

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

A review by TERISA TURNER October 13 2000

"Anyone who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment." Karl Marx

"Having survived fifty years of social and religious intolerance, discrimination and harassment, the Rastafari movement is poised between becoming a part of world history, contributing to a universal culture, and being a passing phenomenon of the 20th century [Campbell 1987:234]."

The perspective here is that the place of Rastafari in a universal culture, a new society, depends not only on it becoming more informed by class analysis, as Campbell contends, but also on the nurturing of the feminist ferment which here is called 'the new Rastafari.' Original Rastafari is uncompromising in its commitment to 'chant down Babylon,' the capitalist system. However, it is bound by the 'capitalist male deal.' Sexism is the key defining feature distinguishing the old rasta from the new. And it is also a fetter limiting the old rasta to a black nationalist accommodation with capitalism. In contrast, the defining feature of new Rastafari is the affirmation that class consciousness cannot exist without gender consciousness.

This study considers gender and class relations in Caribbean and East African popular struggles during three crises of capitalism in the 20th century. It argues that with the growing internationalization of the world market, capital has sought to develop through establishing class alignments characterized by specific gender relations. Using the concept of the 'male deal' to examine gender dynamics during each crisis, the study concludes that the 'new Rastafari' is part of an international social movement of resistance to structural adjustment and affirmation of a new society which transcends the limitations of the male deal.

Rastafari, organically rooted in the overthrow of slavery, crystallized as a movement in 1930 when Haile Selassie was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia. In 1964 C.L.R. James wrote that the Rastafari is "the sect of Jamaican Negroes who reject the bastardised version of British society which official and educated Jamaica seeks to foist upon them. They have created for themselves a new world, in which the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, is God on earth. His kingdom in Africa is the promised Heaven to which all the Rastafari elect will go, not when they die but when they can raise the money for the passage [James 1984:163]."

James emphasized that the importance of Rastafari was not only the rejection of official society but their creation of a new one. This comes, he says, from their being West Indians, a 'new people' who 'came into existence only three hundred years ago...." Hence, "their world is just beginning. They do not suffer from any form of defeat. That is not in their history [184:163-164]." A decade before Bob Marley made reggae the most powerful weapon for revolution in our times; James pulled the future out of the present. In the early 1960s, James saw that rasta expressed "a universal feature of contemporary life. The Rastafari are one example of the contemporary rejection of the life to which we are all submitted. The Mau-Mau of Kenya do the same. The Black Muslims of the United States are of the same brand. And for the time being we need go no further than the beatniks of the most advanced

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

countries of Western civilisation." Anywhere, anywhere out of the world", the world that they know [1984: 164]." James recognized that rasta was part of the new world society emerging from the disarray of the old [James 1984: 73-84].

Over 20 years later Honor Ford-Smith of Sistren, of the revolutionary Jamaican women's theatre collective, pointed to the emergence of a secular, new Rastafari. "The culture has influenced many who are not believers in Selassie to adopt elements of the way of life such as vegetarianism, locked hair (as is worn by the Masai warriors of Kenya), and the use of words developed within the group e.g. 'irie' - all right [Ford-Smith 1987: 314]."

Rastafari is not being treated here as a millenarian or religion phenomenon [Bakan 1990: 16, Campbell 1987] but rather as way of life which emerged when peasants were faced with land seizures and forced into cities, especially in Jamaica in the period since 1930, but also in Africa since the turn of the century. Today rasta is the expression of indigenous people fighting for their rights. It is a global cultural practice, an expression in particular of black people and especially of black women, but one which is also inclusive of radical white women and men.

New Rastafari came from the old male-identified Rastafari and its antecedents in the jubilee of emancipation from slavery. It came from radical religious movements in Jamaica in the 1800s, from Ethiopianism, Garveyism, pan-Africanism, struggles of 'the sufferers,' and from nationalist insurgency in Africa and Caribbean. It has emerged both from and against these antecedents. The new Rastafari has come from a global fightback against IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs (SAP) especially by women because SAP hits women so hard [Antrobus 1989: 26]. It has come from media globalism and the music so purveyed, from international feminisms, including the excavation of the history of women's militancy and centrality to each phase of capitalist expansion and the struggles characteristic of that phase [Mohanty et al 1991]. In sum, new forces have adapted and transformed Rastafari into a still more potent world movement.

This paper argues that a new society is emerging from the grassroots of international capitalism. At the forefront are poor black women and their allies who, by pursuing their social aspirations, embrace those of more powerful echelons of what is here called the 'hierarchy of labour power,' which includes white women, black men and white men from the exploited classes. By embracing the interests of all the exploited, black women's revolutionary practice articulates for the first time what Marx called 'the general class interest.' Such an articulation is the precondition for unity across race and gender lines, of the exploited class worldwide. The argument then is that the new society of which the new Rasta is only one element, has the practical potential to supplant and transform the contemporary world order. New Rasta's prominence derives from its capacity to express the individual's historical connection to other social forces (class, race, gender) locally and internationally. In this way, new Rasta has transformed elements of the existing global 'class in itself' into a 'class for itself.'

A full historical analysis of the rise of Rasta feminism would and include the period before the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However this treatment is limited to three periods: Because the crises of these three junctures were global, a full treatment would draw from all regions of the world. This discussion is restricted to gender in class struggles in East Africa and the Caribbean. These regions were central to the rise of Rastafari.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

The capitalist male deal: It is posited here that each arrangement among classes entails a particular form of 'the male deal.' Dauda defines the male deal as an arrangement typical of pre-capitalist societies, or those with many pre-capitalist kinship remnants, in which men agree to a kind of joint solidarity around the exchange of women. The male deal ensures access for all men to fertile women [Rubin 1975, Dauda 1992:20]. Dauda's analysis may be extended to conceptualize a capitalist male deal. A product of rigorous socialization, the capitalist male deal is a tacit, assumed, 'natural' agreement that all men will have a specific type of power in relationship to women. In general this takes the form of patriarchy in a nuclear family in which men are the heads of household.

Solidarity among men through the male deal is vital to capital first, because "all modern means of production, all classes of societies depend, for the supply of labour power, on the domestic community ... and on its modern transformation, the family, which still maintains its reproductive function although deprived of its productive ones [Meillassoux 1975:81]." Second, capital needs a male deal because it mediates class struggle by reassuring men that they have a stake in power relationships through their continued subordination of women [Dauda 1992:144]. The capitalist male deal is useful in this analysis because it conceptualizes the dynamics which capital sought to create between men and women at each historical juncture in the three periods under examination.

2. The early 20th century

East African Nyabingi

Europe and North America at the turn of the century were marked by competition among national capitals, expressed in part through the scramble for Africa and its formal parcelling out to European powers in 1885. This competition and globalization of industry spurred infrastructural investments in the third world, notably ports and railroads. The capitalist crisis of the late 19th century generated serious pressures from the European working class which could only be solved by massive emigration. In East Africa, the construction of a railroad, beginning in the 1890s from Mombasa on the Indian Ocean to Kampala inland on the shore of Lake Victoria was designed to hold the territories for British settlement. Africans responded to European contact and overrule by attacking British officials and their indigenous allies. Nyabingi was a women-centred popular movement in Uganda which led this resistance at the turn of the century [Hopkins 1970:258-336].

The Nyabingi movement, influential in southwestern Uganda from 1850 to 1950, was centred around a woman healer, Muhumusa, who was possessed by the spirit of Nyabingi, a legendary "Amazon Queen." Muhumusa organized armed resistance against German colonialists and subsequently detained by the British in Kampala, Uganda from 1913 to her death in 1945. The spirit of Nyabingi possessed mostly women, but also men, who led uprisings against the British in 1916, 1919 and 1928 among the Kiga in Kigezi, along Uganda's borders with Congo and Ruanda. British occupation involved imposing foreign African Ganda intermediaries on the egalitarian, patrilocal Kiga agriculturalists. The Ganda's exactions of land, labour, food and money for poll tax galvanized the Nyabingi movement to rebel both against European and Ganda men and win major concessions. Nyabingi was a woman-led movement against oppression of all the community but specifically of women who did the farming and food preparation and hence were directly affected by colonial demands.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

British efforts to crush Nyabingi involved criminalizing it as witchcraft through the Witchcraft Ordinance of 1912, promoting Christianity and encouraging other indigenous anti-Nyabingi cults. In labelling Nyabingi 'witchcraft' the British were resuscitating the witch burnings of 1500-1650 that were central in the move from pre-capitalist to capitalist relations in Europe. In this move, the power of women, especially over reproductive sciences, had to be crushed [Federici 1988]. Christianity produced Kiga men who replaced Ganda Agents as British intermediaries by the 1930s and who enforced colonial exactions from Kiga women and men. A capitalist male deal was struck between Christianized Kiga men and British colonialists for their mutual aggrandizement. This rise of the male deal was effective in forcing the woman-centred Nyabingi movement underground and depriving Kiga and other African peoples of their autonomy and wealth. With the emergence of colonial class relations, women suffered disempowerment to a much greater degree than men. Land loss reduced women's food self-sufficiency and trading capacities while the anti witchcraft campaign delegitimized Nyabingi women's work as healers and seers. Ironically, out of the colonial schools and churches rose male African nationalists who through a campaign against racism, challenged not the system of capitalist exploitation but the European men's exclusive privileges within it. In the Kigezi area of Uganda, church schools produced the "Twice Born," who like Nyabingi were proscribed as seditious by the British and led two revolts in the 1940s. Ultimately the nationalist men formalized a class arrangement with the departing British which included a capitalist male deal giving land ownership to men, not women and which centralized political power in the hands of men. Nyabingi remained powerful in Kigezi, Uganda throughout the 1930s, where resistance involved arson. In Jamaica in 1937 it was reported that the Nyabingi spirit moved on to Ethiopia and possessed Haile Selassie who fought Mussolini's fascist invasion.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

Jamaican roots of Rastafari

Between 1700 and 1830 British merchants and planters made tremendous profits from industrialized sugar plantations in Jamaica. African slaves provided the labour which financed British capital's leap from mercantile to industrial capitalism. While slaves such as the woman warrior Ni in Jamaica fought for territory under Maroon control, European rural populations fought land enclosures through the late 18th century. Slaves and the new European working class challenged capital through the French and Haitian revolutions at the end of the 1700s and brought forth the era of free trade and free wage labour. In this context of world ferment, Jamaican slaves negotiated more time and more land under their own control for provision grounds and 'higglering' or the marketing of their own production. In Jamaica, African women controlled free Maroon agriculture. Slave women were very much in charge of both independent agriculture and higglering. With the Sam Sharpe slave uprising and the overthrow of slavery in the 1830s women and men established a revolutionary peasantry of "Free Villages." Labour short plantations went bankrupt and were absorbed by land invasions into the revolutionary peasantry.

Fierce defense of land and other resources so seized was articulated through a militant quasi-religious 'Ethiopianism' which included Baptist sects in which women were in the majority. In the 30 years after abolition remnants of the old planter slaveholder class were joined by local merchants, in recapitalizing plantation agriculture for export crops (bananas, pimentos or allspice, coffee). Some free peasants also produced cane, bananas and other export crops profitably. As a result, by the 1860s resurgent agro-industrial capitalists were joined by some richer peasants to confront the poorer independent peasantry and a large class of unemployed and landless people. This was also a gender division as men gained access to capital and market outlets for cash crops while women were pushed off the land and denied waged work (locally and abroad) in favour of men. In 1865 Paul Bogle led the Morant Bay peasant uprising for land around the Africanist slogan "cleve to the black!" From its repression grew an even stronger Ethiopianism around Bedward (1859-1930) who in 1895 told the black poor that "Hell will be your portion if you do not rise up and crush the white men [Napier 1957: 14]." Bedward's movement constituted the vital link between the Morant war and the powerful Back to Africa mobilization of Marcus Garvey during WWI. In 1902 the early black feminist, Mrs. James McKenzie, served as secretary of the Kingston Branch of the Pan African Association. Through these movements 'the sufferers' and rural women in particular, elaborated the culture of the Free Villages.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

The struggle for land and economic independence was fuelled by the rise of Garveyism coinciding with the relative power of the Jamaican poor during the commodity boom of WWI. Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) a printer and journalist, promoted race pride, African unity and political independence through armed struggle. Pledging "One God, One Aim, One Destiny!" and "Africa for the Africans," hundreds of thousands joined the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which became the 'largest mass movement among black people this century, with 996 branches in 43 countries and over five million members [Campbell 1987:54]." Amy Ashwood-Garvey, an early black feminist, co-founded the UNIA and organized women within it from the beginning [Ford-Smith 1987:11].

The weakness of Garveyism was its all-class nationalism which focused exclusively on race. In Jamaica in August 1929 Garvey held a convention of UNIA where he countered a revolutionary class analysis by black communist, Otto Huiswoud with Garveyite pro-capitalist black nationalism and its attendant male deal. For Garvey, the "fundamental issue of life was the appeal of tribe to tribe, of observing the rule that self preservation was the first law of nature." These were the fundamental divisions of humanity not that between capital and labour, for the latter could not exist without the former. "There was an appeal closer to man than the appeal of labour. It was the appeal of one unto his own family and clan [Daily Gleaner 19 August 1929: 17 cited in Post 1987:3]."

The Garveyist male deal derived from a colonial idealization of the family promoted in the early twentieth century when capital was drawing male workers out of Jamaica. Women were supposed to stay at home and promote 'proper family life' while the "ideal of the male breadwinner justified male migration, which also acted as a brake on male unemployment locally [Ford-Smith 1987:5]." As in East Africa where by the 1930s, British Christianity produced African men who forced the Nyabingi women's defence of peasant freedom underground; Garveyism forged a link between capitalist men, black and white, at the expense of black women's historical solidarity with black men in the Free Village movement against white capital.

The male deal in both East Africa and the Caribbean emphasized race consciousness but the anti-racism insisted on a place for black men alongside white men in the capitalist system. It promised black men new precedence over women whose consequent subordination was essential to the preservation of capital's ascendancy. The rise of a black nationalist male deal set the stage for struggles emanating from the global crisis of capitalism in the 1930s.

3. Rastafari and Mau Mau: 1930s-1960s

Rastafari in Jamaica In the 1930s social conditions led some of the rural poor "to reject British overlordship by identifying positively with the Ethiopian monarch, Haile Selassie. Rastafari, and others in the Caribbean and worldwide supported Ethiopian resistance to the Italian invasion of 1935. Leonard Howell developed Rastafari through the Ethiopian World Federation's paper, the Voice of Ethiopia. Rastafari contributed to the organization and consciousness of the 1938 Jamaica labour rebellion.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

Jamaica's leftist paper *Plain Talk*, in February 1937, printed an article which claimed that "the blacks are flocking to the standard of an organisation which dwarfs all similar federations." The organization was 'Nya-Binghi,' led by Emperor Haile Selassie [Post 1978: 173]. Thereafter some Rasta began to call themselves Nyabingi or 'Nya-men,' while Rasta forums of solidarity and the drums played at them were also called Nyabingi [Campbell 1987: 160]. Jamaican rasta may have believed that the spirit of Nyabingi possessed Selassie and strengthened his fight against the Babylon of Mussolini's fascism. But the women-centred character of Nyabingi in East Africa was lost in the transfer. At Nyabingi gatherings, women were marginalized and subordinated. Rasta 'queens' could not cook if menstruating, women could not 'reason' with the 'kingmen' nor partake of the chalice (smoke marijuana). Biblical support was found for limiting rasta women's access to knowledge other than through the guidance of their 'kingmen' [Ilaloo 1981:6; Makeda 1982:15; Yawney 1983, 1987, 1989]. What interventions transformed the independent Jamaican woman of the Free Villages into a domesticated and idealized queen? The explanation suggested here is that some rasta men were inducted into a colonial male deal which privileged men at the expense of subordinated women.

Thousands of men returned to Jamaica in the 1930s when the recession ended migrant work. They demanded jobs and land from the major agricultural estates. The 1938 rebellion started in the countryside with women and men demanding "land for the landless," and striking for higher wages in agricultural work. Police fired on the rioters, and a few days later the uprising reached Kingston.

Satira Earle and Adina Spencer supported the organisation of working class women in the early labour movement [Ford-Smith 1987: 11]. To buy social peace women were pushed out of agricultural jobs and into domestic work. Although women such as Satira Earle and Adina Spencer worked to organize women in the early labour movement, their numbers were rapidly shrinking under the boot of the male deal. Between 1921 and 1943 women agricultural workers fell by almost two-thirds. At the same time the number of domestic workers, including maids and garment homeworkers, increased more than fourfold [French 1987: 21].

The colonial government's strategy for containment centred on women who, according to French [1987: 9] were to "(1) Marry a man to mind them. That way one wage would have to stretch for two or more, and jobs would not have to be found for women. (2) Stay at home to rear and service more workers for the big men to exploit - at no cost to them. (3) Accept that men should get first choice in paid work, and that women should be dependent. (4) Work for little or nothing to make big profits for the big man, since work for women was regarded as a "privilege" not a "right." Yet women were forced to work because their man's wage was usually too small to 'stretch.'" In the competition for wages, men "came to see women more and more as a threat to "their" jobs. Many joined the big men in fighting against women's right to wages [French 1987: 9]."

The Jamaica Federation of Women with a membership of 30,000 in the early 1940s, was "a structure designed to contain women's resistance and control the poor Black population as a whole [French 1987 Introduction]." Through the Federation middle and upper class women organised 150 mass weddings. Wedding rings, acquired in bulk, were sold for ten shillings "to bring them within the reach of the ordinary people [French 1987: 29]." Through the churches, media and national and local organizations, a propaganda campaign encouraged poor women "to accept the 'dignity' of marriage as a solution to their economic problems [French 1987: 29]." However, during the 1940s militant women collected the 'mass' wedding rings and

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

sold them to support women workers on strike for a democratic union [French and Ford-Smith 1987].

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

There was a resurgence of Rastafari in the 1950s with the bauxite enclosures. After the war US and Canadian capital eclipsed British capital. Alcan, Reynolds, Kaiser Bauxite, Alpart, Revere and Alcoa made Jamaica the world's largest producer of bauxite. The bauxite industry displaced thousands from rural areas and intensified unemployment. "Most of the land was purchased from small farmers, to the point where the activities of the transnationals displaced 560,000 rural Jamaicans from the countryside between 1943 and 1970 [NACLA Jan-Feb. 1981:2-8 cited in Campbell 1987:86]. Some 163,000 Jamaicans migrated to the UK and an equal number to the US and Canada between 1950 and 1968. While men went from the Caribbean abroad, women went from the countryside to the city. Jamaican rural women brought the core ideas of Rastafari with them to the urban slums. The rasta upsurge, in addition to being a grassroots male class expression, was a women's rural survival network built on the organizations of Ethiopianism, Bedward and Garvey. The beginnings of the new Rastafari was a woman-identified, revolutionary peasant ideology shaped to serve new urban demands.

In the 1953 Kenya's Mau Mau revolt was covered in the world media with newsreels showing dreadlocked forest fighters. Jamaican Rasta adopted dreadlocks. In 1954 the main Rasta paper, African Opinion (New York) carried stories of the Mau Mau struggle, Burning Spear (Kenyatta) and Dedan Kimathi. By 1963 Rasta were under serious attack with eight being killed by police in the Coral Gardens rebellion. Militant reggae music and Rasta art were combined with anti-imperialism and solidarity with liberation struggles. Rastafari, through Bob Marley's reggae, was poised to enter the world stage. Just as in the 1920s the British colonial state banned Garvey's UNIA paper, Negro World, because of its incendiary international affirmation of black independence, in the 1970s reggae and Rasta were targeted for repression. The CIA was organizing a pseudo Rasta body, the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, to diffuse Rasta culture through drug deals and thuggery [Campbell 1987:116].

Mau Mau women

Kenyan women's involvement in the Mau Mau revolt of the 1950s is an important heritage of contemporary Rastafari. Essentially the struggle was for land which had been seized by white settlers after 1903 when the railroad through the rich highlands of the Rift Valley to Uganda was completed. Here, largely with African women's labour, coffee, tea and pyrethrum produced profits for British multinationals and white settlers. By the end of WWII Africans 'squatters' lived on European farms providing wage labour while women cultivated small land allotments for food to feed their families and sell in the local markets. Other Africans had been removed by the British to reserves where they were prevented by law from producing coffee or tea in competition with the whites. On the reserves, African men who had acted as proxies for British power owned large farms. A growing African and Indian working class had unionized in Mombasa, Nairobi and other cities. Its move to link up with agricultural workers on European farms was feared by whites whose profits depended on paying very low wages or obtaining labour in exchange for allowing 'squatters' to carry on their own cultivation. In urban areas women practiced prostitution and marketed farm produce. A large contingent of demobilized African soldiers were unemployed, landless, militarily experienced and influenced by radical black US and Caribbean soldiers alongside whom Kenyans had fought in WWII.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

Mau Mau started in 1948 when women at Olenguruone agricultural settlement scheme went on strike. African women refused to participate in this terracing of the land to prevent erosion unless they first received title to the land. Their strike galvanized urban support from unions. Colonial reactions included repression which escalated until in 1952 the British imposed a state of emergency and launched the anti-Mau Mau war.

Women fought for land in many capacities within Mau Mau. Freedom fighters in the forests included women. Invariably a woman 'Seer' of the future worked directly with platoon commanders. Kimathi, the forest fighters' general, recommended the admission of literate women into the forest fighting force. Other women joined Mau Mau fighters to avoid being sold off by their fathers as wives to pro-British 'homeguards' or 'loyalists.' Women in squatter villages on European estates provided intelligence, runners, food, refuge, medical supplies and care, and at crucial seasons, refused to pick tea and coffee. Similarly women on the 'native reserves' were an integral part of the Mau Mau military wing. In the cities prostitutes used their establishments as safe houses, and provided the Mau Mau Land and Freedom Army with money, intelligence and arms. Women traders used the railroad and markets as networks of communication. The British, recognizing that success in counterinsurgency depended on cutting the link between villages and forest fighters, razed hundreds of communities and imprisoned women with their children in concentration camps. In Githunguri, the most repressive prison, women were divided into four categories depending on their degree of defiance. Most militant were the 'hardcore' women who were detailed to bury the bodies of freedom fighters hung by the British. Women in concentration camps were pressed into forced labour gangs. The British introduced a women's organization to counter the influence of Mau Mau: women who joined could be excused from forced labour. This women's organization was run by middle and upper class European women committed to enforcing Christian nuclear family values and practices on Kikuyu and other African women. Called Mandeleo ya Wanawake (progress among women) it was a vital agency in the British counterrevolution, and was fostered after independence in 1963 as the state party's official woman's organ.

The Mau Mau phase of Kenyans' struggle for land and freedom was crushed by massive military repression in the late 1950s. While Kimathi and other men in Mau Mau worked for egalitarian gender relations, the force was weakened by sexism. Then decolonization was organized so as to entrench capitalist production relations and British allies to enforce them. The male deal which accompanied this neocolonial class arrangement focused on the domestication of women. Maendeleo promoted dependence of women on husbands whom they were pressured to marry in church. It established a network of women's groups ostensibly for education in home economics and money-making craft work. But in practice Mandeleo extolled Christian virtues pertaining to the nuclear family and the subordination of wives to their husbands. Only through marriage could women get access to land which was registered in the names of men. Formal politics, though including token women locally, was an arena for men as was the protection of the judicial system. Medical, curative and spiritual activities of women were discredited and in some instances outlawed.

In the face of this tremendous defeat, Mau Mau women went underground. They kept alive their knowledge, networks and claim to the commons through indigenous women's groups, story telling and songs [Macgoye 1986, 1987]. Women persisted throughout the 1960s in seizing land, especially from farms formerly owned by white settlers. As landlessness increased, poor women were unable to find husbands through whom they could get access to land, and they migrated to the cities to work as domestics and within the expanding

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

'unrecorded economy.' Through selling food, domestic services, sex, changa (alcohol) and ganga the Mau Mau women bided their time and struggled to educate their children.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

4. New Rastafari and the struggle against structural adjustment

The Midnight Notes Collective argued in 1990 that structural adjustment programs should be understood in the context of capital's response to the breakdown of three 'class deals' [Midnight Notes 1990:3-9]. Social-democratic capital at the end of WWII offered a variety of slogans to the world proletariat: from collective bargaining and racial integration in the US, to the family social wage in the USSR, to colonial emancipation in Asia and Africa. A struggle ensued to determine the content of these slogans; but between 1965 and 1975, "proletarian initiatives transcended the limits of capital's historic possibilities...." Profits plummeted and capital went on the attack by attempting to expand through SAP. The contemporary attack involves ending communal control over the means of subsistence, seizing land for debt, weakening labour by making it mobile, opening up the former eastern bloc and thereby intensifying competition among workers and attacking reproduction through a destruction of the earthly commons. The imposition of structural adjustment programs in the third world over the past 20 years has been characterized as a war against the poor, a process of recolonization involving the enclosure of remaining commons by capital [Adams 1991, George 1992]. SAP is an international attempt by capital to replace the three collapsed class deals of the post WWII period with a more effective one. The third world bourgeoisie and state are enjoined to restructure economies to export cash crops and use the foreign exchange to pay debts; while giving foreign capital renewed access to local resources. This deepening of the relationship of unequal exchange is fundamentally an attack on poor women who are being made to do more unpaid labour, the costs of which are revealed in statistics on the health and nutritional status of such women [Elson 1989:68]. SAP seeks to make of women a 'fourth world' whose exploitation is intended to subsidize the greater efficiency of capital and thereby its recovery from the current crisis of accumulation [Mies 1988]. The sexist backlash against women is part of the male deal to aid capital in implementing its 'women as the last colony' strategy. The struggles of the poor, and in particular of women, at the end of the 20th century have been struggles against the class and male deals encompassed by SAP [Trager and Osinulu 1991]. Popular movements including the new Rasta may be understood as organizational responses to structural adjustment.

Kenya

In a 1978 a Kenyan peasant who had fought with Mau Mau fighter observed that "The land, which we expected to be distributed free to the poor and landless, was grabbed by the former homeguards and the big politicians." In his view, "most of the beneficiaries from our glorious struggle are the former collaborators, and not the legitimate freedom fighters." Threatened with acute poverty, the Nakuru farmer concluded that "if the situation continues to worsen, our children will be forced to fight - to fight for the same things we fought for [Mau Mau peasant, Nakuru District, Kenya, 5 September 1978 in Kinyatti 1986: 131."

The children of Mau Mau freedom fighters have been carrying on a silent class struggle. Survival strategies of women are ingenious and sometimes heroic, as in the Nairobi Muoroto squatters' fight against removal in May 1990. Indigenous women's groups are used as a defence against the exploitative 'women and development' programs which SAP seeks to implement through Maendeleo. Their collectivity echoes the fundamental survival networks created by Mau Mau women during the 1950s. In the late 1980s when Maendeleo was incorporated into the ruling party, women voted massively with their feet. Evidence of an autonomous rising of women began to appear. Early in 1990 throughout Kenya rural women defied the law by uprooting coffee trees. Coffee, after tourism, is Kenya's major source of

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

foreign exchange. SAP seeks to expand production and export despite a global glut and falling prices. But women who do the work have responded to the corrupt state buying monopoly's refusal to pay by destroying valuable trees. In the place of coffee, they plant maize, a basic food crop and an immediate means through which to keep their children alive. In December 1991 the Group of Seven met in Paris to organize a freeze on the disbursement of development aid funds to the Kenyan government pending improvements in payment practices by the coffee authority. The repressive single party political system was judged to be thoroughly corrupt and human rights abuses had, according OECD, had gotten out of hand. The actions of peasant women in ripping out coffee trees and thereby undermining an important element in SAP's success met with almost immediate response at the international level.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

In cutting off external funds to the Moi KANU government, the Group of Seven gave a major boost to the multiclass pro-democracy mobilization. It includes a broad front of women, 3,000 of whom held a conference in Nairobi in February 1992 to plan strategies. On that day the fence enclosing a proposed construction site on Uhuru Park in the city centre was torn down, signalling the victory of the Greenbelt Movement in blocking KANU plans to build a skyscraper. The Greenbelt Movement is an internationalist, grassroots network of women which includes people described here as the new Rastafari. It brings together women in several African countries not only to plant trees but to defend the land on which they grow. Led by Kenyan physicist and feminist, Wangari Mathai, the movement carries forward the ecology politics of Olengurone women who insisted on title to land before they would reclaim it. Direct action such as uprooting coffee trees, combines with a compelling spiritualist philosophy to make the Greenbelt Movement a vehicle for women's defence of the environment and their rights to resources. As such it constitutes one of the more startling responses to the dislocations of SAP. As part of the pro-democracy mobilization in Kenya it mounted fundamental challenges to the capitalist class deal and the KANU regime in 1992.

The new rasta of East Africa consists of dozens of autonomous groups which above all provide for survival. They combine study, artistic creation, childcare, economic activities, community service and politics. These are part of a larger and older rasta network with links to London, Lagos, Caribbean and elsewhere. In Nairobi feminist rasta women work as maids, vegetable sellers, traders, seamstresses and prostitutes. They are influenced by Christianity, the indigenous Kikuyu religion and many strands of spiritualism. Political reggae is of central importance. Marley's lyrics and those of other artists are studied carefully in Saturday afternoon 'reasonings' in slum yards. Marley's teachings are virtual primers for those seeking to develop their capacity to speak English. While extreme repression prevents the display of any rasta symbolism or the Garveyite colours of red, gold and green; phrases such as "beat down babylon ghetto child," may be seen traced in the dust on a city bus. In 1991 the tenth anniversary of Marley's death was celebrated by dozens of commemorations in Nairobi's clubs, bars, parks and other meeting places. Marley's power, one Ruandese dread DJ explained, is proportionate to political repression: "Marley says for us what we cant say." Concert videos of Marley and other reggae performers are accompanied by DJ narrations in Kiswahili, Kikuyu and other languages for the benefit of those who don't 'hear' Patwah or English. The tremendous popularity of Tracy Chapman is based on the revolutionary clarity of her lyrics, but also on the fact that, as in Nyabingi, she is said to be "Bob Marley come back from the dead."

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

In February 1992 Kenyan women demonstrated against the imprisonment of their menfolk. When harassed by the police, several country women threw off their clothes in outrage. Despite strict censorship, the government press published photographs of the protesting women which galvanized the society. The photos evoked memories of the 1922 Thuku riots when, in an attempt to release the imprisoned nationalist, women charged armed police, exposing their bodies, and Mary Muthoni Myanjiru was shot dead [Mugo 1978:213]. They echoed the courage of women under Mau Mau who effectively used stripping naked, "the worst curse one can expect," against the police [Likimani 1985:71, Turner 1991]. In 1992 Nairobi women responded to police attacks with a hunger strike, demanding the release of political prisoners and an end to one party rule.

The new Rastafari culture has merged with the rising of Kenyan women and poor men which is the popular democratic movement of the 1990s. The fearless, tempered Kenyan women are unearthing the tactics of their Mau Mau mothers and Nyabingi grandmothers. Allied with them are Rastafari, marginalized and organized by SAP. Together they constitute the new Rasta which nevertheless is opposed by sexist, fundamentalist elements within such bodies as the Church of the Living God. This militant movement's leader lays at the feet of women most of the ills of society. Using Mau Mau and indigenous Kikuyu imagery, and wearing dreadlocks, he advocates the reintroduction of clitoridectomy as a means of reimposing the pre-capitalist male deal. Imbued with an ideological mix of Marley, Chapman, anti-apartheid and environmentalism, Kenya's new Rastafari are contending with these contradictions.

New Rasta: from the Caribbean to the world

Third world feminisms have emerged from the simultaneous limitations of male controlled state policy and liberation movement policy on the one hand, and expanding internationalism on the other. This historical trajectory roots women's movements of today in Nyabingi and Mau Mau, and it traces the trans-globalization of Rastafari.

This internationalization was fostered by women reggae artists especially after Bob Marley's death in 1981 and the continuation of his work by members of the 'I-Threes,' Judy Mowatt ('Black Woman') and Rita Marley. By the late 1980s, feminist reggae was exploding forth from third world capitals and from the metropolises to be joined by a veritable flood of black feminist expression in the full range of media. The magnitude of this power is illustrated by the April 1990 Mandela concert broadcast live from London by CNN when the largest ever television audience encompassing fully one third of humanity saw Tracy Chapman in dreads singing "Let us all be free! Poor people gonna rise up and take their share, Talking about a revolution going on." In seeking to explain Chapman's popularity, Brownhill observed that because she is a black woman, "at the bottom of the worldwide hierarchy of power," Chapman speaks for all exploited people: "She is the oppressed singing about oppression. She is poor singing about poverty, she is black singing about racism, she is a woman singing about battering, she is a lesbian singing about love, and most poignant, she is an ordinary person singing about revolution. ...And herein lies the unprecedented revolutionary popularity of Tracy Chapman [Brownhill 1989:36, 44]."

Transformational women's networks which flourished in the 1980s include WAND (Women and Development Unit of the Extra-Mural Department, University of the West Indies), the Arab Women's Solidarity Association in Cairo, DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), and the Greenbelt Movement in Africa [Sen and Grown 1984, Antrobus 1989], India's Chipko movement and similar initiatives in virtually every country. Women are

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

defending the environment and their very lives by saying no to ecological destruction by capitalist firms locked into a 'grow or die' dynamic. These feminist movements are by no means limited to Rastafari. But the new Rasta includes detailed philosophies and practices founded in the defense of land, markets and women's autonomy. This history catapults the new Rasta to the forefront to today's global resource defence movements.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

Gender relations, as they have been shaped by the struggles against SAP, are most obviously marked by women's economic autonomy. This autonomy involves women seeking their own form of financial independence instead of seeking to construct themselves so as to be well placed in a competition with other women for the protection of a man. New Rasta's economic autonomy for women also involves the refusal by women to support men. For example, absent among new rasta women are those 'baby mothers' who, under threat of violence, must support financially and through the provision of domestic and sexual services, their childrens' fathers. Contemporary reggae and calypso include lyrics which celebrate women's insistence on such autonomy. This change undermines capital's male deal in favour of egalitarian relations among women and men.

Of utmost importance is the fact that in the Caribbean and other ex-slave societies of the new world, indigenous male deals did not exist because the total population was uprooted from their indigenous traditional political economies. The experience of slavery further broke up the functioning of old world precapitalist male deals. The newness of Caribbean society has fostered that region's tremendous creativity. Many elements of social relations had to be created anew from the ultra-advanced capitalist factory system, the sugar plantation and the sharp black-white division between the classes of African slave and European master. Much has been written about how this history gave rise to the new world's creativity with regard to class struggle [James 1984:218]. The astonishing universalism of the Caribbean's contributions to art and to resolving race and class contradictions is rooted in the absence of indigenous pre-capitalist social relations in a highly modern region. We are only now beginning to appreciate the implications of the absence of pre-capitalist male deals for gender relations. Among these are the relative autonomy of Caribbean women and the evolution of a revolutionary alternative to the capitalist male deal which we see now in the new Rasta.

5. Conclusion

The new capitalist deal embodied in SAP requires a new male deal whereby men agree to extract more unpaid work from women under conditions less costly to capital. The difficulty faced by capital is that the prerequisites required by exploited men in order to realize this male deal - jobs, a 'family wage,' a positive future for their children, a liveable environment are not there. They cannot be delivered as is demonstrated by the breakdown of the post WWII capitalist deals. Consequently, the male deal is based increasingly on rhetoric and symbolism which constructs manhood on models akin to the machine, especially the war machine, devoid of human feeling and tending toward extremes of misogyny, racism and competitive violence. This symbolic male deal tends toward ever greater extremes of sexism and the dehumanization of women. Pornography and militarism have contributed to deracinating a generation of lumpen male youth. But they have also provoked a search for alternative constructions of manhood. The male deal is no longer universal. Independent men are breaking away and expressing solidarity with women's struggles against the new capitalist deal that is SAP. This fissure in the cross-class, cross-race male alliance plus the objective impossibility of realizing the SAP-linked male deal constitute a serious crisis for capital. How, other than through the sexist discipline of men, can SAP extract more profits from women? As some men in the exploited classes refuse to strike downward at women, substituting power over them for power over their own lives, the beliefs and behaviours of other men caught up in the male deal come under sharper scrutiny. Capital's monolithic definition of manhood is fractured. The protection which capital has hitherto enjoyed is dissolving. With this continuing dissolution of the male deal, the unity of exploited women and men of all races can only increase at the expense of the power of capital. Sharper polarization

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

must characterize the emergence of the new society of which the new rastafari is but one expression.

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

The new Rastafari has emerged through a process whereby black feminisms have garnered the weight and media access necessary to enable them to appropriate Rastafari and redefine its content. This has also been a process of rediscovery of the history of women in struggle and an excavation of gender, class and race relations. While the theories and practices of struggle for the new society are much broader than the new Rastafari, and exist separate from it, they are to a remarkable extent expressed globally through the cultural movement of Rasta, making it a potent social force for the 21st century.

Bibliography

Adams, Patricia, 1991. *Odious debts: loose lending, corruption and the third world's environmental legacy*, London and Toronto: Earthscan.

Antrobus, Peggy. 1989. "Women and Development: An Alternative Analysis." *Development*, 1, pp. 26-28.

Bakan, Abigail B., 1990. *Ideology and class conflict in Jamaica: the politics of rebellion*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Brownhill, Leigh, 1989. "Poor people gonna rise up: revolutionary popular music," in Terisa E. Turner, et al, editors, *Revolutionary popular culture*, New York and Amherst, International Oil Working Group, pp. 33-48.

Campbell, Horace, 1987. *Rasta and resistance: from Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*, Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.

Dauda, Carol L., 1992. 'Yan Tatsine and the male deal: Islam, gender and class struggle in Northern Nigeria, unpublished MA thesis, Guelph, Ontario: University of Guelph.

Elson, Diane, 1989. "How is structural adjustment affecting women?" *Development*, 1, pp. 67-74.

Federici, Silvia, 1988. "The great witch hunt," *Maine Scholar University of Maine, Bangor*, 1, 1, pp. 31-52.

French, Joan, 1987. *Wid dis ring*, Kingston, Jamaica: Sistren Research.

Furedi, Frank, 1989. *The Mau Mau war in perspective*, Nairobi: London: James Currey.

French, Joan and Honor Ford-Smith, 1987. "Women's work and organisation in Jamaica, 1990-1944," unpublished research study for the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague,

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

Netherlands.

George, Susan, 1992. *The debt boomerang: how third world debt harms us all*, Boulder: Westview Press. Hopkins, Elizabeth, 1970. "The Nyabingi cult of southwestern Uganda," in Robert I. Rotberg and Ali A. Mazrui, *Protest and power in Black Africa*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 258-336.

Ilaloo, Sister. 1981. "Rastawoman as equal," *Yard Roots* 1, pp. 5-7. James, C.L.R. 1984 (1964). "Rastafari at home and abroad," in *At the rendezvous of victory*, London: Allison & Busby, pp. 163-165; "Presence of Blacks in the Caribbean and its impact on culture, (1975) pp. 218-235; "New society: new people," (original: 1958) pp. 73-84.

Kanogo, Tabitha, 1989. *Squatters and the roots of Mau Mau 1905-1963*, London: James Currey. Kinyatti, Maina wa, editor, 1986. *Kimathi's letters*, Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya and London: ZED Press.

Likimani, Muthoni, 1985. *Passbook number F.47927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya*, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

Makeda, Lee, 1982. "What is a Rastawoman?" *Caribbean Times*, June, p. 15. Meillassoux, Claude, 1975. *Maids, meals and money: capitalism and the domestic community*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Midnight Notes Collective, "Introduction to the new enclosures," in *Midnight Notes*, 10, Special issue on New Enclosures, Jamaica Plain, MA, pp. 1-9.

Mies, Maria, 1988. *Women, the last colony*, London: Zed Press. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres, editors, 1991. *Third world women and the politics of feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Macgoye, Marjorie Oludhe, 1986. *Coming to birth*, 1987. *The present moment*, Nairobi: Heinemann. Mugo, Micere, 1978. "The role of women in the struggle for freedom," in Achola Pala, Thelma Awori and Abigail Krystal, editors, *The participation of women in Kenya society*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, pp. 210-219.

NACLA Report on the Americas, 1981. "Going foreign - causes of Jamaican migration, pp. 2 8.

Napier, Robert, 1957. "The first arrest of Bedward," *Jamaica Historical Society Bulletin*, II, 1, March 1957. Post, Ken, 1978. *Arise ye starvelings: the Jamaican labour rebellion of 1938 and its*

INTRODUCTION TO RASTA OLD AND NEW

aftermath, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Presley, Cora Ann, 1988. "The Mau Mau rebellion, Kikuyu women and social change," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 22, 3, 502-527.

Rubin, Gayle, 1975. "The traffic in women: notes on the 'political economy' of sex," in Rayna R. Reiter, editor, *Toward an anthropology of women*, New York: Monthly Review Press.

Sen, Gita and Caren Grown. 1987. "Development Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Sistren with Honor Ford-Smith, 1987. *Lionheart Gal: life stories of Jamaican women*, Toronto: Sister Vision.

Trager, Lillian and Clara Osinulu, "New women's organizations in Nigeria: one response to structural adjustment," in Christina H. Gladwin, editor, *Structural adjustment and African women farmers*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991, pp. 339-358.

Turner, Terisa E., 1991. "Women's uprisings against the Nigerian oil industry in the 1980s," New York: International Oil Working Group.

Wanjau, Gakaara wa, 1988. *Mau Mau author in detention*, Nairobi: Heinemann.

White, Luise, 1990. "Separating the men from the boys: constructions of gender, sexuality, and terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939-1959," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23, 1, pp. 1-25.

Wipper, Audrey, 1975. "The Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization - the co-optation of leadership," *African Studies Review* 18, no. 3: 329-355.

Yawney, Carole D., 1983. "Rastafarian sistren by the rivers of Babylon," *Canadian Women's Studies* 5:2, pp. 73-75; 1987. "Moving with the dawtas of Rastafari: from myth to reality," *El Caribe y America Latina*, pp. 193-199; 1989. "To grow a daughter: cultural liberation and the dynamics of oppression in Jamaica," in A. Miles and G. Finn, editors, *Feminism: from pressure to politics*, Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989.

Send mail to [Terisa Turner](#)