

Religion, Diaspora, and Cultural Identity

A Reader in the Anglophone Caribbean

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5:

Movements of Jah People: From Soundscapes to Mediascape

John P. Homiak

Dem time (1940s–50s) Father send I-n-I into de wilderness wid only de Word. Naked, hungry, and shelterless, wi doan hab nuttin' left fi hold 'pon. Still, wi doan downhearted. Wi travel on wid a full heart an' do de works. Gradually wi bring in de people and teach dem 'bout der culture

Bongo Poro, St. Thomas, Jamaica, July 1980

The title of this chapter identifies two phases in Rastafari as an “imagined community”, a community in which “the majority of its members are unlikely to know or encounter each other, but whose sense of identity is sustained by an image of their mutual communion” (Anderson 1991:6). The frames of reference proposed here, those of soundscape and mediascape, track the development of the movement from a “cult” of protest in colonial Jamaica to its postcolonial reality as a transnational community and an international network of black cultural resistance. At first glance, this couplet would appear to suggest a simple contrast between the local and global. It is necessary, however, to appreciate that Rastafari has always involved a complex interplay between local developments and global events (see Austin Broos, 1987, 1991–2; Yawney, 1995).

As I use the terms here, soundscape and mediascape are sites of political struggle and community definition. While the two are inseparable within the reality of the Rasta movement, they represent different moments within its development and the dissemination of a message of the unity and common destiny of African peoples at home and abroad. Viewed historically, these terms reflect the difference between Rastafari as a pariah element in Jamaica in the early 1930s to its emergence as a form of popular culture in the 1970s deeply implicated in the formation of nationalist politics and identity. The

reality of this distinction remains alive in the declaration cited above by Bongo Poro, a Nyabinghi patriarch (Figure 1).

The contrasts between these two sites, then, are not ones of cultural content, message, or philosophy, but involve differences in the structuring of social relations; in the distinctive images around which community is organized and experienced; and in the flow, frequency, reach, connectedness, and scale of social interactions. Within the local context of the soundscape is nested a roots culture with coherent symbolic boundaries and generational continuity. This includes a tradition of face-to-face mentoring through "reasonings" in which "teachment" is imparted from Elder to youth as well as larger communal "groundings" in which community is constituted by the use of the Nyabinghi drums to "praise Jah and chant down Babylon."¹ Several key images reside herein: the glowing herbs pipe or *chalice* passing from hand to hand, the prophet's rod, the standing 'binghi drums in tricolor, and the circular peaked-roof Nyabinghi tabernacle.

The mediascape, by contrast, is a globalized, diffuse, and deterritorialized site initially defined by the dissemination of reggae, a Jamaican-inspired music critical to the globalization of the Rasta message and to the emergence of Rastafari communities outside Jamaica. These communities in the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Africa have become enmeshed in the global flows created by the communications and media technology of the late 20th century (Appadurai 1991). During the 1970s, popular expressions of Rastafari in the mediascape, through the recording, print and broadcast media, as well as through touring reggae artists, provided the basis for a global identification with the "rootical" expressions of Rasta and its redemptive vision. Here the key organizing images incline toward the flashing dreadlocks and the charismatic stage presence of Bob Marley and the other international ambassadors of the culture. Linking both sites, however, are the common symbols of Africa-Ethiopia — the tricolors, and, most important, the image of Emperor Haile Selassie I.

In the following pages I describe some of the ethnographic contexts of these spheres of interaction and illustrate some of the ways in which the local and global, rootical and popular have become enfolded within the contemporary Rasta movement. I argue that the

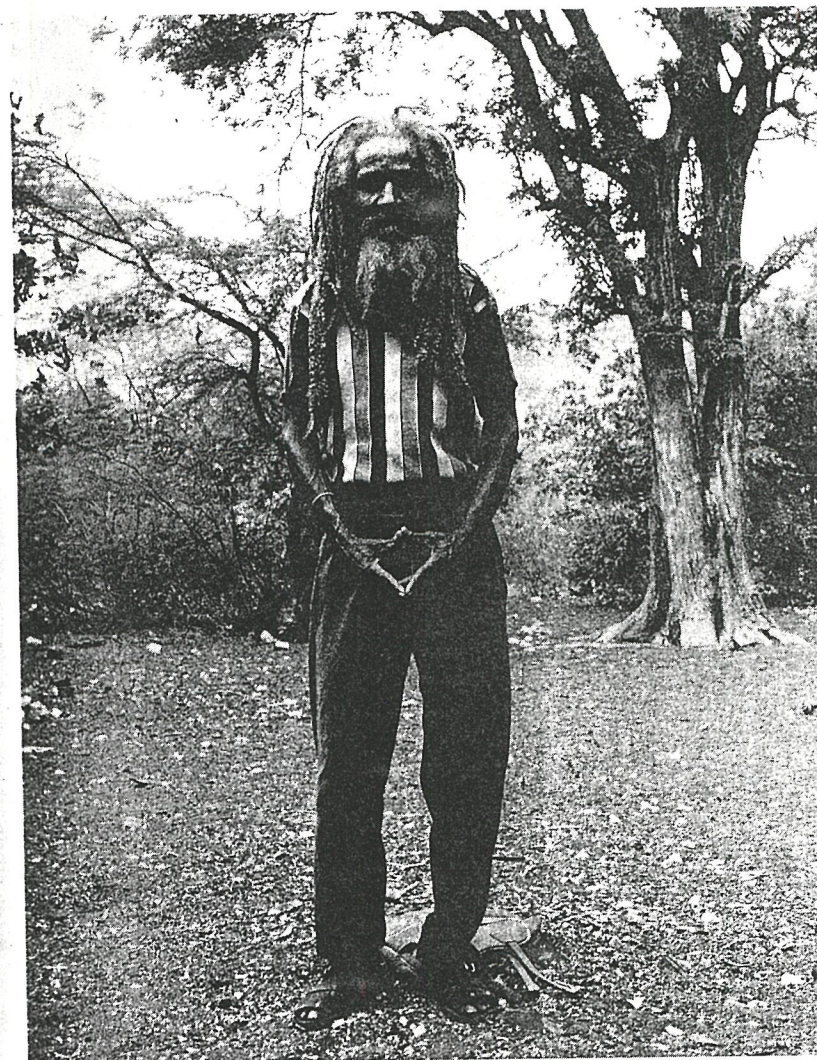


Figure 1. Bongo Poro, a Nyabinghi patriarch, in traditional posture of prayer and reverence. Emperor Haile Selassie was frequently photographed in this posture.

challenges of describing and of theorizing Rastafari in its current global reality are inseparable from one another. I believe that the forms of multi-site ethnography and collaboration advocated by Yawney reflect an experimental ethnography of social movements that is only beginning to receive attention. No single ethnographer can possibly hope to track the increasingly rapid and complex cultural flows among Rastafari globally, and this undertaking involves long-term commitment and flexible multi-site fieldwork, and active collaboration with Rastafari as well with other Rastafari researchers.

Word-Sound-and-Power: Under the Tambrin Tree

Is de Word mon use fi explore earth. Yuh can tek de Word and ride de wings of de morning ta de farther reaches of Creation. Doan care how far yuh guh, de word is der. It is so high you cyaan't go over it, so low yuh cyaan't guh under it, so wide yuh cyaan't go around it. Yuh jus haffa stand and confront de word.

Ras Timothy Hill, Lion Bay 1980

[March 2, 1986, Lion Bay, Jamaica]: "Hailie-I, Selassie-I! Black Ises [praises]. Kibir la amblak [Glory to God]." I am greeted by a chorus of sounds as I wind my way down a dirt road past a row of rude slatboard dwellings, sentinels for an off-the-beaten-track Rasta camp east of Kingston. I respond, in turn, "Rastafari, Selassie-I" and strike toward the center of the camp. As I break into a clearing a series of booming drumbeats echo from a hut notched into the rocky hillside. These sounds are followed by cries of "Lightening fi babylon! Weakheart a guh drop! Yuh a bloodklatt white bwoy. Move and guh way!" I recognize the source but I continue forward without acknowledging the sound.²

In virtually the same heartbeat, I am greeted by a chorus of sounds from a group of the brethren assembled in their customary spot for reasoning under the tambrin tree. "Love Iyah," "One heart, one Iyound!" "Blessed, Jah-son. Give thanks fi see de mon."

"One love in de House," I respond as I am greeted by Bongo Shephan, the leading elder of the group and a brethren who had mentored me during my first years of fieldwork. Rising from his perch on a gnarled root of the enormous tree, Shephan holds the herbs cup in his hand conspicuously aloft and then breaks into a recitation of Psalms. As he begins to speak, the other brethren stand and adopt a posture of prayer:

"Glory to word, glory to sound, glory to Iwah [power]. Behold how good and pleasant it is for bredrin to dwell together in Inity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard, even I-mon's beard that went down to the skirts of my garment. It is like the dew that descended upon Mt. Imon and upon the mountains of Zion-I. For it is there that the Lord, Jah....

... Rastafari ...

... commanded his blessing ... even love and life forlver more. Blessed be the Living I ... Selassie I ...

... Selah."

With this blessing, the boundary around the sacred has been consciously elevated and I am incorporated into the communion of a half-dozen brethren. It has been more than a year since my last visit and there is, as usual, conversation to catch up with each other as well as those community members not present and significant events in Jamaica and elsewhere. I have just come from two weeks in Dominica and Guadeloupe and the brethren are keen to know how things are there, especially with Rasta. For several hours in the lengthening shadows of the late afternoon and into the early evening, the herbs pipe is blessed, lit and passed among the group. As darkness descends, only the glowing cup of the chalice is left to illuminate the dreadlocked countenances of the brethren. Bongo Shephan has opened a reasoning about the most notable event of the past few days, the disaster of the American space shuttle Challenger:

Shephan: De whole world suppose ta know wha gwaan — yuh nah see how Reagan's "seven-headed beast" [the space shuttle Challenger] burst and lick off him rattidcup! Hey, I wonder if mon really know what really happen ta dis space shuttle wha explode de other day?

Quallo: Yes, it a de same seven-headed beast wha crash!

Shep: Prophecy reveal it. For Revelation [...] show yuh about de seven-headed beast that will dwell ina de heavens and fight against de woman wid de man-child — dat is de Messiah — in de midsts of heaven, mon. Dis mon-child is to be de ONE ta fulfill de everliving Father, de Almighty Jah....

Chorus: Rastafari!

Jake: In de midst of heaven?

Shep: Yeah, in de midst of heaven. Look 'pon Reagan [with the space shuttle] now. Yuh did know seh him carry de mark of de beast — which is de same Lucifer.

Jakes: Mi know him name carry 6-6-6.

Shep: Natural. R-o-n-a-l-d W-i-l-s-o-n R-e-a-g-a-n (6 letters in each word). Dat is de mark of de Beast, de Anti-Christ. Which part him deyah? Him ina de midst of heaven [with the shuttle]. Mon haffa look ina word-sound feh know certain thing. Is de sound reveal itself — *Challen-Jah!* [pronouncing the name "Challenger"]

World: Wha yuh seh de name of it again?

Shep: *Challen-Jah, mon!* A yuh no hear? "*Challen-Jah,*" *mi seh!* Feh dem a guh "challenge Jah." A de Dragon!

Chorus: Aoooh!

Shep: A who did challenge Jah ina de heavens two thousand year ago come again. De same Lucifer mon!

Benji: De same Dragon wid seven head.

Shep: Yes. Is de same Dragon, ya know, wid seven head — feh dem have seven astronaut, nah true?

Jake: Yes-I.

Shep: Mi know dis who space shuttle 'ting is a next strategy to keep up arms race ina space. Dem wan colonize space wid weapon. Check de seven people dat guh ina dat shuttle and see if dem nah represent seven rass klatt mystery or "government." It come like yuh hab one from every nation — black mon [an African American], Chiney mon, one from Japan [Asian American], Indian mon, woman....

World: ... a de most technical people him [Reagan] send up der in space. Teacher and all dem 'ting a turn de yout dem into stargazer....

Quallo: ... nah respect earth ... for de earth is de Lord and I-n-I art de fullness thereof. All de problem d'pon earth and dem have de people offa dem head. People dong here ina wickedness and poverty and Babylon gwaan wid dem same vanity. Pure war-and-crime d'pon earth.

Shep: Yes Iyah ... dat is why de heathen rage and de people imagine vain things. Rahab [America] try fi tek it pon a higher level now. Dat is why dem send de teacher-in-space.

Jake: Did that get much publicity here in Jamaica?

Shep: Yes mon. Dat is wha dem tek feh mek de whole Jamaica pickney run after dis ting. Is how dem look fi brainwash de [next] generation mek dem look ina de sky. People a bawl ina de ghetto every day feh food and likle shelter nobody nah badder bout dat. Yuh no see how de government use it and tek de people mind dem and de youth dem ... dem a cry out over dis catastrophe. Cause everyone "out der" [in babylon] a talk bout de teacher. Dat is de wickedness dem use feh brainwash black people....

Quallo: ... stargazers and multiprognosticators ... it is prophecy.

Shep: She gonna give lesson from space.

World: Yes, dat is de next Tower of Babel dem try and tek feh sow confusion. De Tower of Babel cyaan't reach ina space. A pure mischeif, ya know. Wha mi seh ... she think it so sweet going up. She nebber know!

Jake: So, Bongo Shephan. How you see this arms race side of the shuttle?

Shep: Yes, dat is a next portion. Feh mi know Reagan haffa push dis arms race. Him know 'Merica cyaan't win Russia 'pon earth, so him try a thing ina space. I-n-I know seh all dese nuclear [weapon] wha mek haffa use. Dat is a portion of the prophecy.

And a next portion again. Dis space shuttle haffa use rare mineral, some kinda rare minerals and metal wha dem mine in South Africa. Cyaan't work without dem ting, ya know.

So Reagon nah leggo dat. Is through dat him colonize space.
So him haffa keep up de apartheid wid Botha.³

Quallo: Nah true ... Reagan and Botha is like chamber-and-batti (i.e., like a toilet seat and buttocks).

World: ... and dem keep up apartheid through dat. A pure blood klatt brutality dem keep up pon de I-n-I bredda and sista ina dem own "yard" [i.e., Africa/South Africa].

Shep: True Iyah ... Is colonialism in a neo-style. Is a more "technical" strategy dem use feh hold black people. Feh [Queen] Elizabeth did have Africans under de said system and now Rahab [America] come and tek it under Reagan. Dat is why yuh see only certain black mon can come a White House. Cause yuh see dis one mon — wha him name again — Jonas Swimbini [Savimbi]

Jakes: Savimbi you mean, the leader of UNITA.

Shep: Yes — de said one, give thanks. Dat one is puppet feh Reagon and Botha. Dem use him and him army feh fight 'gainst black people. Is de said divide-and-rule "polytricks" dem tek a rule black mon for a longer time. Still, nuttin can hidden from de sight of I-n-I. De said people who was wid de Father [Selassie] 2,000 years ago and who did fight certain battle is de said people who is wid him this day!

Quallo: ... an unchanging lineridge [spiritual lineage] through de Order of Melchizadec, de I seen?

Shep: ... yes, so wi haffa give thanks Inually [continually] ...

World: What was de sound again....

Shep: *Challen'-Jah*, Iyah! Dem a challenge de King. But de said Tower of Babel wha crash in dat time. It cyaan't stand again!

Quallo: ... for knowledge increaseth every day. Yes-I. Bless and sanctifull.

For at least four decades — beginning in places like Back o' Wall, the Dungle, Trench Town, Moonlight City, Shanti Town, Ackee Walk, and Wareika Hill — individuals have been socialized into Rasta culture and have reproduced a continuously meaningful Afrocentric worldview through participation in ongoing sessions of reasoning like the one described above. The above named sites are all "remem-

bered places" that continue to serve as anchors for community among Jamaican Rastafari. Those of Shephan's generation and older continue to recreate community around more recent sites of dispersal like Lion Bay. Here, beneath the tambrin tree, they continued to explore the heights and depths of word-sound-and-power.⁴

Yawney (1975, 1977; 1983; 1994), Chevannes (1994:208–30), Pulis (1993) and I have all produced works which reveal the ways in which Rasta discourse is a site of political struggle. Of interest in the above example is the distinction which (Yawney, 1985:2–4) draws between iterative discourse, that which is codified and formulaic, and generative discourse, that which is creative and which produces far-ranging, unique and meaningful associations. Yawney makes the further point that these complementary aspects of Rasta discourse reflect the different, although not necessarily separate, roles which Elders play as "preachers" or as "teachers," the ability to effect these roles being determined by the relative intellectual and charismatic attributes of particular speakers.

These distinctions enable us to understand how the soundscape, in its local manifestations, functions simultaneously as an arena where individuals are socialized through ongoing exposure to the formulaic, as a context where Rastafari recognize insiders and outsiders based on criteria for speech competence and the ability to reproduce discourse, as a framework for the reproduction of meaning, and as a site for revelation that encourages a disciplined but free-wheeling exchange of ideas in order to yield new insights. It is the periodic production of generative discourse, as in the example cited above, that both affirms the revelatory potential of reasoning and authenticates the charismatic qualities of individual speakers.

What should be clear from the above is that reasonings, while locally situated and of limited duration, routinely draw upon both local and global events in relation to an understanding of a wider field of geopolitical relations (see Yawney, 1975). These understandings do not become doctrine; rather, they generate a provisional consensus. These working understandings, carried forward into reasonings among other circles of brethren have their own ripple effect as propositions are tested, refined, and reworked for further insights. Had any of us known at the time that the cause for the explosion of

the shuttle was placed on its "seals," this no doubt would have called into play yet another set of biblical analogies and explanations.⁵

It would be misleading to present reasoning as a disembodied intellectual and "bloodless" activity. Rastafari are called, and their words and thoughts are impassioned. While "peace and love" are frequently reflected in their dealings with others, they demand "truth and rights" for black people without apology. For Rastafari, "the Word" is a two-edged sword — both "love" and "fire" — which makes the soundscape an arena in which moral and evaluative criteria are constantly brought to bear upon the attributes of speakers. Within the soundscape have evolved ritual means for dealing with disagreement and for stemming factionalism.

These protocols trace to life in the camps and yards of this era, which involved adherence to a disciplined code of behavior in which individuals were held accountable to community standards. Present-day Elders who became Rasta during this period often remark nostalgically that this was the period of greatest unity amongst Rasta. It was also, they acknowledge, a time of "combustible sounds" among the brethren. One Rasta leader who grew up in Back o' Wall characterizes this as a time during which "mon couldn't hide from reasoning" (i.e., adherents had to make themselves verbally accountable to the community).

This statement is a telling insight into the formative nature of the soundscape as a local face-to-face community whose members were not only fearless in confronting agents of colonial authority but, with respect to their own diverse ideas and opinions, could themselves be a litigious collectivity. Suspension of talk, however, has never been an option among the members of this community of self-identified exiles. This continues to be the case within the soundscape. Unlike other embedded egalitarian communities in which the cessation of talk is a critical indicator of conflict (Brenneis 1988:502), the Rastafari ritualize conflict in the service of community. The "true Rasta" is someone who cannot be offended by words.⁶ He is one who, as noted above, "must stand and confront the word."

In this manner, Rastafari "test the Irits [spirit]" and come to "know a mon's heart." These protocols apply with added measure to researchers. They are an extension of the strategies by which Rastafari

screen, control, and use the chalice to "sieve out" researchers. Regardless of how long one's involvement may be, it is always subject to negotiation across the width and breath of the soundscape. Because of the fluidity of Rasta social organization, I routinely find myself in situations with individuals I have not previously met and who feel the need to "check me out." This is invariably the case at island-wide Nyabinghi where the symbolic boundaries of the sacred and definitions of insiders and outsiders are maintained at their highest level. In such instances, the ethnographer must be prepared to deliver himself with sound:

[August 17, 1987, Bath, St. Thomas Jamaica. Nyabinghi Assembly celebrating the 100th birthday of Marcus Garvey] I have "trod" with Bongo Shephan, Bredda Benji, and Ras World to a major event commemorating the centenary birthday of Marcus Garvey. This is the culmination of a month-long round-the-island tour by the Nyabinghi House. Just days before my arrival, a binghi had "sealed" [closed] at Lion Bay under Shephan's sponsorship. Bath is to be the culminating event.

The binghi is being kept just behind the police station. A tabernacle has been raised in the center of an open soccer field and cricket green. As we walk down a narrow access road, we are greeted by Ras Headfull, the resident elder and the brethren charged with "keeping the duty." It is still early and "first night Ises" has yet to begin. Several hundred brethren and sistren are milling about in small groups, some caucusing informally, others clearly upon more serious reasonings. We are met by a hail of cries as we break into the opening, most directed at me: "Fiya bun de White House," "Death to de traitors," "White bwoy, yuh haffa move!" Shep and World respond with "Hotta flames," "Crash de Dragon!" As we move onto the compound, Shep, Benji, and World are hailed by other brethren and step off. Having experienced this a dozen or so times over the past years, I steel myself for the transition.

Almost immediately, I am surrounded by a dozen or so young Dreadlocks who form a tight circle around me screaming cries of "Fiya fi de white bwoy," "Lightening," "Oonu a slime, move and guh way." Within minutes, their antics have become the basis for a public drama that transforms the entire compound, cries emanating from every corner of assembly. As I scan the terrain, my eyes meet those of eight or nine Elders in whose yards I have grounded. A few direct cautionary

sounds at the youth surrounding me, but none seek to intervene. I know all are watching to see how I will acquit myself.

Initially, I attempt to dismiss the youths, telling them that they know nothing about me and to "Allow me! I-mon free." I then step to Brother Vince, Shepan's son-in-law, a thirtyish brethren who is sitting next to the storehouse for the binghi. As I sit down next to Vince, he casually hands me a rizzler and a tat of herbs and invites me to pray. One of the young Dreads picks this up: "Is your friend dat?" and another, "You is a black traitor." Roaring back, Vince retorts: "Oonu is idiot! I-n-I doan deal wid 'friends.' De House of Nyabinghi doan know nuttin' 'bout friends. Nyabinghi call fe de righteous in every nation — black, white, brown, red, and yellow. Jah no partial." Undeterred, the group presses forward. Once again, I am isolated and the attack continues. After about a half-hour of this an Elder named Bongo Bud approaches the group and me. "Hold dong, Lions. Tek time, tek time" — momentarily, the Elder quells the confusion.

Although I have met Bud on several other visits and have reasoned with him previously, we are not well known to each other. Initially, I am uncertain of his intent. Having momentarily silenced the youth, he turns to me with a stern countenance and loudly demands at nose-end distance, "Who are you?" "I am a remnant of my nation come to give praises to His Majesty," I reply. "No!" he retorts, "Who are you?" Now confused, I seek to gauge his drift and try again: "I am one called by Rastafari." Again, "No!" I try a next tack: "I am Jah-son, I-mon." Again, Bud's reply is no. By this time, the youth have started again: "Spy, CIA, Blood klatt pirate!, murderer, Ku Klux Klan." The Elder is clearly searching for something specific and states, "White mon, who are you to the House of Rastafari?" Gauging his drift, I volunteer, "I art Essau, and you are my brother, Jacob" [see Genesis 27:1–55].

"Aaaaah," he exclaims, finally satisfied. "And what is it I have done to you, my brother." Smiling at his method, I reply, "You have taken away my birthright, brother, deceiving our father Isaac into thinking that you were I. Still, I-n-I are one family and we must live together. For Father did say that until the color of man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes, there will never be peace in Creation."

"True sound, Jah son. You have learned your lesson well." Then, turning to the youth Dreads, the Elder declares: "Prophecy show I-n-I dat wi must careful wid strangers for Jah seh He will send I-gels to travel with I-n-I. So give the judgment to the King and render righteousness unto his sons. Young Lions, mind wha you a do. This mon knows more about your culture than oonu. Go back a school!" Dressed down and publicly rebuked, the youths disperse.

Through an impromptu social drama which drew upon biblical discourse (the brotherhood of the black and the white races as seen through the allegory of Jacob and Essau), the Elder simultaneously probed my level of consciousness and provided me with an opportunity to publicly "deliver myself with sounds." In so doing, he had temporarily opened a portal in the House for me to step through.

Like other primarily oral cultures, auditory space among the Rastafari is perceived and mapped as a physical field (Peek, 1981:21). The descriptions offered above are presented to evoke the textured and many-layered nature of the soundscape. This is a field of varied cadences, registers, and genres embodied in biblical poetry and moral criticism, of supremely confident and resolute speakers whose voices oscillate between uplifting praise and fiery sound, solemn preachifying and extended harangues, contentious "argument" and "conscious" reasoning. What Reisman (1974:56–9) has pointed out for other parts of the African and African-American world also holds for Rastafari. Community is based on the calling of a person's names, the act of uttering and naming variously implying a social relationship, sense of mutual commitment, or an invoking of qualities, either positive or negative. As implied by the idea of "living sound," speech is a live channel for action and feeling. In such a context, order is imposed and achieved amidst contending sound and "noise" by commanding voices that periodically bring the utterances of others into unity or for a common purpose.

The message of racial protest hammered out in this space is organically linked to the rhythms of resistance found in reggae — the popular expression of Rasta, which has been critical in its globalization. Understand, however, that there is no facile correspondence between this public and internationalized aspect of the soundscape and the "roots" culture from which it was birthed. The session, the reggae concert, and more recently the dancehall, do not map the same moral universe as reasonings or groundation.⁷ We are talking about liminal space which is demarcated and given meaning through the Biblical chronicles of exile. God's Chosen People are wandering in the wilderness without permanent sites for spiritual ascension. They have been down in the valley, in the Pit of Jehosephat, for a very long time sustained only by the inevitability of prophecy and the knowledge that the God of Jacob will not forsake his people. It is the spoken word itself — "living sound" — that calls the community into being

and into the service of Jah Rastafari, God and King, who in due season will call them home.

Within the soundscape, the moral capacities of the person are defined by evaluative criteria applied to the workings of the voice. A rich terminology of locational and corporeal qualities — resonate with the metaphors of the Bible — are customarily used to describe the manifest quality and impact of a speaker's word-sound. Rastas refer respectfully to individuals who are "grounded," "seated," and who can "hold their corner" (i.e., are resolute and can vigorously defend an idea or position). These are brethren who "know themselves" or are "within themselves," having become Rasta through years of reasoning; in effect, an extended and deliberate process of communally supported self-examination. After having consecrated themselves to Jah as "living sacrifices," they have chosen to "carry locks" (grow dreadlocks) as their personal symbol of the faith. Recognizing both the isolation and danger of the sacred, these moral guardians counsel others against hasty and ill-conceived steps without similar self-knowledge. "Tek time, tek time, mon," is their constant reminder to those "coming up." For in the counsels of Rastafari, "the same word that is sweet to the mouth, may be bitter to the belly." It is grounded brethren who are "heartical," "firm," and balanced. Their personal testimonies form an important part of the oral culture of Rastafari, and they are the ones who produce "conscious sound" and "tangible" or "solid reasoning." As the principal expounders of ideology, they enable other communicants to "step higher" in reasoning. Words cannot "bore" or "penetrate" them. They are incombustible, they "pass through the fiya" in the midst of contentious noise or heated argument. At the same time, these teachers and preachers have a keen sense of the power of speech as a channel for action, both positive and negative. More often than not, it is their commanding voices in the midst of a congregation that transform "noise" and chaos into orderly word-sound.

In contrast, the community recognizes individuals who "cyaan't seated," who "circle" rather than "come into a reasoning," or whose reasoning is "soft," without force or logical quality. Such individuals may just be "coming up in the faith" and, because they are not yet "seasoned," they try to "rush into a ting." They are often described as "outside themselves," as prone to "taking counsel," or as ready to

"follow any sound" (i.e., are easily swayed). Such speakers tend to "chat folly." Because they are "outside themselves," they are frequently "off" or "missing" (in their reasoning) and tend to invite disorder and unnecessary argument.

In the "counsels of His Majesty," respect is accorded to speakers who are not only biblically fluent and who have intellectual qualities but who demonstrate spiritual resolve and psychological resilience. The brethren will poetically intone that "words without deeds is like a garden full of weeds." The "works" of heartical Rastas — their moral bearing, personal sacrifices, and communal deeds — are all manifestations that "make the word live." Those with longstanding commitment who have lived principled lives and who possess oratorical and intellectual skill are regarded as Elders and acknowledged as "coming from far."⁸

Visionary Discourse and Deterritorialized Space

You see, far and near, a little while you shall see I and a little while yuh just can't see I because I art here, I art there, I art everywhere. I art in, I art out, I art all d'bout, to no ends of the earth through the I-wah (power) of Jah Rastafari.

Ackee Mon, cited in liner notes, Bilby & Leib, 1983, *From Kongo to Zion*

Among Rastafari at home and abroad, the soundscape incorporates many "remembered places" which serve as anchors and sources of inspiration for ongoing community. The legendary camps and yards of West Kingston, places like Fire Key, the Dungle, Back o' Wall, and Salt Lane, are but the most notable. By and large, however, the soundscape coincides with no settled community, no church or organization, no fixed site for spiritual ascension. As echoed above in the words of Ackee Mon, it is its own kind of deterritorialized space, here, there, and everywhere to "no ends of the earth."

Community exists only in the act of a communal quest for meaning and inspiration; in the act of giving Jah praises. All else is simply what is required to survive and sojourn in Babylon. It is not surprising, then, that the "linguistic latitudes" of Rasta encode their own extension of metaphysical space which evoke their own liminality and diasporic outlooks.⁹

These are sensibilities encoded in the ubiquitous sound of I/as, which is not only the primary sound of Rasta dialect, but a metaphysical and mystical concept grounded in biblical logic. The "I" — first person, singular, a man — is the Creator, Jah Rastafari, who "lives" within the temple of every individual. For the Rasta, this is the concept and the mystery of I-n-I: that God is a man (in the person of Emperor Haile Selassie) who "lives within man." Attending to the homonymy between "I" and "eye," it is the "I/Eye" within man that gives rise to the notion of visionary communication, which bridges the dislocation between the black man in his condition in Babylonian captivity and his deliverance in Zion (see Yawney, 1979:170–72; Pollard, 1982:21; Homiak, 1995:162). This perspective underlies the reproduction and evaluation of inspired reasoning by Elders — charismatic and visionary discourse produced in the service of community.

Part of the genius of this self-referential discourse is that it inherently encodes resistance to the incarceration of the black man in Babylon. The forces and potentialities of the soundscape "burst the seals" of this containment. From a Rasta perspective, then, the communicative field extends "from earth to Zion," from a diasporic outpost to the heart of the continent — the direct visionary communication which each Rasta claims with Jah Rastafari, Selassie-I.¹⁰ The nature of outreach here is both figurative and literal. Rastafari typically have social networks that reach well beyond what one might associate with their humble gates.

In my own case, it was several years before I began to pay sufficient attention to the implications of these links. "I-n-I are here as international brethren to greet visitors from abroad." This was a statement which I frequently encountered among the brethren at Lion Bay during my first period of fieldwork. Initially, I assumed this to be pure hyperbole. However, during my first year of fieldwork and subsequent revisits, I had the opportunity to engage Rastafari who visited this camp from Guyana, Grenada, Ethiopia, Trinidad, Senegal, England, and North America. Bunny Wailer had built a house that was nested in the steep hillside above this camp. One afternoon, while standing next to this gate, I witnessed the launching of one of what was perhaps the first tour of traditional Rastafari abroad (involving Ras Mortimo Planno and Arthur Kitchen), a precursor to "missions" and international "trods" of Elders that would follow in the mid-1980s and 1990s.

Well before the advent of Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican context was part of a wider African world open to external ideas and flows of information. In this regard, the soundscape was its own kind of imagined community even though it developed within a context of colonial containment and control. The first preachers of Rastafari doctrine were well-traveled individuals who returned to Jamaica in the early 1930s after experiencing the circumstances of black people in North America and the Caribbean Basin (see Austin, 1983). If one is looking for a model of "traveling culture" in the early annals of Rasta, simply consider Leonard Howell's 1936 publication of the *Promised Key*. The element in this text that served to underwrite his authority was Howell's account of his travels to the Gold Coast and Ethiopia where he was allegedly witness to the coronation of Haile Selassie I.¹¹

During this same period, other parts of the African diaspora, the continent, and Ethiopia came more sharply into focus. Out of the emerging music industry in Trinidad during the 1930s came several calypsos that expressed support for the plight of a besieged Ethiopia. This music and other songs with African themes circulated among Jamaicans and West Indians throughout the Caribbean Basin and North America via black seamen and other travelers. There was outreach through the Ethiopian World Federation which, while headquartered in New York, created branches in Jamaica, Trinidad, and other islands. Through this organ came news of Emperor Selassie's gift of a landgrant in Ethiopia to peoples of African descent who had assisted his nation during the Italian-Ethiopian conflict (Smith, Nettleford, & Augier, 1978).

The 1960s, in particular, was a period of increasing exchange and feedback between the movement and proponents of black nationalism. The case of Walter Rodney and the linkage with Rastafari and the Abeng movement are among the most notable. Other linkages are part of a subaltern history, what Rasta might call "the half that has yet to be told." Only during the late 1980s, after I assisted several delegations of Elders to travel to the United States, did brethren feel free to discuss with me some of the contacts that they had in West Kingston and elsewhere. In 1963–1964, Stokeley Carmichael and Miriam Makeba, on a visit from apartheid South Africa, visited several of the Rasta camps in West Kingston, including Back o' Wall. At

least one of George Simpson's Rasta informants migrated to England and remained in contact with the group in West Kingston about which Simpson wrote. Similarly, Jah Bones, initially grounded in West Kingston, writes about the connections between Rastafari in Jamaica and England that developed during the early 1960s. In 1961, Mortimo Planno met with Malcolm X in New York where the two were interviewed for a TV spot. And in the late 1960s, many of these Elders also reasoned with both Walter Rodney and Maurice Bishop who drew upon the support of Rastafari in Grenada in his overthrow of the Gairy regime. Individual Rastafarians, of course, could no doubt expand considerably upon such linkages and their significance. It is worth noting that all of these connections to the wider African world existed prior to recent globalization at a time when the Jamaican response to the movement was one of repression and containment.

From Strength to Strength: Rastafari in Transition

As a segue from the soundscape into the mediascape, we can consider some of the changes in Rastafari during the 1970s and 1980s. What I term the soundscape changed dramatically in the postcolonial period, especially in the 1970s when cooptation, rather than repression, became the primary response to the movement. This decade witnessed the popularization of Rasta through reggae music, an organic extension of the soundscape which, when allied with the socialist politics of the Marley era, served to legitimate aspects of Rasta message and culture. Reggae was certainly central to the spread of Rasta into the ranks of the middle class and the principal means by which Jamaican society has embraced selected aspects of Rasta ideology.¹² At the same time, reggae was promoting the globalization of Rastafari.

Any detailed discussion of the mediascape — those cultural flows and connections which are part of Rasta's globalization — would necessarily have to track the dissemination of reggae throughout the Caribbean, Europe, North America, and Africa (see Savashinsky, 1995; Gjersat, 1994; Bilby, 1996). This would include its reception

among expatriate West Indian communities and its appeal to a youth culture in the cities of Europe and North America where the policies of the state continued to marginalize and discriminate against peoples of color.

By the mid- to late 1970s, Rastafari communities had developed in nearly all of these sites, not to mention South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The tours of musicians such as Marley, Burning Spear, and others were critical to the spread of the message, along with travel by traditional Elders. All of these developments in the 1970s laid the groundwork upon which the traditional roots expressions of Rastafari have been grafted.

During the same decade that Rasta "burst" the confines of its Jamaican Babylon via reggae, Rastafari in the more traditional terrain of the soundscape were engaged in a phase of retrenchment. I am referring to developments within the House of Nyabinghi (see Homiak, 1997). Because of constant pressures to coopt Rastafari during the 1970s, Nyabinghi celebrations during this period need to be seen as a site of struggle concerning the definition of the movement and its vision of repatriation. During the late 1960s and early 1970s Nyabinghi emerged as a communal event staged almost exclusively in specially prepared rural venues. Nyabinghi became, in effect, a ritual pilgrimage "out of Babylon," which served to re-emphasize the status of Rastafari as African "exiles" and to mark their separation from the wider contexts of postcolonial Jamaica. Each 'binghi became a rehearsal for repatriation and underscored the cultural and spiritual qualities required to realize this goal. These developments must be seen in the context of political strategies that threatened the cultural autonomy of the movement and the ability of Rasta to define their own sense of community and identity. It is the House of Nyabinghi that serves to reinforce the traditional aspects of the movement's moral imagination: the Rastafarian as exile, pilgrim, sojourner, visitor, a stranger in a strange land, and a prophet who will "never bow before force."

Even though Rasta had become physically dispersed within Jamaica, this part of the soundscape has acted as a stabilizing influence. Anchored by two generations of Rastafari who entered the faith in the 1950s and 1960s, the House perpetuated the same kind of face-to-face traditions of reasoning and grounding that characterized the culture in West Kingston.¹³ During this same time, Rasta had already entered the realm of popular culture and "gone international."

Island/I-land Roots, Metropolitan Branches

In proposing the concept of mediascape to describe and explore the globalization of Rastafari, I am not simply concerned with the products created by telecommunications, recording, VCR technology, and cyberspace as a means to represent and disseminate Rasta culture. Rather, I wish to direct attention to the accelerated pace at which people, information and various related media now circulate within the portals of Rasta. Due to these developments, the House has now emerged as a deterritorialized site in which separate places — New York, Toronto, London, D.C. and Jamaica — are becoming a single “community” through a continuous flow of people, information, and cultural resources (see Clifford 1994:303). These flows not only serve to exponentially increase the volume and frequency of networking among Rastafari globally, they require new strategies on the part of Rasta to monitor and shape them. In this regard, it is necessary to recognize the way media has shaped the popularization and commodification of Rasta culture. While the media has sometimes sympathetically represented the fundamental message and culture, it has more frequently distorted, criminalized, or trivialized the culture. It is precisely for this reason that Rastafari have become increasingly self-conscious and critical about how and by whom they are represented. This emergent Rasta intelligentsia seeks to claim and control their own space within the mediascape through a host of independent initiatives. These include newsletters and publications such as *Rastafari Speaks* (originally published in Trinidad) or *Jahug* (published in London), *Uprising* published out of Toronto, *Sound-Bytes*, a recent venture out of Washington, D.C.; independent film and video production units like CEDDO co-founded in London by Menelik Shabazz, a Barbadian-born Rasta, or I-Vision Productions founded by Ras Moya (also in London); and distribution ventures like Frontline Distributing in Chicago, cable television (such as Lioness Productions in Maryland), and an array of radio programs devoted whole or in part to reggae and Rastafari.

These developments also need to be appreciated in terms of the importance that Jamaica has acquired for the global Rasta community as the birthplace of the movement. While Ethiopia is unquestionably the movement's geography of desire, Jamaica remains a “site of attachment” of growing importance to an international community.¹⁴ There are several aspects of “traveling culture” at work

here. The first is that the Nyabinghi House, during the past decade, has become closely connected with Rastafari communities in North America, most of the small islands in the Caribbean, as well as in Africa. These linkages derive from various international “trods” or missions undertaken by Elders traveling abroad and the effect these have had on the consolidation of Rastafari communities in North America and elsewhere.¹⁵ The enhanced international profile that the House now enjoys derives, in part, from the fact that these movements and connections have been a prime focus in publications such as *Rastafari Speaks*, *Jahug*, and other ephemeral papers. Both Yawney (1995) and I (Homiak, 1994) have reviewed elsewhere some of the reasons for and impacts of these missions. Suffice it to say that the Elders chose to trod internationally to provide guidance and “grounding” to Rastafari abroad, the majority of whom embraced Rasta through the inspiration of reggae music rather than through traditional Elder-youth interactions. The international impact of reggae, therefore, must be recognized as making possible the subsequent global spread of rooted forms.¹⁶

But still another aspect of Rastafari as a traveling culture has become wrapped up within these flows: increasing numbers of reggae artists similarly feel the need to record in Jamaica.¹⁷ Examples of these include Alpha Blondy from Cote d'Ivoire, Lucky Dube from South Africa, Nico, the most well-known Rasta artist from Cayenne, French Guiana, and, more recently, Nasio Fontaine, a rising star from Dominica. Lesser known, but no less significant for our purposes, are performers such as Denroy Morgan, an artist who has recently returned to Jamaica from living in the United States and Toronto, artists and community activists such as Ras Leon and Sister Makeda (publishers of *Uprising* magazine).

What is doubly significant about these movements in terms of the enfolding of the local-global/rootical-popular is that many of these artists also actively seek out the Nyabinghi roots of their culture and the opportunity to “ground” with the Elders. This is simply one manifestation that brethren and sistren, in both local and global contexts, are increasingly attuned to opportunities for international networking. On my most recent trip to Jamaica, Brother World, a Nyabinghi brethren I have known for over 15 years, made a special point of carrying me to the yard of Ras Denroy Morgan where we spent an evening reasoning. World did this because he perceived us

as having mutual interests in the international development of the movement. Neither of us knew at the time that we both contributed to a common project dealing with the history of the movement (see note 19).

Denroy, a brethren affiliated with the Twelve Tribes of Israel who, after 21 years as a Rasta, recently relocated to Jamaica was preparing to attend his first Nyabinghi. Ironically, this binghi, in Hayes, Clarendon, was being sponsored by Everton Blender, another reggae artist who has a close identification with the House of Nyabinghi. The particular irony of these movements is that, even as they combine to further globalize and transform the movement into an increasingly deterritorialized site, they also elevate the significance of Jamaica ("Jah-mek-ya") as a "place."

Another striking example of this kind of intertwining is Nasio Fontaine's music video "Wanna Go Home" (1996), which was shot in Jamaica to promote his album of the same name. This video was shot in Jamaica in front of the Nyabinghi tabernacle in Scotts Pass, Manchester, using Nyabinghi drummers and dancers. This is significant given the longstanding prohibition that the House has regarding photography and film/video for commercial purposes. Equally significant, from the perspective of how such productions serve to blur the roots/popular genres of expression, are the visual and musical elements in this video. The video uses the traditional Nyabinghi tempo, with a combination of Ethiopian and Nyabinghi iconography and three sistren (garbed in Ethiopian *shammas*), as background for a Marleyesque Nasio Fontaine.

Rooting/Routing the Mediascape: The Indigenization of Modernity

From its inception, Rastafari has entailed an indigenization of the modern. From a Rasta perspective, this has meant a remodeling or reinterpretation of contemporary symbols and events as signifiers of "anciency" and as a means to authenticate the process of culture-building. Looking for an example of the use of the popular in early Rastafari, one might turn to the "street meeting" era of Rasta in Kingston. During the early 1950s, Simpson encountered public meet-

ings of the brethren, which the January 1931 issue of the *National Geographic* used to illustrate the prophecy of Emperor Haile Selassie's coronation. Perhaps no social movement aside from Rastafari has cobbled together such an unlikely assemblage of signifiers steeped in "anciency" and "naturalness" while at the same time making use of the popular, the modern, and the technological in disseminating itself.

For over a decade now, the "roots" of Rastafari have been following the routes traced by its popular reggae "branches." In the current moment of the mediascape, the combination of roots-popular content and high production values must be seen as another way in which the globalization of Rastafari is consciously being effected and its culture authenticated. This process can be discerned in the willingness of traditional Rastafari to experiment with forms of communication other than the spoken word to communicate their message. Most of the works to which I am referring are a result of the travel of traditional Elders and of their collaboration with Rastafari communities in second diasporas. *Rastafari Elders* (1991), a CD and audiocassette of Nyabinghi chants and speechifying is one example, produced by Ras Records with seven of the Elders who traveled to the eastern United States in 1988 and 1989. Ras Sam Brown's two CDs of dub poetry and preachifying, *Teacher* (1991) and *The History* (1997), and the CDs/tapes of Nyabinghi poetry by Ras Pidow, *Modern Antique* (1992), and Sister Farika Birhan, *Rainbow Dawning* (1994), are other examples. While these are examples of media generated through contacts in New York, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and Atlanta, the *Ark of the Covenant: Nyabinghi* by Ras Ivi and the Family of Rastafari (1994) is an example of work done in England in the aftermath of the Centenary networking. All of these productions express how traditional reverberations from within the soundscape have become part of a traveling culture.

Yet another production that reflects this complex networking is the double-CD released by Ras Everton McPherson, a Rasta activist and author, *Kalunga: Traditional Rastafari Kumina Songs, Prayers, and Reasonings* (1995). This effort to bring a little-known piece of Rasta history to light involved field recordings of remnant members of Leonard Howell's Pinnacle community performing early Rasta chants on kumina drums (see Bilby and Leib, 1983), as well as the

collaboration of Rastafari from several communities in Jamaica and abroad. The production circumstances of this CD — which involved Ras MacPherson, but this writer, and contacts facilitated by Mortimo Planno with a brethren in Brooklyn — attest to the unexpected and serendipitous contacts that shape the mediascape.¹⁸

Finally, we note of the highly aestheticized revision of the traditional Nyabinghi chant "Tell Out Rastafari Teachings around the Whole World" by Harry T, a 'binghi drummer who grew in the yard of Ras Mortimo Planno (personal communication, Carole Yawney, July 1997). This chant, released around the centenary of Haile Selassie's birthday, while based on a classic chant, lacks the dominant presence of the drums and the raw and unbridled energy so common to Nyabinghi. It is, by at least one knowledgeable opinion, closer to Jamaican gospel than Nyabinghi (Ken Bilby, personal communication, 1996). However, because of the way that it features a very gifted singer, Sister Tynsi, a traditional Rasta message is given a broader appeal.

The Mobilized Gaze: From Vision to Videography

Dis is not de same movement today as in Back o' Wall days. I-n-I are now d'pon a more ambassadorial tradition. Mon haffa know how ta deal wid people differently dis time.

Bongo Shephan, 1994, Cypress Hall, St. Andrew, Jamaica

My own experience in moving with Rastafari outside Jamaica and in moving with the Nyabinghi House "in yard" confirm these intertwining and deterritorializing flows between Rastafari who are geographically distant and often of different social backgrounds yet motivated by the same ideals and concerns. The kinds of reciprocal flows noted above — of Elder trods abroad and "pilgrimages" to Jamaica — position the House as a transnational space. In North America and elsewhere, cosmopolitan Rastafari have achieved a measure of authority and influence based on their groundings with the Elders. Conversely, many of the Elders now affect a wider field of social relations through the social links they maintain with cosmopolitan Rastafari outside Jamaica. This has brought video, radio, local and cable television, as well as print media, increasingly into the picture with respect to the circulation of visual media about — as well as by and for — Rastafari.

Over the past seven or eight years, an increasing number of my interactions with Rastafari have centered around the exchange and circulation of videotaped materials. Indeed, recently I participated in taping a cable television program (entitled "Reasonings") with several local Rastafari in Washington, D.C.; provided videotape documentation to a Jamaican brethren recently returned from London via Ethiopia and South Africa; exchanged several items of "historic" videotape documentation with a local brethren; and sent additional videos to the House in Jamaica where a number of Nyabinghi centers maintain their own "archives."

In my view, one of the ways the House seeks to bring participants into the culture and adapt its roots traditions to metropolitan contexts is through increasing use of VCR technology and the circulation of videotapes that document the cultural and spiritual life of the House. This medium has extended the boundaries of this imagined community by providing a "mobilized gaze." That is, these visual documents serve to artificially extend the boundaries of the "nation" through generating discussion about a wider network of individuals — some of whom are only present via representations of their performance in the events being documented. Circulation of these second-order representations is actually well adapted to pre-existing networks of communication among members of a community that has always been dispersed.

I first became aware of this process in the mid-1980s following a number of major international conferences on Rasta. It is hardly surprising that the Rastafari would turn to VCR technology since they have always been communicators. Later, in 1988, 1989, and 1990 I became involved in the process, assisting a number of delegations to travel to the United States in my role as an anthropologist at the Smithsonian. These missions were mounted in direct response to a call from members of Rastafari communities who felt themselves to be under siege by the state and its agents of authority.¹⁹ The result was a series of public programs, which sought to educate the public about the authentic spiritual traditions and culture of Rastafari. These events were widely videotaped both by Rastafari in these communities and others to document the unprecedented and historic nature of these occurrences. The production and circulation of these media within selected social networks has, coupled with publishing

initiatives cited above, been central to the elevated profile that the House has assumed.

Bear in mind that we need to distinguish between commercial media flows, which are promoted in magazines such as *The Beat*, *Dub Missive*, *Reggae Times*, and *Reggae Review* and videotapes which, in effect, circulate within the House.²⁰ We are talking about video shot by and for Rasta that is not commercially distributed. These are videos of Elders' "trods" (recently to Ethiopia); of Nyabinghi sessions in Jamaica, Toronto, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere; preachifying and oratory of Elders; reasonings on Rasta livity, repatriation, black history, gender relations, personal testimony, and the struggle of Rastafari for dignity, cultural autonomy, and economic development in Jamaica and elsewhere.

With respect to videotape media, my own experience with the first delegation of Rastafari Elders who visited the U.S. in 1988 is illustrative. It was not merely that the venues at which the Elders presented were videotaped — the Elders' delegation arrived with videotape documentation. During their visit they were lodged in at a brethren's residence in Baltimore where they remained for over six weeks. This site served as a kind of "open house" for local Rastafari and other members of the black community where, almost nightly, there were reasonings, 'binghi chanting, and screenings of videos shot at Nyabinghi around Jamaica. The Elders had indeed traveled with their culture — themselves, their oratorical skills, their drums, and video representations of their traditional ritual and cultural life "in yard." Over the course of that month, the contents of these videos were the subject of considerable direct elaboration through reasoning and personal testimony.

As a gateway into the roots traditions of the movement, these videotapes need to be appreciated within the social context of Rastafari communities outside Jamaica. By and large, Rastafari in these settings find it necessary to maintain a lower profile with respect to their ritual life than is possible in Jamaica, due to the illegal status of their sacrament, police surveillance, and the economic realities of metropolitan life. Rastafari ritual and ceremonial life, therefore, is necessarily truncated and tailored to the rhythms of a more regimented life in the urban centers of North America. Nyabinghi assemblies, when they are held, are typically limited to one-night

assemblies rather than the three- or seven-day celebrations found in Jamaica.

A number of points on the Rastafari use of videotaped materials to extend community within the transnational sphere are useful here. While the very existence of these media — video images — is a reflection of modern technology, it is necessary to point out that the Rastafari are not of one mind about this process. The issue of who can videotape, under what circumstances, and with what audience in mind tends to be a matter of ongoing debate worked out in terms of what Rastafari call "collective security" (i.e., with a course of action taken only after prolonged and democratic debate in which all voices are heard).

It has been my observation that control over the dissemination of these tapes reflects a very traditional Rasta pattern of carefully managing relations of trust and reciprocity. They do not circulate willy-nilly. Rather, they pass between and within communities by brethren or sistren who share personal relationships of trust and a long-term commitment to the faith. This kind of exchange of communicative media is roughly equivalent to the way the Rastafari in the Kingston slums managed to create an alternative space for cultural communication. In this sense, the flow of this medium remains embedded in received understandings about who can "call" or assemble the House and about how the collective security of its members — those present spiritually as well as physically — will be ensured.

Even in the heyday of the camps and yards, it was impossible for a given individual to know and interact with everyone. At the same time, a strong sense of community resulted from the fact that virtually all brethren were "grounded" in small face-to-face groups of individuals who reasoned and chanted together. This has always enabled Rastas to keep abreast of the affairs and concerns of a far wider collectivity of people that those with whom they have actual ongoing interaction. The frequently and volume of face-to-face interactions within the mediascape, while differently structured, now provide an alternative for traditional patterns while continuing to give brethren and sistren a sense of involvement with a much larger collectivity of individuals.

From my perspective, video — and the social contacts it facilitates — now constitutes a mobiled gaze by which global connectedness is

effected within the House. Through the use of visual technology, brethren and sistren gain a feel for Rasta life elsewhere — or the reach of Rastafari elsewhere. An interesting example involves an American-born brethren living in Washington, D.C. with whom I am familiar. Recently, he traveled to the U.S. Virgins Islands. There, among other Rastas, he was greatly impressed by the reasoning of Ras Boanerges, a Jamaican patriarch. It was on videotape, however, that he witnessed the Elder's reasoning, which had been shot during a mission to the V.I. by members of the House. This experience generated an exchange of videotape materials between this brethren and members of the St. John community.

The example raises another point about the use of videotape as a form of communication. Both in face-to-face interaction and on video, Elders have become increasingly self-conscious about the House's construction and dissemination of Rasta history. The amount of critical discussion I have heard about these visual documents suggests to me that at least some 'binghi brethren and sistren see the House reflexively in terms of their own representations. This suggests that delegates on these missions (and the media they beget) increasingly circulate within a symbolic economy of performance (cf. Knight, 1992:242).²¹

Videotaped documentation of the personal testimony of various Elders who have "pass through" the persecution of the early years of Rasta is an example. This makes the testimony meaningful to those in Rasta communities abroad who are the targets of state sponsored repression or media attempts to criminalize or trivialize their culture. Hearing Elder Rastas describe their experiences of bearing many "crosses" on their personal journey and having come "from way down in the valley" serves to inspire others and validate the faith and vision of Rastafari.

Invariably, when Elders, either in Jamaica or abroad, comment on such visual documents they frame a contrast between the former outcast status of the movement — to which they bear living testimony — and its present state of international recognition. Once, while visiting Ras Pidow, a Washington, D.C. Elder, I watched a tape of him performing in Washington's Freedom Plaza at JAMFEST (a celebration commemorating 30 years of Jamaican Independence).

This elder opened the first day of festivities with his poetry accompanied by an ensemble of 'binghi drummers. Then on tape he described what he was actually doing 30 years prior on Jamaican Independence Day, August 1, 1962. He provided a testimony of his arrest, jailing, and trial on an herb charge as well as of his trial, at which "Father [Selassie I] delivered him" by putting the right words in his mouth to speak to plead his case to the judge.

Within the context of social relations of brethren and sistren who know each other, videos sustain the idea of community as an expanded field of social relations — one by which speakers/viewers can assess the contents and "consciousness" of what other speakers say and how they present themselves. In this sense, video can reinforce a traditional aspect of the culture. This raises a related point — that video often circulates in contexts where it is subject to further contextualization, critique, and dialogue. These flows continue to be enmeshed within a community of "speakers who speak to each other and about each other." Set within these social linkages, the communications on video elicit feedback from other members of the House who bring their own critical and aesthetic perspectives to bear upon how successfully 'binghi culture and the core premises of the movement are being represented.

Another change that these flows seem have promoted are more visible linkages between the Elders and Rastafari who are reggae artists. The House has described its relationship to reggae through an arboreal metaphor: "Reggae is the branch, Nyabinghi is the root. In order to know Rastafari you have to take it from the root." At the same time, it is probably fair to say that considerable ambivalence has existed among traditional Rastafari toward the commercial, not to mention "slack," aspects of this music. My own view is that the transnational flows have closed the distance between the two considerably. A number of the tapes circulating both inside and outside Jamaica reveal the dependence that traditional Rastafari in places such as Washington, D.C. and New York have on reggae promotions, artists, and venues (e.g., Bob Marley celebrations in Washington, D.C. are now regularly opened by chanting, drumming, and testimony by Nyabinghi Elders). Conversely, in Jamaica a growing number of reggae artists are involved in the House and some now sponsor the annual celebrations held by the House. Finally, it seems that many

Rastafari who make pilgrimages to Jamaica time these to coincide with Reggae Sunsplash, an international reggae event, and the House's celebration of Ethiopian New Year (Maskaram) and Marcus Garvey's birthday.

Conclusion

Inasmuch as this chapter is based on long-term ethnography conducted in multiple locations, it implicitly raises issues about how to evaluate current scholarship on the Rastafari. The diversity of opinion, belief, and practice that is a feature of the Jamaican context makes generalization about the movement problematic. The enfolding of the local and global spheres in the contemporary movement makes this more difficult. I agree with Yawney that work on Rastafari in the global context requires a long-term research strategy, attention to multiple sites, and collaboration with other scholars and with Rastafari brethren and sistren themselves.

It should be apparent from this discussion that the terms local and global with respect to "versions" of Rastafari cultural are potentially arbitrary and raise the issue of whose definition of "local" is in play. What I call soundscapes and mediascapes intertwine both roots versions as well as cosmopolitan versions of Rasta tradition. In large measure, the impetus that has brought Rastafari "out of yard" (i.e., Jamaica) has involved coordination between not only traditional Nyabinghi Elders, but also Rasta community activists, artists, and educated Rastafari who write about and represent the movement. This latter cohort, as observed above, has been keenly aware of the cultural capital represented by the House. They have clearly drawn upon the symbolic value of the Elders to authorize an orthodox version of Rastafari that confers a legitimacy upon Rastafari in the diasporas of the North American and European metropolitan areas. The reciprocal media flows, moreover, have repositioned the House in Jamaica, transforming it from a position of obscurity on the post-colonial periphery to the symbolic center of a geography of black resistance.

Indeed, the narrowing between center-periphery and local-global seems almost at the point of implosion. Any search of the World Wide

Web for Rastafari will turn up nearly a hundred hits, and most browsers register into double digits in a search on Nyabinghi. Recently, while surfing the Internet, I spent time "passing through" some of my favorite Rasta websites, which include the Virtual Nyabinghi, Nation On-Line, and Abyssinian Cyberspace.

Endnotes

1. Insofar as it is organized around Elders as nodal points in the creation and dissemination of ideology, the soundscape is a resident/resonant archive of popular memory that traces continuity with the history of African-Jamaican and pan-African struggle.
2. The soundscape is very much an evaluative environment in which individuals are called upon not only to make ongoing discriminations between ambient babble and "conscious" sounds but to maneuver in a context of linguistic indirection. Previous writings on Rasta speech have virtually ignored this social aspect of speech behavior despite the conspicuous importance which the Rastafari themselves attach to it. In the Rasta doctrine of "word-sound-and-power," words are always a two-edged force. They carry the uplifting force of "life" and "love" as well as the purifying but potentially destructive force of "fire." Because the word is regarded as inherently life-affirming, it is held that there are no words which can offend the true and heartical Rasta. Words that lack substance or which are off the mark are said to simply "pass through," being dismissed as "void" and "burned" within the heartical fire of the intended addressee. Rastafari continuously monitor each other's consciousness according to the sounds which individuals may "take unto" or "follow" and those which they ignore or "dash away."
3. From the early to mid-1980s, the Republic of South Africa conducted a vigorous propaganda campaign to influence American and European foreign policy and minimize external pressures on the reform of apartheid. Propaganda materials were available to U.S. citizens upon request. After returning to Washington, D.C., in March 1986, I requested materials and was sent, among other items, a pamphlet, "The Vital Role of South Africa's Minerals." This pamphlet was

particularly informative in light of Bongo Ketu's reasoning. It included a representation of the space shuttle Columbia accompanied by the statement: "South Africa is a valuable source of strategically scarce minerals used in the high technology construction of the U.S. space shuttle Columbia, seen here" (Publications Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Information, Republic of South Africa, March 1982).

4. In his biography of Bob Marley, White (1983) makes reference to this camp as the headquarters for the Theocratic Government of Rastafari and as "founded" by Bongo Shephan and Bongo Gabby. While this site did serve as such a meeting place between 1974 and the early 1980s, its history actually attests to the more complex relations between the soundscape and an emergent mediascape in Rastafari during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Oral accounts have it that a handful of Rastafari first began to settle in this community in the late 1960s when Coxson Dodd traveled with his sound system to keep dances out on the main road, a movement which was further encouraged by the general displacement of Rastafari from West Kingston during the mid-1960s. During the early 1970s, Bunny Wailer built a house on the hillside overlooking this camp and Chris Blackwell, possibly with Marley's encouragement, funded the erection of a community center in which Rastafari held their meetings. For a brief time, Bob and Rita Marley lived in the housing scheme about a half-mile from this camp. In 1974, during a Nyabingi celebration, this camp was formally recognized as a "headquarters" for the Emperor Haile Selassie I Theocratic Government, also known as the House of Nyabingi.
5. For the Rastafari, the concept of the seal is central to the scriptural authentication of the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie (see *Revelation* 5:5-7), since only His Majesty, as the returned Christ, was seen worthy to open or "burst" the seven seals leading to the final judgement and redemption of the faithful. In Rastafari discourse, the bursting of the biblical seals is, among other things, intimately related to the idea of the judgement and destruction of the oppressor.
6. As noted above, the Rastafari (like other Jamaicans and West Indians) have elaborated techniques of linguistic indirection to comment upon the state of existing social relations.
7. For other accounts which provide insight into the diversity and creativity within the local Jamaican soundscape, see Bilby (1996), Homiak (1995), Owens (1975), Pulis (1994), and Yawney (1987, 1990).

8. The multiple metaphors and evaluative frames which Rastafari apply to speaking and speech abilities are an indication of the profound agency which they attribute to words. Thus, speech is, for them, "the works," the work that Jah calls upon them to perform as part of their divine duty. Among other prophetic sources, Rastafari draw upon the language of *Hebrews* 7 to express the timeless and unchanging duty that is expressed through their faith, "a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec."
9. This field encompasses a cosmology mapped onto the socialized body of the Dreadlocks Rastafari. In the process of reasoning, the brethren will, for example, refer to the locks as "telepathic antennae" or "mystic magnets" which "draw up communication with Zion." With respect to their own subjectivity in reasonings, an individual may state: "I guh up ina mi heavens (head)" or "I seat up ina mi heavens and reason wid de Fadda (God/Selassie)." Coupled with other aspects of discourse (e.g., the terms "Jah-mek-ya" (Jah makes here) and "I-thiopia"), such statements express the view that there is a special geographic relationship between Jamaica and Ethiopia. The former, an outpost of European colonialism, is "the Valley of Decision" where "all nations will be judged by Jah Rastafari, ruler of Zion and earth."
10. This correspondence between I/Eye emerged at a time when colonial surveillance of Rastas and definitions of social space emerged as strategies by the state to contain, discipline, and control the movement. It is surprising, therefore, that no scholar has yet remarked on the inherently counterhegemonic aspect of this linguistic register. The Rasta claims to be able to "stay in and look out" or to "seat up in his tatu [dwelling] and look out at wha gwaan ina Babylon."
11. On the verso of the postcards of Haile Selassie which Howell allegedly sold in 1934 as "passports" to Ethiopia was inscribed: "Leonard Perceival Howell, Traveled the world through."
12. Through reggae, many Jamaicans have come to acknowledge the necessity for a strong Afrocentric component to their national identity. The demands for social justice inherent in much of reggae music have not, however, been translated into political action. In this regard, reggae has allowed Garvey and Marley to be assigned to a "safe" niche within the pantheon of national heroes without significantly altering the status quo.

13. During the 1970s, the House of Nyabinghi became both a traveling culture and a deterritorialized space. The latter was achieved through the increasing use of recorders at islandwide binghi celebrations and the subsequent circulation Nyabinghi chants, testimony, and reasoning on audiocassettes among the brethren and sistren in both Jamaica and abroad. Within wide networks that constitute the House, this became a way of providing a niche for music which had virtually no commercial acceptance. During my first few years of fieldwork, I found that many Nyabinghi brethren and sistren had their own personal archives of tapes and would frequently play these tapes for hours on end as a way to revisit the occasion of the actual 'binghi and/or to critique the quality of "the work" or the "Ises" (praises) produced by the congregation at that event. In this way, the House maintained an ongoing presence in the experience of its members which transcended the time and space of a specific celebration.
14. The contemporary international movement might be considered to have bifurcated centers — Ethiopia and Jamaica. From this perspective, the Rasta diaspora is now characterized by a tension between the dystopic and utopic elements of its localization in Jamaica. Jamaica, once exclusively a "living hell" (e.g., "Egypt" or "the Pit of Jehosephat") to the Rastafari, is now also extolled as a "Blessed Land, Jah-mek-ya," the site of the movement's religious revelation.
15. These events include a delegation of Elders who traveled through the Eastern Caribbean in 1982. The first official missions outside the Caribbean, known as "The Voice of Thunder: Dialogue with Nyabinghi Elders," was organized in Toronto in 1984. In 1986, an international Rastafari conference, "Rastafari Focus," was held as part of Caribbean Focus at the Commonwealth Institute in the United Kingdom (see Yawney, chapter 8, this volume).
16. Yawney (personal communication 1990) has described the travel of traditional Rasta culture during the 1980s as involving a "second wave of missionization" atop the influences of reggae which began in the 1970s.
17. There is clearly a dual draw to Jamaica based on the elevated visibility of the Nyabinghi House in recent years and the heightened activity of Kingston's recording studios. Ken Bilby (personal communication) has noted that there is an economic component to this

- movement in that employment is provided for traditional Rastafari drumming ensembles as backup for musicians who record in Jamaica. These traditional roots musicians have probably fared poorly during the dancehall era with its emphasis on computer-generated rhythms.
18. In 1994, I provided Ras E.P. McPherson an audiocassette of my own research with the Howellites, a tape which had been recorded during a meeting of three members of Howell's remnant community and five of the Nyabinghi Elders who were preparing to travel abroad to represent the House in 1988. The tape I recorded was combined with earlier recordings done by Ras McPherson in the early 1980s. Ras Mortimo Planno subsequently put McPherson in touch with Ras Denroy Morgan in Brooklyn who, in turn, arranged the production facilities for this CD in 1995. Only subsequent to my reasoning with Ras Denroy in September of 1996 did I realize our mutual connections to the CD.
 19. Rastas in metropolitan communities have found themselves periodically under siege, having to deal with forms of oppression and racism around the criminal justice system, immigration practices, and the like. A number of these missions abroad have been designed to educate the public about the true nature of Rastafari practice and to enable local Rasta communities to more effectively represent themselves. As Yawney (1995:3) argues, Rastafari under such circumstances "may quite possibly rely increasingly on the more orthodox forms of livity for religious and cultural protection."
 20. In the former category I am speaking about productions inspired by reggae-driven Jamaican popular culture. This includes Jamaican films such as *The Harder They Come* (1973), *Rockers* (1978), *Countryman* (1982), and *The Land of Look Behind* (1981).
 21. The focus on Nyabinghi traditions which can travel has, I believe, had an impact upon "reasoning" as a ritualized, intensive, and time-consuming communicative event. Over the last ten years, the circles of brethren with whom I move in the Nyabinghi House expend visibly less time and energy on this activity than I witnessed during my early years of fieldwork. More focus is given to preaching, counsels of Elders, and activities in Nyabinghi centers. I say this with some caution as an impressionistic view based on much shorter periods in the field since my initial fieldwork.

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