"A place in which to feel at home": An Exploration of the Rastafari as an Embodiment of an Alternative Spatial Paradigm

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So I want you to tell I now
where Zion is and
where heaven is
according to the world.
I-n-I is Mount Zion
For Zion is I-n-I
(cited in Owens, 1976: 276-77)

Introduction

The Rastafarian movement has constructed a worldview which comprises two opposing realms, namely, Zion and Babylon. This spatial paradigm is not confined to geographic location. Its boundaries pertaining to Babylon and Zion transcend the limitations of modern, nationalist categories. Zion, which refers to Africa or Ethiopia, is used to describe more than just the physical or geographical space of Africa. It is a state of freedom from the cultural, political, economic and social dominance of the West known to the Rastafari as Babylon. For this reason, this distinctive geography can provide a framework for the Rastafarian community in South Africa within which to articulate the experience of living under the dominant culture that they perceive to be Eurocentric and oppressive. By attributing spatial characteristics to both Western ideology as well as to an alternative ideological paradigm encompassed by Zion, South African Rastafarians have constructed an alternative geography which should be understood less as an analysis of space and rather as a commentary on a set of circumstances under which Western ideology continues to be enforced on African culture and identity. The notion of Zion, with its implications for a Rasta-

farian identity, cannot be asserted in terms of conventional geography but rather through an alternative spatial paradigm that is defined by cultural constructs and symbols. Drawing on theoretical perspectives regarding the body as a cultural construct, my intention is to explore the way in which the spatial paradigm is embodied by the Rastafari community in South Africa through the use of particular bodily symbols. It will be argued that the movement's distinctive hairstyle, namely, the dreadlocks, and the development of a specifically Rastafarian orality, are components of Rastafarian culture that function as symbolic media through which the Rastafari embody the division between Zion and Babylon and, in turn, render the Rastafarian body a site of conflict between modern, Western society and the Rastafarian worldview.

The Rastafarian Spatial Paradigm

Rastafarian spiritual geography

The Rastafarian spatial paradigm can be understood as a development on the ideas propounded by the black nationalist, Marcus Garvey, who derived a culturally-specific geography from biblical references to Ethiopia and, in turn, reinterpreted them through the experience of slavery and oppression. Drawing on Eyre's study of biblical symbolism and the role of what he refers to as "fantasy geography"[1], Park shows how Rastafarians have used the geography of the Bible, as well as nationalist conceptions of Africa, to construct an identity of significance which extends beyond global boundaries (Park, 1994). According to Albert Memmi, colonised peoples have historically employed two approaches as a response to oppression and subjugation: One represents a strategy of "cultural adaptation" whereby the ideologies of the coloniser are internalised and conflicting pre-existing traditional values are suppressed, and the other, a process of "cultural revival" in order to reappropriate traditional cultural elements which had been destroyed by the colonial encounter (see Nelson, 1994).

The ideology of Ethiopianism and the subsequent rise of Rastafarianism, then, can be understood as a process of "cultural revival" which included a creative appropriation of European cultural and religious constructs that formed part of a wider process of re-interpreting and appropriating history as a means of resistance against European domination. Under conditions of slavery, black people employed mechanisms of retention and adaptation whereby aspects of African culture were preserved and blended with European influences. Rather than "cultural adaptation", this was a dynamic and creative process during which European cultural forms were appropriated to form part of a strategy for resistance to subjugation. This process is clearly revealed in the emergence of black Christianity which inverted "accepted" Christian themes as part of a complex ideological struggle (Jones, 1988). It is within this context that the Rastafari movement established its own set of ideals that were a continuation of contemporary black

spiritual and social movements. Rastafarianism can thus be perceived to form part of a process whereby the construction of such an identity entails a reinterpretation of history in which the memory of Africa becomes an important piece of what Chevannes (1994) terms the "ideological mosaic" of the Rastafari movement. Furthermore, this self-constructed "map" not only provides a way in which to understand and relate to the Rastafarian's lived experience of the world, but also poses a challenge to the dominant worldview under which he or she is enslaved.

Yi-Fu Tuan has argued that "mythic" space is an intellectual construct which can be interpreted as a means of fulfilling humanity's fundamental needs (Tuan, 1977). Rastafarian geography divides the world into Babylon and Zion and can therefore be seen as a response to the need for freedom from oppression and subjugation. Moreover, this division functions as a challenge to the dominant ideology's conceptions regarding geographical and nationalist space:

"Rastafari use this spatial paradigm, grounded in and legitimised by reference to biblical lands of good and evil, to reformulate a conception of geographic and spatial location offered in modern, nationalist categories" (Neill, 1997: 1). The reappropriation and reconstruction of place, in accordance with Rastafari thought, can thus be understood in terms of a Rastafarian "spiritual geography", which is a concept used to encompass the social, historical, cultural and religious aspects of the Rastafarian geographical paradigm (Neill, 1997).

Post-modern geography and its implications for an understanding of the Rastafarian spatial paradigm

Timothy Neill raises a number of significant questions in his exploration of locality as something which is experienced in an essentially "globalised", "deterritorialised" world, for example, the deconstruction of the inextricable relationship of geographic space and location to the modern state or nation. Drawing on Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State*, Neill argues that Western thought finds it problematic to consider the possibility of the existence of societies that are not necessarily affiliated to a particular state (Neill, 1997). This is reinforced by scholars who have, in some cases, argued that spatial location possesses a primordial significance (see Shils, 1975). It has also been suggested that a sense of place serves as an integrative function in society in that it provides a group, or an individual, with a significance that is related to the need to perceive that one has roots or a place in the world to which one belongs as part of a broader, shared community (Butzen, 1978). The Rastafari derive a sense of belonging and community which is expressed in spatial terms, namely, Africa. However, this conception of Zion or Africa moves beyond its significance as a continent within a specific geographic location and is not limited to any specific country. The Rastafarian spatial paradigm transcends the boundaries imposed by modern conceptions regarding nationalism and challenges the

nationalistic geographic spaces into which Western society, as a result of its preoccupation with neat divisions and compartments, has divided the world according to its "representative groups" (Neill, 1977).

Recent postmodern approaches to spatial analysis have recognised space as something which is socially produced rather than being an objective and neutral phenomenon free from the influence of ideological forces. The organisation and meaning of space, argues Soja, should be understood as a product of a political and ideological process (Soja, 1989). Moreover, if space is an embodiment, as well as medium of social life subject to the forces of ideology, it can therefore never be fixed (Soja, 1989). Postmodern approaches to geography provide some useful tools with which to analyse the Rastafarian spatial paradigm. Clearly, the construction of Zion and Babylon emerges out of a specific cultural and social experience, namely, the colonial, as well as the post-colonial, experience in which Africans continued to be dominated and oppressed under the Western political, social and cultural system. The postmodern understanding of geography, which recognises space as something dynamic and subject to the forces of social and cultural change, is reflected in the changing understandings of what constitutes Zion for the Rastafari. Initially, in the historical context of the post-slavery experience and rise of black nationalistic tendencies, Zion referred literally to Africa and, by implication, repatriation constituted a physical relocation to Africa. However, the ideal of repatriation has now become translated as the need for freedom from oppression and is therefore not bound to a specific location. Recent developments in Jamaica have indicated that a new emerging consciousness is concerned with creating Zion in Jamaica and that repatriation is no longer desirable (Witvliet, 1985). Similarly, the Rastafarian experience in South Africa is a clear example of the way in which socio-political circumstances serve to construct space. The experience of living in Africa under the Western, modern political and social system is communicated in spatial or geographical terms as being enslaved by Babylon and exiled from Zion. Rather than a place that is fixed to a specific location, Zion is therefore a state of freedom from oppression and subordination and can exist simultaneously everywhere and anywhere.

Zion, as the Rastafarian sacred centre, cannot therefore be limited to a physical geographical area but should rather be understood as one which is shaped by changing circumstances and subject to the flux of historical and socio-political forces. It is not being suggested that space is an irrelevant framework in which to study cultural groups, but rather that our definitions of space are limited by modern, nationalistic geographies which assert the inextricable relationship of people to a nation or state. Despite the fact that human beings have the tendency to associate themselves with a specific location or territory, this centre of meaning and significance is not a spatially located phenomenon but one which is constructed out of a set of specific values and beliefs (Shils,

1975). Space or place is, as Tuan suggests, a "concept in mythic thought rather than a deeply felt value bound to unique events and locality" (1977: 150). In logical terms there can only exist one such centre but in mythological thought, or in terms of spiritual geography, many centres can coexist without contradiction (Tuan, 1977). As discussed earlier, Africa or Zion constitutes a centre in Rastafarian thought which is not spatially located and can therefore be manifested in different political and social climates and can lead to the existence of more than one Zion. The construction of Zion as this centre of meaning is related to the Rastafarian value system which upholds the virtues of freedom from oppression, peace and unity, and it is this value system that is manifested or embodied spatially by Zion.

Locative and utopian space

The tension between physical geographical space and an understanding of space which seeks to move beyond physical location can be understood in terms of the distinction that historian of religion Johnathan Z. Smith (1978) has made between locative and utopian space. A locative orientation towards sacred space requires the existence of a place fixed in some kind of geographical location. In contrast, utopian space is that which is free from the bounds of physical location and can exist, as Chidester has pointed out, in no place or in every place (Chidester, 1995). Both locative and utopian spaces are interpretive possibilities that may be appropriated, depending on which one in particular corresponds to a specific worldview (Smith, 1978). However, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and although one may appear to be more dominant, it does not undermine the co-existence of the other, either spatially or temporally (Smith, 1978). The Rastafarian worldview that asserts a division between two realms, Babylon and Zion, clearly reflects the dichotomy between utopian and locative space. Zion or Africa has a physical, geographical location, giving it a locative orientation towards space, but the notion of Zion is also encompassed by a state of freedom from oppression and can therefore transcend the need for physical location and exist as an embodied space. Ultimately, Africa or Zion, as both a locative and utopian space, can be understood as a product of the Rastafarian experience and worldview which refuses to accept the condition of slavery and oppression encompassed by Babylon as a permanent, inevitable experience.

"Strangers in a Strange Land" – The Rastafarian Spatial Paradigm and the Condition of Exile

The condition of exile can be articulated in terms of a situation in which the place regarded as the most sacred is remote or is experienced under "disorientative" or "dislocative" conditions (Chidester, 1995). The Rastafari can be seen to be exiled from Zion in two senses: firstly, as descendants of those who were brought to the New World and lived in exile from their homeland, Africa, under condi-

tions of slavery; and secondly, aside from physically leaving Africa, Rastafarians perceive themselves to be exiled from Zion as a socio-political state in which they will no longer feel oppressed. Rastafarians living in South Africa have essentially never left Zion or Africa but continue to live in exile as a result of their refusal to internalise and conform to the modern Western social and political system. As Tuan has pointed out, attachment to place finds its expression ultimately under conditions of exile and "home becomes vividly real only when juxtaposed against its contraries – foreign country and journey" (Tuan, 1976: 30).

According to the Rastafarian worldview, home is a state of freedom from the dominance of Babylon and therefore, for South African Rastafarians, the experience of oppression under a Western socio-political order is translated as the condition of exile in which one experiences a sense of alienation and disorientation. Rastas interpret the Old Testament history of the Israelites and their captivity in Babylon as a prophecy of the oppressive conditions of exile that they are experiencing at present, and they perceive themselves to be "strangers in a strange land" (Exodus 2:32) who are destined to be delivered out of captivity by a return to Zion. The Rastafari reject African political leaders who have internalised European ideology and culture; they are perceived to be enemies of Zion who only serve to reinforce Babylon as the dominant social order and, in turn, are responsible for sustaining the condition of exile. For the Rastafari, this separation from Zion is an alienating experience, and as a result, Africa or Zion, is given a utopian orientation:

> But above and beyond all of this there is another Africa. This Africa is a presence, a dialectically given existential presence. And this Africa in a white racist colonial era became the burden and the possibility of black manhood. The absence of Africa become the presence of Africa. (Owens, 1976:6)

The Rastafari assert that the enslavement of Africans severed a sacred link with their spiritual and geographically-located home and Africans therefore continue to be in exile because they perceive modernity to be merely a continuation of an oppressive set of circumstances. In the context of exile, utopian space can only be achieved by a liberation from the existing order (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995) which, in the case of Rastafarians, requires a dismantling of Babylon before they can "fly home" to Zion. A utopian orientation towards sacred space is compatible with experience of exile because: "in such utopian orientations sacred place was essentially portable, whether it was carried in a text, a ritual, a meditation practice, a sacred calendar, gestures of recognition, or in the intimacy of the human heart" (Chidester, 1995: 226).

As Bokser has noted, the loss of a sacred centre does not only give rise to the negative experience of exile but also facilitates positive efforts to localise the sacred in other places and provide new centring structures (Bokser, 1985). The Jewish nation developed a substitute for the loss of locative space by taking with them into exile an essentially portable space which was not territorially defined – the Torah (Park, 1994). According to the Jewish tradition, the recognition that one embodies the Torah as a portable sacred space is central to being a Jew because one must live and experience the Torah in order to embody the text and thus ensure the continuity of the tradition (Morris, 1990). Similarities can be drawn between the Jewish and Rastafarian experience in that the Rastafari movement also developed a portable space as a result of being separated from their sacred centre. Like the Jews, the Rastafari responded to exile by making their centre mobile, and in contrast, have constructed a spatial division as a fulfilment of the need for an identity that is not geographically located. In the same way as the Jews have embodied their portable sacred space, the movement seeks to ensure that the self-constructed spiritual geography is inscribed on each individual Rastafarian body that experiences and, more importantly, expresses the struggle between Babylon and Zion and that serves to reinforce and sustain the division.

The experience of exile, however, refers to a broader framework in which Rastafarians have ensured a self-imposed exile from Western conceptions of nationalist identity. Neill has argued that the Rastafari of South Africa reject both the preceding colonial, as well as the present national, state as the legitimate foundation of social organisation and have thus substituted the secular, modern state with a more meaningful ideology and have subsequently constructed a legitimate space outside of Western systems of classification (Neill, 1997). As a result, the Rastafari operate at the periphery of modern, Western-based national boundaries and have produced a spatial paradigm free from the restrictions of conventional geography that transcends not only the need for locality but also a specifically nationalist identity.

"Rebuilding Zion Walls" – The Destruction of Babylon and the Restoration of Zion

Phenomenologist of religion Van der Leeuw has linked the construction of sacred space with the politics of property and argues that, rather than merely a source of meaning, sacred place constitutes a source of power that encompasses the "realisation of possibilities" as a result of its having been appropriated or selected (see Chidester, 1995). Clearly, in the Rastafarian belief system, Zion is conceptualised as the homeland belonging to the Rastafari people and represents the "realisation of possibilities" in terms of its implications for the destruction of Babylon as an oppressive political and social structure. More importantly,

Zion, as belonging rightfully to Rastafarians, provides an empowering ideological framework from which to resist the dominance of Babylon. Zion functions as a source of power because its existence as a state of freedom is premised on the destruction and dismantling of Western ideological structures. The destruction of Babylon and, in turn, the construction of Zion, is clear evidence of the way in which the assertion and resistance of power is central to the production of sacred space (see Chidester and Linenthal, 1995).

According to Tuan, power can manifest itself in two contradictory ways, namely, order or violence; and power, in the form of destruction, he further argues, can therefore lead to renewal and freedom in the form of a newly established social order (Tuan, 1978). For the Rastafarian worldview, the destruction of Babylon forms an essential component of the process of the construction of Zion as a space in which the African is no longer oppressed by the dominant ideology of the West. Spatial inversion in millenarian movements, which are based on the reversal of an existing order, is a common strategy as a means of dominating space (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995), and Rastafarian rhetoric often makes reference to an apocalyptic restoration of the original Africa in which ultimate, universal repatriation will be preceded by a time of blood, fire and brimstone (Witvliet, 1985). This apocalyptic destruction of Babylon and repatriation to Zion constitutes a reversal of the existing order in which the Rastafari continue to be enslaved by Babylon and can therefore be understood as a metaphor for fundamental political and social change.

Zion, however, cannot be reduced to a mystic vision but rather can be perceived as the fulfilment of the possibility for a political and social state free from the dominance of the West (Jones 1988). The ideal of repatriation as a metaphor for resistance against the dominance of the West, rather than as a literal relocation to Africa, is evident in the worldview of the South African Rastafarian community. This community essentially has never left Zion/Africa but has still undergone the experience of oppression by the West, in the form of slavery during Europe's colonial expansion, the implementation of apartheid and, more recently, the current socio-political experience which is perceived to be a continuation of the condition of enslavement by Babylon. Such a perception is clearly revealed in the Rastafari's need to find a suitable place to gather, a place which is "in Africa", rather than somewhere located within the realm of Babylon, such as a place of work (Oosthuizen, 1990). For the Rastafari of South Africa, Africa, as Zion, can therefore be contrasted with an Africa which is a geographically-positioned space that constitutes a symbol of slavery, oppression, loss of freedom and dignity (Oosthuizen, 1990). The notion of Zion encompasses the process of building a new and just and free society and therefore, as a place, it extends beyond conventional geographical or spatial boundaries.

Zion Versus Babylon

The expression of Rastafari consciousness whereby two opposing ideologies are portrayed in spatial terms can be interpreted as an attempt to produce a space of knowledge and power that exists outside of modernity. However, because this space, namely Zion, exists in relation to its antithesis, an affirmation of the power and existence of Babylon forms part of the process of its rejection and exclusion. According to the Rastafarian worldview, Zion as a place of freedom, peace and unity can only be achieved when modern, Western society, as its antithesis, has been dismantled. For this reason, the Rastafarian movement can be seen not only to embody Zion but also the Babylon system the movement is resisting. Despite the fact that the two are set up as a binary opposition, Zion and Babylon exist in relation to each other. Furthermore, it has been argued that sacred space is constructed or defined in terms of what it excludes and as a result, the "politics of exclusion" is inevitably reinforced by means of a distinction between purity and impurity (Chidester, 1995). Within the context of the Rastafarian spatial paradigm, Zion can be seen to be constructed by what it excludes, namely, its antithesis, as encompassed by the form of Babylon. Zion, as a sacred space, can therefore be understood to exist as place which is free from the polluting effects of the Babylon system. In this way, the existence of good versus evil is conceptualised and spatialised in terms of Babylon versus Zion (King and Jensen, 1995). The construction of Zion can be seen to emerge out of a response to a socio-political and economic system which the Rastafari regard as oppressive and it is therefore inextricable from its negative counterpart, namely, Babylon. Zion's existence in relation to Babylon is evident in the fact that the destruction of Babylon is a prerequisite for reaching or attaining Zion. As Johnson-Hill has argued, the destruction of Babylon as the dominant ideology is essential because "the flight [to Zion] commences in the ashes of Babylon and constitutes a passage to the antithesis of Babylon, it entails a radical detachment from the vampire system" (Johnson-Hill, 1995: 291).

The Rastafarian is a product of the two opposing, self-constructed worlds, namely, the Zion that he or she is striving to achieve and the Babylon that is simultaneously being resisted. Babylon and Zion can therefore be seen to coexist in relation to each other largely because they both form part of the Rastafarian experience. As Witvliet has pointed out, although the movement is referred to as one in which liberation can be achieved, Rastafarianism seeks rather to create a space alongside the existing system or world of Babylon in order for people to experience liberation, mentally and spiritually (Witvliet, 1985). Furthermore, Zion and Babylon are simultaneously embodied by each Rasta who, in turn, is simultaneously defined by both sets of categories:

> With their (usually) black bodies, dreaded hair, wearing of Rastafarian colours and iconography, and use of ganja, Ras-

> tafarians are given a set of categories by Babylon. They are marginalised, arrested and beaten. They have their locks shaved, and their sacred weed taken by the police. At the same time Rastas use their bodies to articulate Rastafari. (Neill, 1997: 29).

Gabriel Marcel once said that "an individual is not distinct from his place, he is that place" (cited in Relph, 1976: 43) and, for the Rasta who exists in a world in which the boundaries of Zion and Babylon are constantly overlapping, both constitute spaces which are embodied by the individual Rastafarian (as well as the broader Rastafarian community) and both Zion and Babylon are therefore inextricable from a Rastafari conception of selfhood. For this reason, the Rastafarian body is rendered a site of conflict in which the struggle between Babylon and Zion is played out. Bodily symbols of resistance to Babylon, namely, hair, music and language, become a central focus of the relationship between the movement and the Babylon system it is seeking to dismantle, and it is on the basis of these cultural constructs that this set of power relations is displayed.

"I-n-I is Mount Zion for Zion is I-n-I" – Embodying Rastafarian Spiritual Geography

It has been argued that we can no longer speak of the physical body as something which is inherently "natural" in the sense that it is an objective concept free from the implications of the culture and ideology within which it is located (see Synnott, 1993; Douglas, 1970; Csordas, 1994). The body has come to be regarded as something on which society inscribes itself and is therefore a culturally and socially constructed phenomenon. As a result of the inextricable relationship between the individual body and the larger social body, the physical body becomes the only means through which to communicate the social and cultural experience of a particular individual or group. It is within this theoretical framework with regard to the body that both hair and orality are to be explored as bodily symbols through which the Rastafari embody an alternative spatial paradigm. The analysis of the way in which the movement's spiritual geography is inscribed on the Rastafarian body is informed by a recognition that the physical body serves as the only means through which religion can – as in the case of all social phenomena – be experienced and, by implication, expressed. Csordas has argued that religion constitutes an aspect of society and culture which reveals the physical body to be a culturally constructed phenomenon (Csordas, 1994). Moreover, scholars such as McGuire (1990) and others have argued that the body should actually serve as a lens through which to approach and gain an understanding of religious traditions.

Hair

Hair constitutes one of the most powerful symbols of the human body and, to a large extent, identity and ideology are both expressed through hair. Hair can be manipulated in various ways and is therefore an ideal symbol through which differentiation and transformations between individual or group identity can be signified (Synnott, 1993). The Rastafarian community use dreadlocks not only as means of resistance but also as a means of embodying a worldview which distinguishes between two ideological paradigms encompassed by Zion and Babylon. This is evident in Rastafarian rhetoric which distinguishes between "baldheads" and "natty dreads". The Rastafari refer to those who have internalised European ideology and culture – and have served to reinforce and sustain Babylon as the dominant social order – as "baldheads" (Neill, 1997). "Natty dreads" refers to the Rastafarian who has successfully freed him/herself from the ideological constraints of Western modernity. The division between Zion and Babylon, or the distinction between "natty dreads" and "baldhead" can be understood as a commentary on both the colonial and post-colonial experience in which, under the guise of modernity, Africans continue to be enslaved. Historically, hair has formed a significant part of resistance movements in general but, more specifically, of African movements resisting European, Western oppression. A celebration of African hair by the growing of dreadlocks constitutes a powerful symbol of the rejection of Western values and culture. As White and White have argued in their analysis of slave hair: "[dreadlocks] celebrate the very texture of black hair that white racism had devalorised, a texture that alone is capable of being shaped into the dreadlocks' distinctive configurations" (White and White, 1995: 53).

Understandably, Rastafarian dreadlocks are problematic for the dominant ideology because they represent a direct challenge to Western society. The growing of dreadlocks is inextricable from the Rastafarian worldview which is premised on the destruction of the Western, capitalist system in which dreadlocks are utilised as part of the movement's strategy of resistance to Babylon. As a result, the Rastafarian body becomes a site of conflict on which the power struggle between the movement and the dominant ideology it is resisting is played out. Until recently, it was a relatively common practice in South Africa for police to shave the heads of Rastafarians as a strategy of harassment which is indicative of the extent of the challenge posed by the dreadlocks.[2] Moreover, the subsequent re-growing of dreadlocks by the victims can be interpreted as a manifestation of this struggle for power. Dreadlocks are not just outward symbols of the Rastafarian worldview but, as Davis and Simon (1992) have argued, can be conceptualised as the irreconcilable point between the Rastafari and the authority of the Babylon system. The concept of "natty dreads" has subsequently formed an integral part of a vocabulary of resistance to the Western, capitalist system. The meaning of "baldheads" moves beyond its literal implications and refers not

only to those who have not grown dreadlocks but also to those who try to mirror their oppressors both in appearance and in ideology and culture. The concept of "dread" has taken on a new meaning in the context of the Rastafari movement, in that instead of referring to hair which is unkempt, dirty and dangerous, it is a term that signifies power, freedom and defiance (Barrett, 1977). Within the Rastafarian framework, "dread" is used both as a noun and as an adjective (Davis and Simon, 1992) and therefore one who is "dread" is understood as someone who has achieved freedom from the constraints of Western ideology. The dreadlocks are integral to the concept of Rastafari livity[3] because its is regarded by the movement as the most natural way to wear one's hair. The concept of "ital" as that which is natural and pure stands in opposition to Babylon and is expressed in the physical appearance of the Rasta (Johnson-Hill, 1995). An exploration of the role of hair as a medium through which to communicate a rejection of modern, Western society should be located within a broader theoretical framework in which resistance is understood as a means of reinforcing the division between Babylon and Zion. As a form of resistance, dreadlocks constitute an integral part of a process in which the Rastafarian embodies the alternative spatial paradigm and, as a result, renders hair as the site of the power struggle between the two realms which comprise the Rasta self.

Orality and language

The oral culture of the Rastafari, as another means of embodying the movement's spiritual geography, is clearly revealed by the Rastafarians who communicate ideas concerning Zion and Babylon primarily through the medium of music and language: "through ideas about sound in language and music, conceptions of selfhood, and a formulation of modern temporality, the Rastafari movement asserts a spiritual geography" (Neill, 1997: 2). By means of a distinctive music style and linguistic devices, Rastas succeed in locating themselves in what Neill refers to as an "oral discursive space" rather than one that is based on written, chronological history (Neill 1997). This oral discursive space needs to be examined in the context of the Rastafari worldview that rejects Western linear time. Despite their existence within the Babylon experience which is based on chronological time, the Rastafari have developed what Walter Benjamin has argued is a "messianic" notion of time (see Neill, 1997). This is an understanding of time in which the past is perceived to form part of the present and is thus inseparable from it. For this reason, Rastas maintain that the experience of slavery and colonialism should be understood as a living force that shapes the present and prevents temporal distance from identifying with either the pre-colonial, ancient Africa of their ancestors or the experience of slavery and oppression under colonial rule (Neill, 1997; Owens, 1976).

The Rastafari in South Africa draw parallels between the experience of slavery undergone by their ancestors and the present experience of living in

post-apartheid South Africa under the Babylon system that continues to reject their use of ganja, their appearance and their refusal to conform to the values intrinsic to Western society and culture. The movement's emphasis on orality can also be interpreted as a protest against the individualism of modern, Western society because it is a spoken language, rather than the written form, and can be experienced communally. "Dread talk", as the Rastafari language is often termed, forms part of the construction of a space free from the restrictions imposed by Western ideology and emphasises the creative and empowering potential of primarily oral language:

> Just as the sounds of words are changed to empower 'Dread Talk' by more accurately reflecting the context of Babylon and the 'doctrine' of Rastafari, orality itself more accurately reflects a Rastafarian understanding of the world. (Neill, 1997: 20)

The distinctive language employed by the Rastafari is concerned with reconstructing words in order to reflect their true meaning, which is congruent with the experience of subjugation and oppression. The symbolic structure of language is therefore closely related to the Rastafarian worldview that challenges the oppressive situation of Babylon and rejects privileged relations embedded in its discourse (Lewis 1986). The use of an alternative language constitutes an active confrontation of Western modernity as an alienating order or knowledge which embodies and thus reinforces the spatial paradigm differentiating between Zion and Babylon. Johnson-Hill (1995) has argued that those who are subordinate within a particular social system tend to represent a degree of "anti-structural" power in relation to the dominant order, which then results in a reversal of conventional structures. Within the context of the Rastafari movement, it is within the construction of a distinctive language that the inversion of such structures is clearly evident. Words which have been reformulated to include an "I" are central to the movement's ideas regarding empowerment, and the use of "I-n-I" is perhaps the most important linguistic device used as part of its strategy to resist and deconstruct Babylon. The use of "I-n-I" as a substitute for "you" and "me" blurs the divisions between singular and plural and thus simultaneously represents individual freedom as well as the connection and unity of all Rastafarians (Witvliet, 1985). Most importantly, it replaces "me", which is regarded as an expression of subservience because its use ensures that the speaker is always the object and never the subject (Waters, 1985).

The Rastafarian concern with object and subject is related to the way in which objectification formed a central part of the slave experience and "I-n-I" can therefore be understood to be the assertion of the Rasta as the subject of his or her own history (Witvliet, 1985). "I-n-I" can be seen to reflect a deep sense

of personal autonomy (Legesse, 1994) as well as a reassertion and rediscovery of one's dignity in an oppressive context (Johnson-Hill, 1995). By the use of "I-n-I", the Rastafari are literally and metaphorically reclaiming their own subjectivity (Neill 1997). The concept of "I" can therefore be understood as the embodiment of Zion because it signifies a destruction of the oppressive set of relations embedded in the notion of "you" and "me". Furthermore, if "I" is the embodiment of Zion, by implication, the concept of "you and me" serves to stand for the Babylon system under which the Rasta continues to be oppressed. For the Rastafarians, sound is the very essence of words and both words and sounds are related to power (Owens, 1976; Barret, 1977) because as ontological "sounds", they are understood as having the power to manifest what they really are (Chevannes, 1998). The notion of "word-sounds" is conceptualised in a fundamentally African way as "vibrations" which have power to impact directly upon the material world (Chevannes, 1998). For this reason, Rastas employ a linguistic device in order to alter the way words sound, so that sound elements reflect the meaning of words more closely. For example, the beginning of the word "oppression" contains the word-sound "up" which Rastas regard as a misrepresentation of its meaning by Europeans as a means of keeping the black population unaware of the reality of the situation (Neill, 1997). The Rastafari therefore alter the word to "downpression", which is believed to more accurately reflect its true meaning. Another example is that of "overstand" instead of "understand" when referring to Rastafarian knowledge. The Rastafari claim that their ideologies and knowledge have the potential to lift people over their ignorance while an "understanding" of Babylon results in the continuation of oppression. Similarly, "politics" is changed to "politricks" in order to show that the Rastafari perceive the political arena to be a means of subjugation based on the trickery of the majority (Neill, 1997).

The removal of negative connotations that are perceived to exist within the language of the "downpressor" forms an integral part of the construction of Rastafarian language and a word such as *ded*icate is replaced with *livi*cate because of its similarity to the word "dead" (Simpson, 1985). The Rastafari believe that, within the construction of a distinctive language, they have exposed the contradictions between sound and meaning embedded in the discourse of the coloniser and have reassembled English into a language of "upfull sounds". The idea of creating sounds that are "up" reflects the way in which Zion stands in contrast to Babylon, which is perceived spatially as down. Clearly, language is rendered a site of both political struggle and personal transformation but more importantly, it is central to the construction and maintenance of a spatial paradigm in which there exists a division between Zion and Babylon. Language reflects the paradigm because it is in itself a product of both Zion and Babylon. The centrality of speech to the definition of the Rastafarian self is revealed in the conviction existing within the movement that humanity actually *is* "living

sound" (Chevannes, 1998: 175). Ultimately, the Rastafarian self is understood as something which is not only constructed *by* language, but actually *is* language. Moreover, language is used to communicate and thus, by implication, sustains the self-constructed geography of the Rastafari which asserts division between Zion and Babylon.

Orality and music

Reggae, as a unique music style, forms another component of the Rastafari cultural framework in which a space free from Western ideology can be constructed. In this respect, music functions as a "soundscape" which facilitates the forging of a Rastafari identity and simultaneously serves to establish and maintain the alternative geographical paradigm (Neill, 1997; King and Jensen, 1995). Similar to the role of language in the Rastafarian movement, the geographical paradigm is sustained by music largely because it is a medium through which the oral history of a previously, historically dispossessed people can be communicated without the literate bias that occurs in Western knowledge. Reggae has been described as experiential music, but as poet and reggae artist Linton Kwesi Johnson points out, it is not experiential merely in the sense that people experience the music, but rather that it is true to the historical experience of an oppressed people (Johnson, 1976). Many reggae artists sing of the condition of slavery as if they themselves had experienced it, for example, in "Slave Driver", Bob Marley sings: "When I remember the crack of the whip, my blood runs cold, I remember on the slave ship when they brutalised my very soul."

As in the case of language, reggae is a means through which to assert an oral space free from the dominance of Western ideological constructs. According to the Rastafari, freedom from Babylon can be obtained through power of music (King and Jensen, 1995). This is clearly revealed in the song "Trenchtown Rock" by Bob Marley who sings of "freeing the people with music". According to Jones, reggae is one of the most effective means of protest and resistance against Babylon because of its adherence to African derived music principles:

> Through the political vision of Rasta, the reggae lyricist attempts to jettison the Eurocentric value system of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie by expounding Afro-centric values and fostering a sense of collective racial identity. (Jones, 1988: 27)

It has been argued that reggae differs from other musical forms emerging out of the colonial slavery experience because it is not merely descriptive and rhetorical but also provides an "authentic message" with which the African can identify (Thompson, 1981). More specifically, however, reggae stands in contrast to other forms of music which arise out of the Diaspora experience, largely because

of its role in defining the Rastafari as a people as well as helping to "give shape to their geography" (Neill, 1997). Both the lyrics as well as the rhythmical structure of reggae reflect the worldview of the movement in which there is a division between Zion and Babylon. The dualism of Zion and Babylon is established and reinforced through the metaphors within the lyrics of reggae as well as by its rhythmical structure: its "downbeat" symbolises the destruction of an oppressive society (i.e. Babylon) and the "akette" drummers, with a lighter upbeat, suggests the construction of a new social order (i.e. Zion) (Thompson, 1981). The role of music in constructing an alternative space that transcends conventional geographical location is encompassed by the words of Bob Marley, who stated in an interview:

> Well, as man we live 'mongst music. See music – music is a godly ting. They say we live 'mongst country – a country, but country's not it ... Me wanna speak to all the children, me wanna speak to everyting that moveth and liveth on the earth. All my family a music.[4]

Through the medium of both music and language, the Rastafari movement in South Africa succeeds in constructing and maintaining a geographical or spatial paradigm which is based on its resistance to the dominant and oppressive symbols and categories imposed by Western ideology. Music and language serve to create Zion as a space in which the movement can offer a critique of Western modernity and, most importantly, maintain Zion as a separate and distinct space which stands in opposition to Babylon. Ultimately, it is within the realm of language and music that Africa/Zion, as "a world which is yet to come", can truly exist (Witvliet, 1985).

The Rastafari as an embodiment of an alternative spatial paradigm

The symbolism of the Rastafarian movement has been the "social consciousness" which has served to sustain a worldview premised on the destruction of modernity and the rise of an ideological paradigm under which the black person is no longer oppressed (Lewis, 1986). The individual Rastafarian body can thus be seen as a "readable text" [5] on which the social reality of a world divided into Babylon and Zion is inscribed. The spatial paradigm of Zion versus Babylon is manifested – or communicated – through the body, or more specifically through the symbols of dreadlocks and Rastafari orality. For this reason, the Rastafarian body should be understood not only as the medium through which the spatial paradigm is reinforced but also in terms of its implication for a challenge to modern, Western society. Mary Douglas has argued that attitudes to society are,

to a large extent, encoded in bodily symbols and resistance is therefore often expressed in bodily terms (Douglas, 1970). Sacred space can be interpreted as a ritual space in which an individual or group can embody the way "things ought to be" and, by implication, ritualisation is thus a type of embodied spatial practice (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995). The growing of dreadlocks by individuals within the Rastafarian movement, as well as the adherence to a specific orality, can both be interpreted as rituals that are used as a means of constructing and reinforcing Zion as a sacred space. This is supported by Smith's argument that ritual is not an expression or a response to the sacred but rather a place that is made sacred by ritual (Smith, 1987).

It could be further argued that the growing of dreadlocks and the use of Rastafarian orality are ritual activities that are essential in maintaining the sacrality of Zion for the Rastafari of South Africa, since they ensure that Zion – as a sacred space - moves beyond its geographical location as Africa and is inscribed on each individual Rastafarian body. The individual Rastafarian body is an essential aspect of the movement's goal to resist the dominant social body encompassed by Babylon. The distinctive orality and hairstyle of the Rastafarians are sources of power because they represent Zion as a space in which the African no longer feels oppressed by the dominant ideology of the West. The destruction of Babylon is an essential component in the process of constructing Zion and is therefore a metaphor for fundamental political and social change. Lewis, for instance, has argued that the Rastafari use symbols to distance themselves from modern society and construct a "cultural enclave" existing outside of the Babylonian system (Lewis, 1986). Dreadlocks, language and music function as such symbols for the Rastafari of South Africa, through which they are able to separate themselves from Babylon and, in turn, reinforce the division between Zion and Babylon.

The cultural characteristics of the Rastafarian movement are related directly to maintenance of boundaries between themselves and modern Western society (Lewis 1986) and Rastafarian orality and dreadlocks can therefore be understood as the most distinctive cultural characteristics that have been employed in order to assert their difference and opposition to Babylon. The use of dreadlocks and orality as a form of bodily resistance to an oppressive set of circumstances can be located within a theoretical framework addressing the body, in which the body is recognised as a site on which power relations are played out. Bryan Turner has argued, in this regard, that the body is a system of signs that stand for and express relations of power and is therefore always used as a metaphor for political and social institutions (Turner, 1996). The appropriation of the body by the Rastafari can thus be explored in terms of its function as a means of resistance to an oppressive socio-political experience under which, according to Turner, the oppressed are usually prevented from deriving any sense of personal autonomy over their bodies and, as a result, experience

their bodies as objects which are ruled externally (Turner, 1996).

The body, in this context, is reappropriated and utilised by the Rastafari movement as a means of communicating a rejection of the rules and conditions of the broader social body. Resistance to a dominant ideology is usually characterised by a group or individual's rejection of the dominant order's system of social controls, its rules pertaining to formality, as well as its definition of purity (Isenberg and Owen, 1977). The growing of dreadlocks, the re-structuring of language and the adherence to African musical forms constitutes an outward, visible rejection of European notions of appearance and culture which, in turn, implies a rejection of the entire ideology within which these notions are rooted. Furthermore, by growing dreadlocks and expressing him- or herself within a distinctive oral space, the Rastafarian ensures a sense of personal autonomy over the previously enslaved body and so forms part of a process of resistance in which he or she no longer experiences the body as something which is ruled by an external authority.

"Don't Mind Your Nationality You Have Got the Identity of an African"[6]

Clearly, Rastafarian spiritual geography operates at a "transnational level" that challenges modern, national boundaries by providing a reconstructed spatial paradigm, which undermines the national boundaries imposed by Babylon through refusing to recognise their existence (Neill, 1997). Furthermore, the Rastafarian movement has succeeded in providing a new identity in terms of its geographical paradigm. The concept of the "Rastaman" displaces the need for a nationalistically-derived identity as he or she is an inhabitant of Zion, which is located within a self-constructed spiritual geography that supersedes modern national boundaries (Neill, 1997). The role of the Rastafarian-informed spatial paradigm in constructing an identity is clearly articulated by Bob Marley in response to a question posed regarding his thoughts, as a Rastafarian, on being a Jamaican: "Being Jamaican - I don't see as I being Jamaican, I see I-self as a Rasta - being Rasta! So Jamaica is Jamaica, Africa is Africa, I-man a Rastaman!" (cited in Neill, 1997: 25).

It is evident that the way in which self is conceptualised can be understood as forming part of what Neill aptly refers to as an "anti-nationalist self-referencing terminology" (1997). The notion of the "Rastaman" therefore represents a refusal to recognise modern, national boundaries as legitimate, and in response, constructs a meaningful space from which to derive a sense of identity free from the confines of national borders imposed by modern, Western geography. The construction of a distinctive language and musical style, as well as the adoption of dreadlocks, form part of a process of the construction of an African identity which supersedes the limitations of modern, nationalist categories and, in turn,

are implicated within a broader ideological framework that seeks to challenge Western ideology. Lewis has argued that dreadlocks symbolise a "hold" on Africa (Lewis, 1986), but it is an Africa that is not limited to geographical location but rather an Africa that is embodied by each and every individual Rastafarian. Moreover, the notion of the Rasta existing in an Africa which transcends the limitations of boundaries and location implies that all Rastafarians, irrespective of their nationalities, can assume the identity of an African. As the most visible symbol of the affirmation that one has taken on the identity of a Rasta, dreadlocks play an important role in the development of a sense of unity among the members of the movement: "Our hair, the dreadlocks, keep us together" (South African Rastafarian informant cited in Oosthuizen, 1990: 38).

Similarly, the construction of a specific Rastafarian language reinforces an identity that is transnational because it does not belong to any country or state.[7] The role of language in the construction of an identity that is not dependent on nationality is revealed in a statement by a Jamaican Rasta, but nevertheless has relevance for the Rastafari community in South Africa:

> It just arise in conversation; describing many things, or several times you have several different types of reasoning and you step up with the words ... so we the Rastas suppose to speak, that *here, there and anywhere we find ourselves* we suppose to speak and no-one know what we speak beside ourself. (Pollard, 1980: 34, my emphasis)

As a dimension of Rastafari orality, reggae also reflects a continuity with the oral culture of Africa, which not only forms part of the rejection of values, norms and assumptions of the society in which the Rastafarian is enslaved, but also serves to reinforce an identity free from the constraints of modern notions of nationality. In the same way as dreadlocks contribute to a generalised notion of "Africaness", the continuity of reggae with African indigenous forms of music (Jones, 1988) functions as a means of communicating a sense of unity among Africans as well as rendering it an effective transnational idiom (Savishinsky, 1994). Savishinsky argues that reggae serves to establish wider and more inclusive sets of relations which extend beyond the narrow confines of ethnic or kinship-based relations (1994). This is clearly evident in the fact that reggae has attracted a widespread and culturally-diverse following, such as Native Americans, the majority of sub-Saharan African people and the Maoris of New Zealand. Mitchell documents an interesting phenomenon in respect of the aborigines of Australia who have made use of the pan-Africanist vision, communicated to them through reggae, in order to transform themselves from a subordinate minority within their own country into a global majority of non-white people (Mitchell, 1996). The appeal of reggae as a musical form for so many diverse

social groups undermines the misconception of Rastafarianism as a "separatist subculture of withdrawal" (Jones, 1988: 49), and instead, bears testimony to the movement's ability to provide an identity independent of modern categories of nationality.

The notion of the Rastafari self as existing in an Africa that moves beyond geographical boundaries implies that Rastafarians, irrespective of their nationalities, can assume the identity of an African. Africa, as well as its implications for identity, cannot be understood in terms of modern understandings of geography and its relation to nationalism. For the Rastafari worldview, Africa serves as a representation of freedom, as well as a homeland, because it is the place where the consciousness of Rastafari took root. However, Africa is not limited by spatial and geographical boundaries and therefore repatriation is expressed as a collective consciousness of going forward to a new social order irrespective of nationalities. The Rastafarian geographical paradigm which asserts a division of the world merely in terms of Babylon and Zion rather than nations, countries and states, implies that the entire world constitutes both Babylon and Zion. The Rastafari of South Africa succeed in deconstructing the alienating experience of being dispossessed of the traditional religion of their ancestors, their country and culture by constructing a geography which locates their homeland in whatever location they find themselves. An important part of that journey is therefore the Rastafarian construction of Africa or Zion.

Africa, however, is of significance and meaning to a broader spectrum of those who experience oppression. It is clear, then, that the movement's spiritual geography ensures that Rastafarianism is not just a millenarian movement waiting to go back to Africa but is an alternative spiritual nationality that supplies a mass cultural identity (Davis and Simon, 1992) - an identity which can be located only in Zion and, by implication, can transcend conventional geographical boundaries. Furthermore, as an identity which transcends geographical, nationalist limitations, the notion of a Rastafarian can therefore apply to a broad spectrum of those who feel oppressed, irrespective of race, gender and nationality. Within this context, the adoption of dreadlocks as well as the construction of a distinctive Rasta orality, function as a means of asserting a sense of commonality with other sectors of society who are experiencing some form of oppression, and recognising that subjugation under the modern, capitalist system is not a distinctively African experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been argued that the body serves as a medium through which the Rastafari of South Africa reinforce a worldview that distinguishes between two ideological paradigms encompassed spatially by Zion and Babylon. More specifically, this paper has focused on orality and the use of dreadlocks as

bodily symbols which are used by the Rastafari in order to construct an identity free from the Babylon system which, in turn, functions as a means through which to articulate the movement's resistance to an oppressive set of circumstances under the Western, capitalist system. In order to move beyond a superficial interpretation of the function of dreadlocks, language and music within the movement, I have attempted to locate their use - as bodily symbols - within a broader theoretical framework which recognises the body as a social construct, rooted in a complex set of power relations involving Babylon and Zion, through which the Rastafarian self is constructed.

Notes

1. I find the term "fantasy" problematic because its connotations can be misconstrued so as to undermine the validity of the Rastafarian spatial paradigm. For this reason, I prefer the terms "spiritual" or "mythic" geography which are used by Neill (1997) and Tuan (1977) respectively.
2. A study of Rastafarians in Jamaica and South Africa by Waters (1985) and Oosthuizen (1990) respectively revealed that police often shaved the heads of Rastafarians who were arrested for possession or sale of ganja, or as a form of harassment.
3. The term "livity" refers to a lifestyle which is consistent with the goal to resist Babylon (Johnson-Hill, 1995).
4. This quotation is cited from the album "Talkin' Blues" which is comprised of some of Marley's music and selected interviews.
5. Csordas' (1994) description of the body.
6. Lyrics cited from a reggae song by Peter Tosh.
7. This is evident in the use of the Rastafari concept of "irie" which is used by youth of various cultural backgrounds to describe something which is good.

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