion," 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

³² *Ibid.*, 179.

³³ *Ibid.*, 179-180.

³⁴ Zindika, *A Daughter's Grace*, 3. *Nehanda* is also the title of Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera's first novel (Harare: Baobab, 1993), which describes the struggle of Nehanda's people against the colonial invasion of their territory in terms of their relationships with ancestral spirits tied to the land.

³⁵ Zindika, *A Daughter's Grace*, 3. 'Kingman' as well as 'Daughter(s)' or 'Sistren' and 'Empress' are Rastafari terms of reference and address in relationships. The highest terms of respect are 'Empress' and 'Queen', which are derived from Emperor Haile Selassie's ('King Alpha') wife Empress Menen ('Queen Omega') and symbolize women's honour and dignity.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

³⁸ Nyabinghi refers to Rastafarian gatherings during which a certain style of drumming and chanting is performed. It is also the name of one of the mansions of Rastafari.

³⁹ Zindika, *A Daughter's Grace*, 39.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 45, 47-48.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁸ Herbert Aschwanden, *Karanga Mythology: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga in Zimbabwe*, trans. Ursula Cooper (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989), 161.

⁴⁹ Zindika, *A Daughter's Grace*, 98.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 100, 104.

⁵¹ Ibid., 117.

⁵² Self-determination and the shaping of one's destiny featured prominently in the speeches of Marcus Garvey and in the UNIA motto, "One God! One Aim! One Destiny!," as well.

⁵³ Zindika, *A Daughter's Grace*, 132-33.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 138-39.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 145.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁵⁸ Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," 743.

⁵⁹ Collins Klobah, "Journeying Towards Mount Zion," 182. The Biblical Queen of Sheba according to Rastafarian teachings proves the divinity of Haile Selassie I, who is considered to be a descendant of the union between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon.

⁶⁰ Collins Klobah, "Journeying Towards Mount Zion," 182.

⁶¹ Ibid., 186.

⁶² Ibid., 189.

⁶³ Montague, *Dread Culture*, 15. Bull Bay is the location of the headquarters of the Ethiopian African Black International Congress Church of Salvation (EABIC), also referred to as Bobo Shanti. Discrepant spellings of terms such as 'Kingman' and 'Nyah Binghi' or 'Nyabinghi' are retained as used in the respective text under discussion.

⁶⁴ Montague, *Dread Culture*, 24.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁷⁰ According to the Kebra Nagast, an important text for Rastafari, Menelik is the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. He is said to have brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia.

⁷¹ Montague, *Dread Culture*, 150.

⁷² Klobah, "Journeying Towards Mount Zion," 189.

⁷³ Montague, *Dread Culture*, 165.

⁷⁴ Marley's Twelve Tribes association was Joseph. See e.g. Mozella G. Mitchell, *Crucial Issues in Caribbean Religions* (New York: Lang, 2006), 174f. The Twelve Tribes are not explicitly named in the novel, but Joseph is rendered as a member of the 'Sons of Jacob'.

⁷⁵ Blake Hannah, *Joseph*, 1.

⁷⁶ Blake Hannah, *Joseph*, 4-5. The 'Dungle' is also the setting of *Children of Sisyphus*. The actual 'Dungle' and 'Back-o-Wall' areas after demolition became the area of Tivoli Gardens, a neighbourhood notorious for urban unrest and confrontations with security forces. Blake Hannah's rendition of Ashanti living "a happy life" in this "dung hill made of garbage dumped there each day from homes where they had enough to throw away" (4) thus is a significant counter-portrayal to the garbage-man's depiction of the 'non-human' "creatures of the Dungle" in Patterson's novel (4).

⁷⁷ Blake Hannah, *Joseph*, 10. *The Harder They Come*, directed by Perry Henzell (1972; Arsenal Film, 2010), DVD.

⁷⁸ Blake Hannah, *Joseph*, 12-13.

⁷⁹ Joseph is sold to Potiphar as a 'house slave', and when his wife Zuleika becomes infatuated with the handsome Joseph and unsuccessfully tries to seduce him, she accuses him of attempted rape, for which he is imprisoned. See e.g. Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten, "Madame Potiphar through a Culture Trip, or, which side are you on?" in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium*, edited by Cheryl Exum and Stephen D. Moore (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 216-217.

⁸⁰ Blake Hannah, *Joseph*, 22.

⁸¹ Ibid., 23.

⁸² Ibid., 32-33. The narrative repeatedly points to the situation of Jamaican communities “in cities like Bristol, Birmingham and Manchester, where the children of the immigrant West Indians grew, suffering in the hatred of racism – a hatred that made them appropriate candidates for the Gospel of Rastafari” (Ibid., 35).

⁸³ Ibid., 46. The reference to the fictional professor and theatrical actor Hudson Granger can be interpreted as a side comment on the University of the West Indies’ academic studies of the Rastafari movement and specifically to Rex Nettleford, whose 1960 *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica* (with M.G. Smith and F. Roy Augier) significantly influenced the discussion of the movement. Nettleford was also a co-founder of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica.

⁸⁴ Blake Hannah, *Joseph*, 57.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 77. The concert alludes to the ‘One Love Peace Concert’ on April 22, 1978, at the Jamaican National Stadium, but reframes the historical joining of hands of the political opponents, Prime Minister Michael Manley (People’s National Party) and Edward Seaga (Jamaica Labour Party), which Bob Marley initiated during his performance. Blake Hannah’s narrative focuses on the revolutionary Rastamen as the political agents, placing the politicians in a secondary role.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 89.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁹¹ Ibid., 109-10. This alludes to the lyrics of Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song.”

⁹² Ibid., 129.

⁹³ Ibid., 149.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 150, 153.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 170-71. Building a bridge for his audience between the philosophies of Rastafari, Garveyism, Pan-Africanism and other forms of black consciousness, Joseph outlines his detailed plan for the building of a new ‘African’ nation, scolding the journalists for their one-sided media portrayals of ‘Africa’.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 179.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 189.

⁹⁸ Taking Ashanti’s Ethiopian experience and her spiritual connection to the Virgin Mary into account, the Ark can also be read as representing her connection to Joseph, as Mary is at times allegorically referred to as the Ark carrying the Christ. The green light, in turn, points to the version of the Ark as having the exact proportions of the King’s coffer in the Great Pyramid in Egypt, where the initiation of disciples towards higher energy is said to have taken place. The light would then represent the cosmic force which only the physically and spiritually ‘pure’ such as Joseph could endure.

⁹⁹ Michael Hoenisch, “Rastafari – Black Decolonization,” in *The Meanings of ‘Race’ for the 21st Century*, edited by Paola Boi and Sabine Broeck (Münster: Lit, 2002), 146.

¹⁰⁰ Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” 746.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 754.

¹⁰² Rowe, “Gender and Family Relations in Rastafari,” 73-74.

¹⁰³ Collins, “Daughters of Jah,” 231.

¹⁰⁴ McPherson, “Rastafari and/as Decoloniality,” 365.