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**Towards A New Map of Africa through Rastafari 'Works'**

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## **Abstract**

Mortimo Planno is credited as having tutored reggae icon Bob Marley and many others in the faith of Rastafari which was to emerge as a new world religion and way of life out of Jamaica. Planno, an outstanding Pan-African scholar and activist, traveled to the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, and some fifteen African states, lecturing on the Movement developed in Jamaica, celebrating the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie I as God incarnate. For more than fifty years this elder was seen as the *de facto* leader of the Rastafari movement of Kingston. This paper seeks to broaden the notion of the African Public sphere to include the historical Diaspora by highlighting the *works* of Planno, cultural historian – Rastafari luminary and plenipotentiary – in closing the void between Africa and its Diaspora, through examining Planno’s definition of the African public sphere, as articulated in his general writings, and main text, ‘The Earth Most Strangest Man’, as well as travelogues accounting his discourse on Back-to-Africa. The study applies Paulo Freire’s theory of a “pedagogy of liberation” to assess whether Rastafari thinkers such as Planno can be seen as facilitating a trans-Atlantic conscientisation towards remedial African national development and liberation from what Garvey (1927) described as “mental slavery”.

## **Key Words:**

Rastafari; Mortimo Planno; pedagogy of liberation; mental liberation; Conscientisation; Back-to-Africa; African public sphere; Ethiopianism; Caribbean; Bob Marley; Reggae; Africa map

## **Prologue**

### **“Zimbabwe”**

“Every man got a right to decide this own destiny  
And in this judgement there is no partiality  
So arm in arm with arms we’ll fight this little struggle  
‘Cause that’s the only way we can overcome our little trouble

Brother you’re right. You’re right. You’re right. You’re right  
You’re so right  
We go fight (We go fight)  
We’ll have to fight (We go fight)  
We’re gonna fight (We go fight)  
Fight for our rights

Natty dread it in a Zimbabwe  
Set it up in Zimbabwe  
Mash it up in a Zimbabwe  
Africans a liberate Zimbabwe

No more internal power struggle  
We come together to overcome the little trouble  
Soon we’ll find out who is the revolutionary  
‘Cause I don’t want my people to be contrary

### Chorus

Divide and rule could only tear us apart  
In every man’s chest there beats a heart  
So soon we’ll find out who is the real revolutionaries  
And I don’t want my people to be tricked by mercenaries

Brother you’re right. You’re right. You’re right. You’re right  
You’re so right  
We’ll have to fight (We go fight)

We're gonna fight (We go fight)  
We'll have to fight (We go fight)  
Fighting for our rights

Natty trash it in a Zimbabwe  
Mash it up in a Zimbabwe  
Set it up in a Zimbabwe  
Africans a liberate Zimbabwe  
Africans a liberate Zimbabwe  
Natty dub it in a Zimbabwe  
Set it up in Zimbabwe  
Africans a liberate Zimbabwe”

Bob Marley (1979) “Zimbabwe”

### **Foreground: The Carry Beyond Geo-sphere, A Map of the World**

“Our magnificence dominates the Three Indias, and extends to Farther India, where the body of St. Thomas the Apostle rests....Seventy-two provinces obey us, a few of which are Christian provinces; and each its own king. And all their kings are our tributaries....If you can count the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea, you will be able to judge thereby the vastness of our realm and our power.”

(Extract from a 12<sup>th</sup> Century letter authored by the Prester John, reproduced in Silverberg, 1972, pp.42-45).

Long before there was the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494 dividing the world (not so neatly) between Spain and Portugal, an Ethiopian sovereign was to have circulated word of his realm and extensive Empire. In 1165 Manuel the Constantinopolitan Emperor, and Fredrick, the Emperor of the Romans received letters from one Presbyter John (also Prester John or Priest King), a Christian Emperor and King of Kings who a direct descendant of the magi mentioned in the Gospel (who visited and presented gifts to the Christ child). The letter indicated a domain constituting a tribute empire that spanned the globe beyond the boundaries then known to the European world expanding east and west of the uttermost end of the earth.

Though significantly altered through various translations and interpolations the letter clearly indicated the Presbyter John as unsurpassed by any other in power and wealth. The letter created such a stir in Europe that for the next five centuries, various attempts were made to establish the identity and specific location of this legendary emperor as well as to behold the wealth and command he was reputed to have over these territories and their peoples. This letter and its author – though originally at times confused as Genghis Khan<sup>1</sup>, is now generally accepted to relate to the Ethiopian Sovereign and his empire – believed to have extended to Africa, Asia and into the Americas. This letter though the subject of much debate and skepticism provides yet another source to triangulate the theories of pre-Columbian African presence in Central and South America as well as in South Asia, Polynesia and beyond, chronicled in the oral histories as well as in Chinese records of the Twelfth century (see Van Sertima, 1975). It took Christopher Columbus' voyage in 1492 to the Americas, for Europeans to secure further evidence of the expansiveness and wealth, literally the 'other worlds' across the seas and the wealth that could be possessed by adventurers into these waters yet unknown by their explorers. This 'discovery' set in motion one of the most ambitious projects ever embarked on by mankind, that being to conquer the world for Christendom, the latter perhaps a euphemism for establishing and justifying the European hegemonic dominance that subsequently developed. Various strategies were put in place to facilitate that project, the chief instrument for this mission being the Spanish code known as the Requisition, which legitimated not only the conquest of the 'new world' by Spain on behalf of the Pope, but also the parceling off or allocation of virtually most of the western hemisphere to the Spanish State (see Wynter 1995, p. 19).

Sylvia Wynter (1995) reminds us that not all the 'natives' of the Americas were silenced in their opinion of Christopher Columbus and the project of European capture of most of the 'New World'.

“[T]he Pope being the Lord of all the universe in the place of God, and he had given the lands of the Indies to the King of Castile, the Pope must have been drunk when he did it, for he gave what was not his...The King who asked for and received this gift must have been some madman for he asked to have given to him that which belonged to others.”

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<sup>1</sup> See Silverberg (1972, pp. 73-86)

(The Cenu Indian's reply to the Spaniard "local culture" conception of the legitimacy of the Papal Bull of 1492 as one which "gave" the *New World* [my emphasis] to Spain).

[Quoted in Wynter 1995, p.18])

Wynter picks up where the Cenu Indian left off to extrapolate:

"Equally, the discourse of the Requisition, like the correlated discourses which legitimated the West's global expansion, was only true within the terms of the 16<sup>th</sup> century variant of the matrix Judea-Christian culture of the West, and therefore within the terms of its behavior-motivational belief system and neo-Augustianian principle of explanation." (1995, p.20).

Hickling (2004) through his methodology of psycho-historiography supports Wynter's argument and identifies the foundational ethos and inner logic of the Columbian American Colonial project on "delusional psychology" founded in greed (Hickling 2004, p. 54.). However one wishes to conceive the mindsets that was to dwell in the geo-sphere which came to be known as the Caribbean, its name derived from a 'cannibal' Amerindian tribe that Columbus called 'Caribs' (a corruption of '*Galibi*' meaning "brave men"), that occupied most of these islands which form an arc linking North and South America. In less than one century of Columbus' voyage, there was to unfold one of the most universal battles that claimed every scrap of rock dotting the area of the Caribbean involving peoples from every corner of the world, for all the powers that were then dominant in Europe. Within two centuries of Columbus' arrival the emergent island outposts were appropriately labeled with European national flags while miniscule numbers of local administrators maintained extractive links on behalf of these 'mother countries', who were now being afforded abundant riches to fuel an ambition to develop their citizenry. The activities in the Caribbean had afforded for not only economic wealth but had aided intellectually and philosophically expanding research and closing knowledge gaps. It also significantly helped to develop and expand the range of language driven skills required to administer the region *inabsentia* a phenomenon which reputedly afforded for more oppressive behaviour on the part of white overseers, as well as their general interpretations of laws/codes, and social structures and relations derived from administering extractive networks constructed to drive European advancement. For this global network to succeed the African majority responsible for most of the labour had to be contained, controlled and incorporated into a delusional construct through legislations and a penal system which shackled impulses to resist. Resistance still could not be totally contained

as Wynter (1977 & 1995) notes, and were even prolific in islands such as Jamaica and Haiti; the latter by way of the now famous Haitian Revolution of 1791 ending France's control of that territory almost two hundred years prior to decolonization discussions commenced in the rest of the region (between 1962-1981). To the extent that the Caribbean experience has been one of African political disempowerment Rastafari have often render the word as 'carry beyond' to speak to the cleavage of the peoples away from African shores and their imprisonment in tiny islands way across the seas. Carry beyond is also understood and applied poetically to speak to a state of darkness and ignorance affording for lack of culture and self knowledge to exist only in a state of perpetual slavery.

The legacy and space that the Carry Beyond occupies is therefore one of strong ties with all of the dominant European countries and to some extent with Asia, the home countries of the indentured and merchant classes, but very weak and undervalued links with Africa, the majority of the labouring population's homeland. In the British West Indies, colonialism tried to ensure that there was no link between the African continent and the Caribbean that was not an extractive one, and so there was to be no back flow of population or investment towards Africa – that is no direct connections that would strengthen the African connection. Africa represented labour, the West Indies represented land under European control into which many Africans were imported to work, and for so many others it could be said, and put to death. Rodney (1973) details how Europe for the past four centuries has manipulated African wealth to underdevelop the continent. This 'underdevelopment' was transplanted in to the island by the solitary designation of 'slave' or the legal non-status of the African, dominant but an impotent majority. In Jamaica, Planno identifies (within a population pyramid headed by minorities and expanding downwards) an African society that is under denial and suppression. Planno therefore locates Jamaican and by extension the Carry Beyond as constituted with the following hierarchy: "Jews, Arawaks, Mulattos, Arabs, Indians, Chinese and Africans – all of which spells JAMAICA" (see Planno, 1996, p.X). Planno acrostic scheme for Jamaica recognizes that the core, base, backbone, substantive body of Jamaica is always built and driven by an estranged African element constituting more than 90% of the population<sup>2</sup> but which remains silenced and unrepresented in many levels of the official society in ways not

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<sup>2</sup> The population of the British West Indies along with the non-British CARICOM states (ie. Haiti and Suriname) or some fifteen small island states in Central America, have a total population of approximately 15 million inhabitants, 90% of whom are of African decent, with yet another 5% (on average) of mixed decent (African and European/Asian). Information sourced from US Central Intelligence Agency, country profile see <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos> (retrieved September 9, 2008). Nettleford (2007) describes the region as "where Africa, Europe and Asia met on Amerindian soil.

dissimilar from the earliest day of colonization when overt racism afforded unabated violence and hardship to be inflicted on the enslaved. Since Africa never achieved political hegemony within the Caribbean, at least not in the conventionally recorded histories<sup>3</sup>, her peoples seemingly have been negatively affected by this and thus the African global family has suffered an irreparable disadvantage. Indeed if the realm of the Presbyter John of the Twelfth century bragged “...there is no strife among us; our people have an abundance of wealth...There are no liars among us...” by the time of the European Christian stewardship – the wealth, population and existence of these Indies (East and West) were effectively crippled and transferred away from these spaces and their populations diminished from there previous wealth and dignity to the enslaved.

### **The African sphere**

“Think about it: everyone they tried to work those fields in the hot sun dropped like files and then they started bringing us over from Africa. It didn’t matter how many of us died as long as we lasted through a crop, because they figured on an endless supply.”

Greenlee, S. (1969, pp.114-115)

The Africans on the west side of the Atlantic owe a debt to Marcus Garvey who contributed hugely to the groundwork to teach the people of their race and its experience. Decades before Garvey, Alexander Bedward had emerged in Kingston with a racialised message in relation to the time at hand and the emergence of free African population, no longer subject to white colonial authority. Within the first three or four decades of the Twentieth century, not only was there street activism / teaching of Africa (see Elkin, 1972), there were also a number of published works relating to the same racialised excavating. Athyli Rogers, Fitz Ballintine Pettersberg, Leonard Howell, Amy Jacques Garvey, J.A. Rogers the African sphere have worked toward a elevation of the population understanding of the truth of Africa. This therefore means that by the 1940s developed cadres emerged in the Diaspora teaching Africa from religious, political and academic view points with the Rastafari being one of the latest in that trajectory of teachers. Planno in introducing his research on the African sphere in his book “The Earth Most Strangest Man: The Rastafarian” as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> If however mindful of Ivan Van Sertima’s thesis – African presence predates that of the Europeans in the region by centuries and their hegemonic significance is borne out by the monuments (Olmec Negriod heads) erected to them in the Central American region.

“Ethiopia the Aincient (sic) Kingdom of Africa has made an unnoticed expansion of the Ethiopian Kingdom. From one end of the Earth to the other. Africa being inhabited by invading European Nations Has lost most of her written history to the invaders, who in turn copy and then destroy the original...”

(Planno, 1996, p.3)

Immediately as we are told that the Ethiopian Empire expanded the earth, Planno goes on to outline that subject to invading European destroying our sources, Africans have been at the mercy of second hand copies of their history. Among the Rastafari the term Ethiopia is still often used in its original sense to relate to the Greek description for the African landmass, occupied by ‘sun burnt’ peoples. Mortimo Planno, further qualifies the Rastafarian position:

“By Ethiopia I an I mean one continent, by Ethiopia I an I mean the Country Ethiopia with its capital Addis Ababa. By Ethiopia I an I mean All for One, One for all operating in this manner there can be no failure. The only true interpretation for Africa for the Africans. I an I being in captivity Has to admit, to names of those who did pass through great tribulations...”

(Planno, 1996, p.3)

Planno conforms to the traditional Rastafari definition of Ethiopia, but he also expounds his meaning to include the historical trajectory of experiencing for the African people – from the continent *en masse*, to the country of the Ethiopian highlands, to the captive Ethiopians beyond the shores of Africa. This third category of Ethiopian or those who fell into captivity though they are numerically and culturally dominant within their captive nations, these societies are still however conceived as European satellites or outposts. This paper makes a case for Rastafari to be construed as an African Diasporan teacher fashioned in a pedagogical ‘sphere’ emerging out of a dominant Ethiopianist and Pan Africanist identity, deeply embedded in the diaspora. To some extent it may be said that Ethiopianism has expressed itself as a far more active and perhaps even ‘militant’ force among African Diasporan, especially after the coronation of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I<sup>4</sup>. This was further deepened and strengthened when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 an episode that was to capture the attention of many African Diasporan ‘pariah’ intellectuals, as notions of Africa

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<sup>4</sup> See King, KJ (1978) as well as James, W (1998) for comprehensive discussions of Ethiopianism within the African Diaspora and its manifestations in the west as well as within the African continent in the early decades of the twentieth century.

was still for the outcasts among the West Indian thinkers<sup>5</sup>. The Movement of Rastafari thus came into being at a moment when Ethiopia had opened a way for attention towards the African continent in general. This *Rastafari sphere* I argue, is indispensable to an on going liberation conceptualization and deployment internationally, and significantly contributes to the broadening and strengthening of the African Public Sphere.

The importation of Africans and the system of slavery ended formally in most of the Americas by the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Within a generation of the British West Indian Emancipation Act (of 1834) the Africans inhabiting the region had called into scrutiny their lack of social and political status. Though legally free it took another century after Emancipation for Africans to achieve a political voice. In 1933, five years after Marcus Garvey was deported from the United States after being previously imprisoned there the Rastafari founding patriarch Leonard Howell, who was also deported from the United States, emerged in Jamaica preaching a similar message to that of the Cenu Indian while echoing sentiments also close to that of the Presbyterian John's letter, some five centuries after Columbus' design took root in the Americas. Howell preached to the people gathered in the market place and in the public side-walk street assemblies<sup>6</sup> a message of rejection of western hegemony and the celebration of an Ethiopianist trajectory emergent through this legendary Solomonic King who had just been crowned. Within a decade of Howell's activism preaching the Messianic interpretation of the 1930 coronation of the Ethiopian sovereign as the sign indicative of the redemption of Africa, a Movement was to develop in Kingston Jamaica which quickly spread nationally and internationally to emerge as an import voice and discursive public tradition for the *Conscientisation* of Africans at home and abroad.

Here I am going to seek to concretely identify the African sphere, by way of an engagement with the cosmological outlook developed by the Rastafari of Jamaica and particularly as identified by one of the Movement's first and most long serving plenipotentiaries, and teachers, Mortimo Planno. Rastafari in this paper is being defined as Ethiopianist centered

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<sup>5</sup> See Edmonds (2003).

<sup>6</sup> See Lee (2003) and Hill (2001) for discussion of Howell and the early Rastafari leadership. Elkins (1977) provides a discussion of "Street Preachers" in Jamaica from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early decades of the Twentieth century which provides a context for the streets to be viewed as a genuine 'theatre for debate' and discursive deliberations, or what would be constituted within Rastafari lexicon as a space for 'reasoning', or what obtain in the literature as "public sphere", especially for the marginal most – without resources to secure favour of policy makers or media. To this extent this forum of street ideational activism or 'reasoning' operates more akin to a "*counter-public*"(see Fraser 1990) as its would be a critique of the bourgeois located notion of public sphere express by Habermas (1989).

worldview and Movement, venerating the life and character of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia as the prophesied Redeemer King of Creation. Actively, Rastafari can also be defined as the principal teacher of liberation – or as Howell designated himself teacher of “famed wisdom”. From these two definitions emerge an argument for the Rastafari as a teacher of African liberation worldview. This places the Rastafari as a quintessential force in incubating progress among his marginalized brothers and sisters globally. This point also helps to define Rastafari as a Pan African diasporic media especially in light of the universality of the conditions that Africans have suffered consistently. Boyce Davies affords an appropriate summation of the African condition which she describes as follows:

“For many years the status of African Diaspora peoples in various nation-states has entailed as recognition that they are always a “deportable subject”<sup>7</sup>. Additionally, Africans often did not have access to the basic rights accorded citizens in many locations prior to civil rights and other anti-colonial movements. The ongoing denial of rights speaks most strongly to what the concept of “citizenship” in the United States [and the Americas] has meant for black people. As a direct result, this sense of statelessness can have the effect of creating not only a sense of alienation from the nation-state but also *an international African identity in the diaspora.*” (Boyce Davies & M’Bow, 2007, p.19)

The notion of a “deportable subject” coupled with the idea of “an international African identity in the diaspora”, provides me with an entry point for a more poignant introduction of the inner logic, role and place of the Rastafari Movement within the African diaspora. Whereas it took just the label of ‘slave’ to transform an African into a subhuman, it has taken almost two centuries of extreme violence and bloodshed to begin to reverse the scars of the slave legacy from the population so affected. Boyce Davies *et al* further highlight the fact that the African in the west has had even today to mediate the societies of their birth from the position of “denial of citizenship rights (Constitutional rights)...”. Boyce Davies *et al* further highlight the fact that in the cases where citizenship / constitutional rights are secured – arbitrary arrest and imprisonment become loop-hole within the state apparatus to denial citizenship – a situation which obtains in North American prisons where African males are

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<sup>7</sup> See Carole Boyce Davies, *Deportable Subjects: US Immigration Laws and the Criminalizing of Communism*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100: 4 (2001).

over-represented in relation to their numbers within the larger population<sup>8</sup>. This has been well represented by the African American case where their numbers are disproportionately larger within the frontline of active services, with high mortality rates in matters involving law enforcement and consequently also allowing for high numbers within the penal institutions especially males under thirty-five.

The African sphere cannot therefore only be a continental enclosure<sup>9</sup> but must also facilitate significant populations of Africans abroad whose histories, circumstances and consciousness unify them with those Africans at home. Marcus Garvey recognized that there was need for a global African consciousness, dialogue and networking, and through the UNIA this object was being advanced. The misfortune which arose however related to Garvey's stalwart contribution was that it did not demonstrate the capacity to evolve and grow after the demise of its chief architect. The Rastafari which follows Garveyism as next in line of a long tradition of resistance, were well poised to expand the reach of Garvey largely due to its religio-political framework, which connected to the combined pedagogical needs of being a modernizing syncretic fusion. Rastafari movement through a diasporan bricolage of Ethiopianism, Pan Africanism, Garveyism, Hinduism as well as Christian eschatology has developed a system of reasoning, with an amazing international resonance (see "60 minutes" Hickling, 1979), towards the development of a liberatory praxis which would see improvement for the African citizenry internationally. I would further note that, the Movement operates more like a *counter public* sphere where through an insidious and discursive process of reasoning, provides the basis for teaching a common culture or perhaps more aptly assist in framing the icons, images, symbols, mores, and general way of being that ultimately might inform "an international African identity in the diaspora". My argument now turns more specifically to the Rastafari definition of the African Sphere and more specifically the African Public Sphere as seen and impacted through the works and ideas of Mortimo Planno.

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<sup>8</sup> Figures for the African American male inmate population in the USA.

<sup>9</sup> See Bankie (2003) who debates the context of Pan Africanism or Continentalism.

## **Basis of Wisdom: Mortimo Planno's Open Yard**

“We are volunteer Ethiopians  
Agitating for our Rights  
And We'll never stop fight  
Until we brake (sic) down Babylon Wall.”

(Planno, 1996, p. 7)

“The impact we [Rastafarians] have is that of a pressure group who have forced certain pressures on the establishment...that they have to give African countries recognition and move towards having better relation with African countries.”

(Planno, 1979)

Mortimo Planno was born in Cuba in 1929 to May Parker a Jamaican and Miguel Planno a Cuban tobacconist. In the early 1930s Planno's parents moved to Jamaica and he recalls by the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, or by the age of ten in 1939, he had developed and began to articulate a strict anti-colonial consciousness which saw him siding with the Germans against the British colonial overlords. By the age of 30, Planno was a known community leader and activist who the University of the West Indies would consult with in studying, reporting and recommending that the Rastafari be taken as a legitimate movement in pursuit of achievable goals and that government could be of assistance (see Smith et al 1960). Planno was a Rastafari brethren who was given to writing letters – many of which he directed to the ‘Powers and Principalities’, in pursuit of justice for the disenfranchised and the poor and in particular the Rastafari struggles within the contemporary society. The 1960 Report was generated from one such Planno letter (see ARI 2008) resulting in the dispatching of a Mission to Africa (April 1961), to gather facts in Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria as to these countries receptiveness to receiving the Jamaican Rastafari and the more general Back-to Africa interest group. Planno was placed on the Mission as a leading representative of the community. The Mission first had audience with the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I in Addis Ababa who assured them that Ethiopia could accommodate all the Africans from the West Indies who desired to return (see Planno et al, 1961). After Ethiopia the Mission was received in Nigeria by the Governor General, Nnamdi Azikiwe; later in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the delegates were received respectively by Kwame Nkrumah, William Tubman and Milton Margai (see Planno et al

1961). Though there were no specific promises of repatriation the Mission transmitted a sense of action as well hope that was only halted when the national government changed and the opposition party and the agenda of ‘migration’ to Africa as it was described became a casualty of the new administration’s focus and direction (see Planno 1996 & Nettleford, 1972).

After Planno’s return from the Mission to Africa he became more legitimately seen as the leading Rastafari among a largely unorganized cadre of disaffected urban dwellers. Planno mounted public protests, held street meetings, kept concerts and theatrical performances – all geared at animating the consciousness and ‘*overstanding*’ of Africa. Planno even introduced the teaching of the Amharic language in Trench Town. Additionally he became one of the first internationally acknowledged spokespersons for the Movement and toured the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada representing Back-to-Africa within the West Indian Diasporas resident in those locations. After the visit of the Emperor in 1966 this became more so as the tumultuous welcome translated into mayhem for ‘official’ machineries of state protocol could not contain the tens of thousand who had come to see this truly legendary ruler. The flaming torches, the palm branch bearers, drum players, spectators all who had come to hail their King of Kings, thronged the plane on the tarmac requiring the Emperor’s intervention by suggesting / requesting that Planno’s skills be employed to settle the multitudes and allow for his deplaning. Onlookers were now imagining total disaster with fire and explosion and stampeding. The stage was now set for Planno’s skills to be exercised. Planno – not a part of the official welcome party had to be summoned by loud speaker – who upon his arrival and brief salutation with the Emperor proceeded to restore calm. In the words of a witness, Bro. Dyer, an elder who Planno inspired into the faith of Rastafari and who later walked to Ethiopia from Spain – “Planno open his mouth and began to teach them about their history”. Planno recalls starting with the Psalm that was unfolding before him and he spoke thus:

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel  
together, against the lord, and against his anointed, saying, let  
us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.  
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh... (Psalm 2:1-4)

Planno's ability to avert disaster due to the failure of protocol saved the day and prevented international embarrassment. He earned the title of "Prime Minister for the day"<sup>10</sup> in the local newspaper. The arrival of the Emperor had been dreamt of and desired ever since the doctrine emerged in the 1930s. For those three days Jamaica had become Ethiopia according to Planno's analysis. The visit vindicated the Rastafari faith, while intensifying the desire for Ethiopia. After this moment in Jamaican history – accounted as the most memorable state visit<sup>11</sup> Planno more so became a magnet for the community until his residence became well established as one of the first prominent inner city, Trench Town locales for creative discussions to develop within. Individuals were now converging on Planno's 18<sup>th</sup> Fifth – Open Yard as he called it – to reason and solidify critical opinions. Planno's space perhaps operated as an alternative (that is African center) dialogical public sphere – within the margin of the society. To this extent, Planno's Open Yard perhaps more operated as a '*counter-public* sphere,' given it more subversive agenda – particularly that aspect which looked outwards of Jamaica to Africa – Africa still being remote with respect to the nation agenda and well outside of the public sphere concerns<sup>12</sup>. Its appeal was outstanding seeing Rastafari brethren: musicians, jugglers (informally employed), sporting personalities, academics, artistes and other individuals converging on Planno's space to share in the *reasoning*. He explains the method as such:

“[A]s we get the opportunity we use it, use it fi carry one foot forward. Every time an opportunity open the door we go through that door and call down Africa pon dem. Marcus Garvey learn from Mohammed Ali that the people of the Caribbean want to learn more about Africa. And him Marcus Garvey did not have the language to tell it to the people. Him didn't really have that approach. The Rastaman for instance have a better approach than him in telling the people about back-to-Africa...to explain to you who can't read – what British write – how “you going to suffer through your own desire”.

Planno (1998)

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<sup>10</sup> See report in the Daily Gleaner, April 23, 1961. Also located in ARI project.

<sup>11</sup> Other African heads that have had State Visit are: William Tubman (1954); Kenneth Kaunda (1966); Julius Nyerere (1974); Chief Leabus Johnathan (1974); Nelson Mandela (1991); Gerry Rawlings (1996); Thabo Mbeki (2003).

<sup>12</sup> See Fraser 1992, who engages the idea of the *counter-public*.

Planno provides an indirect critique of Garvey's 'bourgeois' strategies for conscientising and developing an African sphere within the Diaspora by highlighting the state of being of the mass of the populace at the time of Garvey's UNIA. Further Planno suggest that the "Rastaman" becomes the translator of Garveyism to these masses, many of whom were illiterate. In his lecture "Polite Violence" Planno helps to bridge the gap between the contribution of Marcus Garvey and that of the Movement of Rastafari. Though emerging from the early 1930s, it was only in the post World War II period that the Rastafari movement started to clearly lobby for the official authorities to undertake the task of engaging Africa as a real and actual part of the majority of the population's culture and way of life. With the emergence of a West Indian university located at Mona Jamaica (established in 1948) as well as the newly formed United Nations facility for the expression of international disputes, also the decolonization discussions which were now rife, Back-to Africa as a pathway for some of the society was also seeking some representation. Garvey's work had slowed after the 1930s and more so after his passing, this void is where the Movement stepped in to "tell the people about back-to-Africa." Planno even developed songs to help to provide his audiences with instructions: "Tell out King Rasta doctrine around the whole world...", he would start and end his gatherings with such singing.

Capitalizing on the school of thought that emerged through the doctrine of Ethiopianism as seen through the religious and later intellectual movement of the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rastafari by the 1950s had developed a grassroots version of this ideology and had layered it with a religio-political flavour, arguably the component that was less evident within Garveyism. Philosophically this component added to the basic Back-to-Africa framework of self-reliance a spiritual anchor through the focus on the Emperor and Ethiopia. Ethiopia's primacy within Rastafari, not only being linked by its historical regard for the long uncolonised history which the nation evidences, but also is based on the visibility that this state had been receiving internationally since the battle of Adwa in 1896, when a decisive victory over the Italian invaders unleashed a renewed hope in the African ability to overcome seemingly ubiquitous oppression. With the international prominence of the Emperor Haile Selassie I, after his coronation as well as the Italo-Ethiopian war (1935-1941), there was no absence of active discussion and scrutiny of this region by Africans everywhere. In Jamaica at the outbreak of the war there was a large protest-meeting in Kingston and some 1,400 Jamaicans signed a petition asking the British Crown to grant permission for Jamaicans to

enlist in the Ethiopian Army<sup>13</sup>. The war in Ethiopia also strengthened the chiliastic readings that the Movement placed on Ethiopia as manifesting the Revelations: the final battle with the beast, (representing/repeating the story of the Romans with Christ, now the Italians through Mussolini, sanctioned by the Pope, the anti-Christ), to destroy the Messiah, Emperor Haile Selassie I<sup>14</sup>. Leonard Howell – in his first messages at the inception of the Movement advised the people to turn their attention to the newly crowned Black Emperor, and to study his laws and constitution as he was their true redeemer and not the white British King. The appearance of the Ethiopian Emperor on the throne became that moment of truth fulfilling the promise of the Messiah. Howell like Planno did not expect to have this understanding delivered by anyone from the official society – an official society that the Rastafari soothsayers were to later represented as ‘Babylon’ or ‘the system’, as they were false preachers and teachers.

The activism that the Movement embarked on resulted in a shoring up of the knowledge of and desire for Africa within the population in general which at that time had very little true awareness of Africa. It represented a period within which Africa was affirmed, studied and monitored. The news of Africa usually reported in the press was always subject of new interpretation by Rasta, for example, though reported as a problem in Kenya – in the 1950s the Rastafari immediately identified with the struggle of the Mau Mau and by some accounts were inspired by this group to develop the aesthetic of dreadlocks (see Chevannes 1998). The climate of decolonization became infused with some social discussion related to restoration of linkages with Africa through ‘repatriation’ (or migration) of Back-to-Africa advocates. The decade between 1958 and 1968 therefore saw a ground swell of the idea of Back-to-Africa in Jamaica through the work of the Rastafari who by this time had begun to organize different associations looking at the best ways of manifesting Africa. In 1958 as an outcome of the first international Rastafari convention called in Back-o-Wall, Kingston a telegram was sent to Queen Elizabeth II stating, “We the descendants of Ancient Ethiopia call upon you for our repatriation...”. Several months later the Rastafari camp in Back-o-wall was destroyed by police and its leader arrested and imprisoned. The convention or “Grounation” as it was called, of 1958 was called on the anniversary of the Ethiopian victory at the Battle of Adwoa (March 1) and lasted twenty-one days and had the expressed effect of making the Rastafari seen (within the British commonwealth) to be a visible organization of African – Back-to-

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<sup>13</sup> See Van Dijk, 1993, p.94

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Africa minded members of the society. The social response was that of feeling confronted by the brethren and set in train a deterioration of relations between the Government as well as the general public towards the Rastafari movement (see van Dijk, 1993, pp. 117-118).

After this Grounation in Kingston, the Rastafari became a far more articulate and obvious anomaly within the society. The cultivation of dreadlocks became widespread as characteristic of initiates becoming a part of an embodied identity, and use of the body as a site of resistance. This feature has been present from the outset and over the years has seen more elaboration of this identity as well as its significance. The embrace of the Ethiopian national colors has also been a part of this signification as well as the cultivation of beards merely, sometime in stead of dreadlock identity. The display of pins and buttons with the Ethiopian sovereigns, Ghana flag as well as Marcus Garvey and colours of the UNIA are also features of this embodied practice. As a result of the visual presentation the Rastafari critique of the wider society presented, the Movement became what Planno describes as a “fascination for the society, journalists...tourists”. Coupled with a doctrine that focused on “the dark continent of Africa” – the strange, anachronistic ideas of the Rastafari became a regular part of the media’s obsession, till eventually the print media also became an outlet for the ‘truth about the Movement to be revealed’. For example on the issue of the Rastafari Human Right to hold the philosophy of Ethiopia Planno writes in a letter to the Editor of the local newspaper the *Gleaner* quoting the UN Declaration on Human Rights:

“Mr. Editor, under article 15 (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality, (11) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.... The Rastafarian Movement made representation to government for a nationality change. To many people the Rastas are making trouble, when they ask for a nationality change...” (*Daily Gleaner* December 19, 1963, p.12)

Planno’s Back-to-Africa advocacy for the Rasta brethren kept Africa alive generally, clamoring for repatriation and the discussions that were now being promoted became translated within the wider society as a need to have greater understanding about the continent of Africa. Roy Augier, one of the authors of the now famous (1960) *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Kingston* indicated that the effects of the Rastafari phenomenon within the University of the West Indies was to create the space for the insertion of the study of Africa within the curriculum as well as the placement of African pre- Columbian history within the

curriculum of the secondary school system – Walter Rodney, according to Augier was handpicked to provide this contribution to the University (Augier to Niaah, June 2008). The obsession of the Rastafari with “the unresolved legacy of colonialism” had helped to remind the wider society that its major cosmological and demographic locus was Africa and assisted in legitimating the claim of the African presence (hitherto denied). This coincided with the period of “Black Power”, however its expression in Jamaica was most clearly through the engagement of Rastafari with the issues of Africa. Throughout the remainder of the 1960s especially after the visit of the Emperor in 1966, various attempts were made to pursue the course of repatriation – including the attempts of Planno’s Rastafari Movement Association to fund the repatriation of 9 families to Ethiopia. When it became apparent that the efforts were not yielding appropriate rewards largely due to lack of financing, reggae became the chief source of engagement for the next generation of Rastafari activism – which was to partially emerge from Planno’s Open Yard in Trench Town that became the place of convergence for the radical university students and researchers, musicians, athletes, Rastafari brothers and sisters.

Between the end of the 1960s and the death of Bob Marley in 1981, just more than a decade, the Rastafari of Jamaica was to develop a medium to speak to the world, to proselytize about its new faith and to elevate the discussion of Africa everywhere. This medium or media was reggae music – which is defined by some as the King’s (Ethiopian Emperor’s) music. Reggae from its outset was associated with the membership of the Rastafari movement and it is perhaps therefore not surprising that it was easily imbued with the sentiments of the Movement’s doctrine and vision. This characteristic of the music production was always a feature as African music forms had always expressed the peoples’ experiences. Rastafari’s Ethiopianism became more embedded in the music which included sentiments of repatriation, but also expressed solidarity with suffering Africans in Jamaica but also on the continent of Africa. Artists also chose to use African names, African chants, themes, clothing and ritual practices within their creative works as a part of the reclamation of the human self and continent that they had lost.

## **Rastafari: Building African ‘consciousness’, Remapping the Earth**

“A people without a nation that they can really call their own is a people without a soul. Africa is our nation and is in spiritual and physical bondage because her leaders are turning to outside forces for solutions to African problems when everything Africa needs is within her. When African righteous people come together the world will come together. This is our divine destiny.”

(HIM Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia)

Bob Marley received a formal invitation to attend the independence ceremonies of the new nation of Zimbabwe on April 17, 1980. The previous year when Marley first publicly performed the song ‘Zimbabwe’ in Boston, at the now famous Amandla concert (so-called for the phrase Amandla Ngawetu, “Power to the People” in the Shona language of Zimbabwe, where his performance raised a quarter million US dollars for African liberation<sup>15</sup>), he paused the performance and made the following speech:

“The Third World struggling...and we must come together for Zimbabwe...Women and children shall fight this revolution...we can be free, we want go home to we yard...Rastafari know that...Don’t let propaganda lead you astray, false rumors and false propaganda. Haile Selassie I the *Almighty!!*...Zimbabwe must be free by 1983, Jah seh, *Africa must be free*...So everyone have a right to decide his own destiny....Put your feet in the dust....A people without knowledge of their past is no better than a tree without roots....We smoke herb so we get one meditation, and they don’t wan’ fe see us in unity, *C’mon children!! Yeah!!!*...I couldn’t mek a speech, I could mek a speech, but I’m gonna tell ya that I’m gonna fight for my rights. I’m a Rasta man and we are Rasta people. Consciousness cover the earth...*Hey sisters!!* Awake from your sleepless slumber, emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind, yunno

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<sup>15</sup> See Davis (2006, pp.211-215).

what I'm saying? Babylon *burning!!* It's vibration mek the whole world stop. *Burning!!* No more force *A free the people!!* Yunno something? We're gonna do it...with a nuclear bomb! Wake up and live! Rastafari, the Almighty God!! *With no apology!!...Yunno, it's time for us to be free!!!*"

(Davis, 2006, p.215)

Planno, regarded as Marley's tutor / mentor, explains Bob Marley as being akin to a Rastafari Bishop, given the power and authority to move across the world as a chief emissary of the faith (see Planno, May, 1998). In his interactions through the music which he used to teach, Marley expounded the philosophies of the ages that he had come to know through the consciousness of the Rastafari. Marley's method infused by his abilities as a total performer, often appearing as though entranced, transforming his audiences to a higher consciousness through rhythm and thought provoking verses, is seen by Davis (1984) as a crucial force in a liberatory praxis "toward human unity and dignity" (ibid. 216). The assessments of Planno and Davis of Marley help to place the artist within a framework more akin to 'theological' work, and Marley's own testimony of faith in the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie help to support his own consistent profession of faith as well.

Applying Freire (2000) can help to contextualize the role of the Rastafari within the African sphere and in particular within the Diaspora. Freire in examining the importance of dialogue in the process of human consciousness building recognized that there is no 'true word' that is not at the same time a praxis. He goes further to indicate that "to speak a true word is to transform the world" (2000, p.87). Emerging from its 'word' based philosophy of a redeemer King, Rastafarians developed a praxis to transform the world. For this transformation of the world to occur, 'spirit media'<sup>16</sup> like Marley are able to achieve a genuine dialogue within his works which convinces his audience of his (divine) inspiration as well as their own ability to command the same. Freire indicates however that dialogue cannot exist however if there is no profound sense of 'love' for the world and for people. Freire indicates that:

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<sup>16</sup> The Rastafari most sacred ritual the 'Nyahbinghi' is a syncretic practice which has emerged in Jamaica in over the last seventy years, drawing from the Eastern African tradition of colonial resistance involving a spirit medium commanded by "Queen Nyahbinghi". This medium was perceived as the source to the successful defense of the territory who up until her capture in the 1920s had the ability to inspired warriors victory (see Hopkins, 1971). By some account Marley commanded such powers and was thus recognized as a medium himself. Talamon (1994) refers to Marley as "spirit dancer", Chevannes (1999), in supporting of Marley's importance refers to his as "apotheosis of Rastafari hero", Marley is now considered to have represented a very powerful and unique African teacher / messenger.

“Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination. Domination reveals the pathology of love: sadism in the dominator and masochism in the dominated. Because love is an act of courage, not fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical.”

(Freire 2000, p. 89)

Through the dialogical process of ‘reasoning’, Rastafari evolved a cogent philosophy and interpretation of the African Diasporan experience, according to Planno (2002, in an interview), “we get the people more wise”. The principles of the public reasonings were taken into the studios of Kingston by the Rasta brethren and the resultant effect was a new music genre and a new breed of teachers on the Pan African situation. Bob Marley was to emerge by the early 1970s as a leading exponent of this purposeful sound. Reggae music as this sound has come to be known has been defined by Rastafari as “the Kings music”, and to a great extent the contents and overarching concerns of the genre have come to embody the African reality and ambition. By 1980 or approximately a decade after his international debut, Bob Marley had risen to the stature of being the most famous Pan-African anti-colonial champion, in a truly revolutionary and uplifting way, so much so that had made a significant impression on the various liberation movements in Africa and Southern Africa in particular (see Campbell 2007).

### **Summary & Conclusions**

What is therefore this new map of Africa? How is it to be envisioned, harnessed and administered? Africa has perhaps suffered from a diminution in its political scope and geographical range by not engaging in a philosophy of hegemonic dominance or an explicitly imperialist worldview. Despite this however her peoples have become a key Diasporan phenomenon, large numerically and exercising potent cultural influence internationally. Within this constituency the Rastafari have emerged a mission of *conscientisation* for the mass about the need for progress and liberation. Through the veil of Ethiopianism the Rastafari have historicized the African diasporian experience from a perspective that has critiqued the overarching paradigm and provided the tool for its transformation. To this

extent the Rastafari have fashioned and upheld and continued to administrate an African sphere that has afforded for the development of a citizen of Africa, a Pan Africa community, existing at the level of a transnational being. This feature of the Rastafari has been fashioned and developed over the years by successive generations of elders of the faith, from Howell to Planno to Bob Marley and beyond, it is generally misunderstood and undervalued however in spite of this has found resonance among oppressed peoples universally. To this extent the Rastafari have help to create Africa abroad, and deepen it significance especially for many of those who were transplanted, stateless and homeless - plucked from their homeland under duress and great pain. This new map of Africa is therefore yet still a very old map about an empowering state of “consciousness” perhaps best and most succinctly expressed by Garvey himself as “African for the Africans both at home and abroad”, which for many has meant fashioning and refashioning Africa consistently in those sphere we have dominated.

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