JAH CHILDREN.
The Experience of Rastafari Children in South Africa as Members of a Minority Group. With Particular Reference to Communities in the Former Cape Province

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Of
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by

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This thesis is an ethnography of Rastafari childhood in the former Cape Province, South Africa, through the eyes of both parents and children. If children are a ‘muted group’, then what are the identity formation implications for “double-muted” groups, the children of ethnic minorities whose voices are not heard? Rasta parents’ experience of the struggle, ie. the opposition to apartheid, has shaped the Rastafari chant of ‘equal rights’ and ‘justice’ into a distinctly South African form of protest and resistance. Their childhood experiences have resulted in a desire to provide a better life for their children, using Rastafari as a vehicle. This is expressed in a continuation of the struggle that was started during apartheid, in the Rasta ideology children grow up learning.

The Rasta child has become a contested body in this struggle. The South African Government, through policy, has a mandate to protect the child, and legislature exists to do so in accordance with international law. However, as child-raising differs phenomenally from culture to culture, these goals on the part of the State start infringing upon the rights and freedoms of minorities to raise their children according to their own cultural goals. This study examines the tension between Rastafari and government with regards to child raising, specifically looking at the following main points of contestation: public health, public schools and policy/legislation; in order to examine how Rasta children negotiate their identity in the face of these conflicting messages and struggles.

Their identity can be influenced by three main groups, the Rasta family they grow up in; school; and multi-media. What these children choose to accept or reject in their worldview is moderated by their own agency. This study shows that this tension results in a new generation of Rastafari children, who are strongly grounded in an identity as Rastafari and take pride in this identity. It also illustrates how Rastafari are impacting on and changing government policy through resistance. Their successes in challenging the state on the grounds of multiculturalism and religious freedom, has helped in the attainment of a sense of dignity.
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PREFACE

The power of music lies in its ability to express what people are feeling with the greatest eloquence. Melancholy, joy, frustration, shame or shared struggles - what words could never capture, music enraptures, due to its ability to evoke raw human emotion - a shared space amongst all. Those who share a love for the same music find common ground on previously disputed territory, and wherever there are people, music spreads.

Reggae is a particularly powerful example of this medium, which overrides class, ethnic and identity differences and appeals to people from all walks of life. Reggae is a style of music usually identified by its distinctive and rhythmic heartbeat drumming. Part of its association with Rastafari is due to the popularisation of Bob Marley and the Wailers in the mainstream. Rastafari is a cultural and religious movement that began in Jamaica in the 1930s. It is named after Ras Tafari (Duke Tafari), the title Haille Selassie I held before he was coronated Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930. Rastafari believe that Selassie I is God, and that all brethren and sistren should reconnect with their African roots.

As Cathy Stanley (2002) writes in her moving preface, “Rastafarian music is music of the people, of the ghettos and the yards, and eventually of the urban areas of England and the United States” (p. xiv). My first introduction to Rastafari came through listening to Bob Marley in school in South Africa, and like many others listening to reggae, I knew little to nothing about the religion, or culture, of Rastas, other than the superficial, external symbols of dreads, ganja, and the colours – red, yellow, green. Later, when living in London from 1996 to 1998, I met some yardies, and even attended some reggae squat parties, but the significance and deep religiosity of a Rasta livity still escaped me. At the time it amazed me that just because some of them were from the same continent as me, I was welcomed as a “Sister from Africa South”. The reasons I liked the music were the messages of anarchy, the passion, and ultimately, the distinctive reggae drumbeat. I loved the style for similar reasons, as well as the visual appeal - being passionate about photography. And between the style and the beat, I failed to see the heart, so to speak.

On my return to South Africa, I met my husband, who introduced me to some of the principles underlying Rastafari, such as consciousness, livity, and reasoning, which he had learned from many Rasta brethren over the years. By the time I started researching Rastafari anthropologically, in February 2000, I had spent more time meeting Rasta families in their homes, rather than just individuals at reggae parties. I was therefore familiar with livity (Rasta lifestyle), and finally understood more of the heart-icle aspects of Rastafari than the external symbolism and popular music. As a researcher, the richness of Rasta culture fascinated me; as an artist, the appeal lay in its vibrancy and

1 Urban Rastas.
2 Lifestyle.
3 For example, “I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations, Neither are you here to live up to mine, yeah, I don't owe no one no obligation, No I don't mean none, so everything is fine, fine” (Peter Tosh. I Am That I Am).
courage in the face of insurmountable odds; but it was as a friend that the injustice of how most Rastas are treated by mainstream society, hit home.

One week, during a visit, we might learn that the family had been raided the day before. In the middle of the night, there would be pounding on the door, and a rough, disembodied voice would demand entry. With blinding lights, guns and dogs, chaotic forms would enter and search – occasionally breaking things, and usually leaving a scene of devastation and a fatherless household behind. When the small dog tried to protect his family, the same voice would threaten to shoot it. We’d be told “the rascals took my daddy”, and that no search warrant was shown. Sometimes the father would be beaten, other times, held for a few days without food or water. Recourse to the law was not regarded as an option, by this and other Rasta families. In this instance, the ‘faceless voice’ belonged to a policeman, and any complaint would have to be lodged with the police in the first instance. Many Rastafari have encountered corrupt and violent police, and as a result they have no faith in the justice system. On another occasion we’d be told in hushed tones how “this sister and brother are on the run now” as the police want the brother for ganja, and the social workers want to take away the children.

For us, blinking in the light of a shiny new constitution which promised a “new” democratic South Africa, this was behaviour reminiscent of apartheid, and as such, hypocritical. Police brutality was supposed to be a thing of the past. Whereas before people were persecuted and afforded minimum human rights on the basis of colour, it seemed “okay” to deny Rastas their human rights in the new dispensation as they were “criminals” in the eyes of the law. Smoking ganja is criminalized, and despite South Africa’s multicultural policies and forward-thinking constitution, Rastas are viewed, and treated as criminals for using their sacred herb. The stigma of being a “criminal” seems to strip people of their humanity. They are “de-humanised” by their supposed actions against civil society. After all, as one narcotics officer I interviewed on a radio show told me, “the law is the law”, regardless of culture, religion or individual belief.

The picture of this particular Rasta family being held up as criminals would have been laughable, due to their attitude to crime and the “sins of Babylon” in general, but it wasn’t, as their lives were under constant strain and threat of arrest and imprisonment. This experience highlighted the fact that the gap between class in South Africa was still huge. Basic human rights are only respected and observed if you are from a particular stratum of society - who can afford to take action if you are abused, and are treated more fairly as a result. The reactions of more privileged others when I told them these stories ranged from a sense of disbelief - “no, that doesn’t happen anymore, they must have done something to deserve that”; to abrupt dismissal and rejection - “what are you hanging around with those people anyway, they don’t wash, they’re filthy dagga-rookers (cannabis smokers)”; yet these “dirty-filthies” were not that different to other South African families I had met. They cared for their children, worked, played, and laughed, had dreams realised and broken, and in general made the best of whatever situation they found themselves in.

And Rastafari helped them do so. Apartheid (as much as it has become a bit of a mantra for South Africans – met with much eye-rolling and sighing), has undeniably left behind a wake of poverty,
inequality, and a spiritual and moral void. A large portion of the population feel little self-worth in the face of the odds stacked against them, and Rastafari, to my eyes, seemed to be having an overwhelmingly positive effect on those who practised the livity. There were several questions burning in my mind that I wanted answered. How many Rasta were in South Africa? Who were they? What made them want to follow Rastafari when there were already so many cultures active in South Africa? And what made them such popular targets for the police when so much violent crime is rife in the country? Despite my fascination, anthropologically, there seemed to be little interest in this group or its impact in South Africa. Information was limited and attitudes negative.

So in 2000, when I had to choose a research topic as part of the requirements for my Honours degree in anthropology, I decided to try answer some of these questions through my own research. This was in part naively motivated by the idea that if others could understand, and view Rastafari as I had, they would no longer vilify Rasta as a threat. And that anthropological research and cross-cultural knowledge could perhaps in some small degree alleviate suffering in a country so torn apart by enforced “difference”. As the use of ganja obviously facilitated much of the state harassment, and as I was personally interested in ethnobotany, this was a logical place to start, and so it was that I focused on the ideology and healing strategies of the South African Rastafari (Herbst: 2000).

My research soon developed further into an advocacy role with the media coverage of a Rasta, Gareth Prince, who was being denied access to the bar to practise as a lawyer due to his use of ganja. More accurately, this was as he would not swear not to use ganja, on the grounds of his constitutional rights to freedom of religion. I contacted Brother Gareth, a telephone call that has resulted in a standing friendship with multiple meetings over the past few years. Shortly after our first meeting, his lawyer contacted me to ask if they could use my research in their court case. I agreed, glad that my research could benefit Rastafari positively, despite being one of the “young anthropologists” Nancy Scheper-Hughes astutely refers to as sensitised by the writings of Foucault...on power/knowledge...to think of ethnography and fieldwork as unwarranted intrusions in the lives of vulnerable, threatened peoples” (1992, p. 27).

The use of my article (Bain: 2002), led to my Honours dissertation (Herbst: 2000) being used in the Constitutional Court where the case was debated twice, due to a lack of South African research on specifically, Rastafari in South Africa. Journalists inevitably contacted me for newspaper, magazine and radio interviews, and friends jokingly referred me to as the local “Rasta-rologist”. The pressures of being involved in advocacy can be frightening. Suddenly, this “young anthropologist” realised that whatever she wrote could be construed either positively or negatively depending on a turn of phrase. These writings thus had the potential to be ignored completely as “subjective” or might contribute to long-term imprisonment depending on what was said, and more importantly, how it was said.

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4 This was a question which still remains unanswered, except through estimates.
5 This could be criticised as a melodramatic statement. However, during the course of this research my husband and I experienced a raid ourselves, following an “anonymous complaint” about dagga on the property. Answering the door to nine fully armed police (including a woman), in five vans, with dogs, brought home what Rastas experience daily. It was especially noteworthy that such a force would be sent after widespread media coverage about the police force not having enough petrol to send patrols to assist people who called them; and several reports about police setting dogs on people unnecessarily. I thus became extremely cautious about coding the Rastafari-related data I had on my computer, especially names and locations, in the event of seizure.
The ethics of my fieldwork - how I interacted in people’s lives and how I presented those lives, thus became intertwined with my research, and I had to carefully consider my varying roles both within, and out of the Rasta communities. This introductory Honours research proved invaluable in assessing reactions to stigmatised communities, as well as how the “stigma” of the criminalized ganja/Rasta connection could be transferred to the researcher. Thus when I first stated I would be researching Rastafari, my departmental head concernedly enquired, “what if you get arrested?” Although most anthropologists were genuinely interested in the research aspect, flippant remarks such as “hey sister, gimme some ganja” (at a national anthropological conference), and “oh, so you can get a degree these days smoking it up with the Rastas” were still common. This showed me that one’s prejudices can override the most vigorous training in objectivity. It also gave me a vital insight into the stigmatisation of Rasta and ganja.

The interest in Rasta childhood grew as I became interested in the concept of the child anthropologically. In addition, I noted that Rasta children were experiencing discrimination, for example being excluded from school because of their dreadlocks. Ganja was also a heated point of contestation with children as young as two having spent a night in a cell, and one couple “on the run” with their children to avoid arrest. I started to wonder what other forms of discrimination these children experienced due to their beliefs, and thus explored these and related themes for this study. Despite their personal histories and often materially poor conditions, the Rastafari presented in this thesis are not victims and South Africa is not a complete pariah of evil. Rastas, civil society and the State have impacted on each other with varying degrees of force and coercion. These children and their families negotiate an identity as South Africans and Rastafari in a globalising world. Jah Children, then, is an attempt to map the new generation of Rastas, those born into a country very different from that of their parents in some aspects, yet still the same in others.

This research was funded in part by a scholarship from the National Research Foundation (NRF), and a Rhodes University Masters Degree Scholarship. In addition I am grateful to the following people and organisations for financial assistance:
NUFFIC, Diana Gibson from University of the Western Cape (UWC), Anita Hardon, and Ria Reis from the University of Amsterdam helped facilitate a DELTA (Dutch-Education: Learning on Top-Level Abroad) Scholarship, and the necessary visas for me to attend the “Children, Health & Well-being” course at the University of Amsterdam. This proved to be extremely informative. The South Africa Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD), and Valerie Møller of the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) assisted me in obtaining a SANPAD Travel Grant to present a paper on this research at the “Children in their Places” conference at Brunel University, London. Rose Boswell provided me with a research assistantship. Otter Information Technology funded the website www.rasta.co.za, the visual ethnography and the cd-rom. Albaynet is currently hosting www.rasta.co.za.
There are many others I would personally like to acknowledge - firstly, my supervisors, Rose Boswell, and Robin Palmer for their helpful comments and insights throughout, especially in the final stages of the thesis. I have made many friends amongst *In I* during the course of this research, and I would like to thank them for their assistance and patience through all my lengthy questions. The long *reasoning* sessions were invaluable to this study, and extremely enlightening. Without the Rastafari who allowed me to enter their lives, this research would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my family, especially my husband, Jon - who accompanied me on my research when he had time, acted as a sounding board for my impassioned (and lengthy) theorising, and helped out with many cups of tea and proofreading in the final stages. For the sake of brevity, I have kept my acknowledgments short although many people contributed to the final product in the form of comments over the years, and encouragement. To all these people, *give thanks – I appreci-love* the support!
Now didn't JAH create the earth, And to the waters did he give birth. He divided the waters from the land, rivers for land, and seas for sand.

Then said he, let there be light. And he made the darkness bright. Greater lights to rule by day, Lesser lights to rule by night.

Nothing or no one can change them, adjust or even rearrange them. These creations were here from the beginning So accept them for what they're worth.

For all good things in life are free, like liberty for you and for me. As the freedom of a raging storm, let the little children be born.

Wanted children, crying from the backbone of their fathers. Wanted children longin' for the bosom of their mothers (rep.)

And so JAH created man Male and female according to his plan. All creatures both great and small and in pairs he create them all.

To man and woman he gave all dominion, over all creatures that live on creation. To multiply and replenish the earth, by coming together and so give birth.

So who are you to try them, price them and sell them. Who are you to slave them and to kill them before them born.

Who are you to hunt them down, run them down and gun them down. Who are you to judge them and to put them to shame and scorn.

Bunny Wailer: “Wanted Children”
'Wanted Children', the song appearing on the previous page, captures the complex relationship between Rastafari, Jah, and beliefs about children, in the poetry of its lyrics. Bunny Wailer's poignant cry: “wanted children, crying from the backbone of their fathers, wanted children longin’ for the bosom of their mothers” reflects a comment a young Rasta sister spontaneously made to me, when I asked her about childhood. Already five months pregnant with her fourth child Sister Jolie burst out, “Sister, you know what bothers me. That these Babylon people just gooi weg hulle kinders (throw away their children) like they're rubbish. That's not right, children, children are everything - they must be treated right!” This impassioned outburst followed a spate of media coverage about ‘baby rape’ and abandoned children in South Africa. Having been a “wanted child” herself, Sister Sara had strong feelings about abuse of children., which her Rasta principles now accentuated.

Her son, Menelik¹, an exuberant four year old with a mass of shoulder-length dreads; huge brown eyes; and a mischievous grin skipped into the room. Born into Rastafari, he was the first of the tricolour-clad Jah Children I was to meet and greet over the course of three years and just one of many doorways into understanding the complexities of Rastafari, both locally in South Africa, and globally. Eventually I encountered over 40 families, and documented the lives of 30 Rasta children of varying ages, in South Africa; specifically looking at how these children negotiate their identity in varying spheres, spaces and influences.

Using anthropological methods, this study examines the concept of childhood in Rastafari, and how Rastafari children grow up with a sense of identity as Rasta in the face of state intervention, and social stigma. “Jah Children”, the title of this study refers to all the “children” of Jah (God). Like the expression “children of Israel”, which is also used by Rastas, it covers adults as well as children in Rastafari. Despite the belief that “we are all born Rasta”, as Sister Sara’s husband phrased it, a person born into Rasta, one who has not “eaten of flesh or lived Babylon livity” is deemed a true or pure Rasta.

In South Africa, the pure Rastas are literally children, or young adults, who have been guided and not “sinned Babylon sins”. According to Rastafari views, they are spiritually stronger and not as polluted as one who has grown up in Babylon eating flesh and drinking during youth. This does not negate the influence and importance of ones and ones (individuals) who have found Rasta, for example the parents - “the leaders who have suffered many things during the struggle [apartheid]”, the formerly non-Rasta pioneers of this relatively recent religious minority in South Africa. Rather, it points to a continuation of the struggle, in this case a struggle for justice, through a new generation of Rastafari.

The tension between the South African government and Rastafari largely revolves around their differing views of what is in “the best interest of the child”, views which are politically, socially and culturally influenced and packaged. The South African child is thus a crucial concept and focus in this

¹ All names changed to protect identities.
² This refers to the strict dietary and behavioural restrictions Rastas follow, which includes avoidance of meat, salt, alcohol, cigarettes and the avoidance of immoral behaviour such as swearing, promiscuity and theft.
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This dissertation is thus not just about any child making up South Africa’s patch-worked fabric – it is about the red, golden and green children of Rastafari and how they experience growing up as South African Rastas. Rasta children however, cannot be viewed in isolation, and need to be looked at through multiple lenses. In the telling of these children’s stories, the experiences of their parents cannot be ignored, as these parents grew up during apartheid and were the founders of Rastafari in this country. The culturally appropriate ital rearing of “pure” Rastas, children like Menelik, is an important goal of this minority. Thus I propose that the preservation of the family, specifically raising a child with a strong sense of Rasta morals and values, is an important contributing factor to the spread of Rastafari in South Africa, as the ethnography will show. The difficult childhoods many of these parents personally experienced enforce this determination, as the opening story shows.

OBJECTIVE AND AIMS OF RESEARCH

The manifest objective of this research is to understand the motivations behind Rasta child raising practises in South Africa; and to examine Rasta children’s identity formation in relation to both their home environment and Babylon. However, because to date there has been no study done on the South African Rastafari family, and little written on Rastafari in this country (Kroll: 2000; Yawney: 2002; Delle Donne: 2000, 2003; Herbst: 2000), and I have found few family or child-orientated studies in the international literature on Rastafari other than Yawney (1988) and Rowe (1998), an underlying objective of the project is to make an ethnographic contribution to Rastafarian studies in the South African case, specifically the family context from the point of view of children and parenting. As Rastafari in South Africa as elsewhere exist as minorities within the larger society I became increasingly aware of the difficult relationship between Rastafari and the state, particularly since becoming involved in advocacy. Notable in the contest between South African Rastafari and the state, linked to ganja use but also transcending it, is the position of the Rasta child in South Africa.

Although classed as a developing country, South Africa is an industrial society that achieved democracy in 1994. Rastas are citizens as well as Rastafari and, being for the most part poor and lacking in an institutional infrastructure of their own, depend on state institutions for education, health care, and similar services. In addition, those who wish to explore alternative options are forbidden to by legislation that protects the rights of the child. Rastas may regard the world beyond Rastafari as Babylon, but they and their children have no option but to engage with that world. Thus this dissertation is more than a contribution to the scarce literature on Rasta child-rearing beliefs and

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3 An image of the South African child as starving, needy, in desperate need of assistance and welfare. While there is no denying that many South African children do have such needs, the image of the welfare child as disseminated by government and media internationally has come to represent a particular stereotyped and heavily commodified view of the South African child.

4 See Appendix 3: United Nations Declaration & Convention On The Rights Of The Child
practices; it is a study of the tension between outside intervention and local Rasta’s goal to “grow” their children according to their own precepts and its consequences for both Rasta communities and state policy in a multicultural society. Accordingly, the object of research has several facets and each one has multiple aims.

Preliminary research showed that Rastafari belief systems draw a distinction between Zion and Babylon as good and evil, and are anti-systemisation, and anti-capitalist. In addition, Rastafari are trying to raise their children independent of the Babylon system. Research aims from the perspective of the Rastafarian families are:

- To discover what influenced these South Africans to become Rastafari, and why they want their children to be Rasta.
- To show how and to what extent parents’ achieve their goal of “growing a child” outside of Babylon influences.
- To reveal how, in the South African context, Rasta children interpret Rastafari symbolism and belief systems.

At another level, this dissertation also examines the relationship between the South African Government and Rastafari, specifically with regards to the body of the Rasta child. Research aims from this perspective include the following:

- To discover who is ultimately responsible for the Rasta child’s body – the government, the parents, or the child?
- To reveal the main points of contestation about the child’s body.
- To show how is this tension being resolved and played out on the ground, rather than in theory.
- More generally, to discuss to what extent current policy and legislation supports minorities such as Rastafari.

A final objective is to study how the Rasta child/youth creates a unique conceptual map or worldview under the seemingly dichotomous influences of both Babylon and Zion. Specific aims include:

- To investigate how the youth reconcile Rasta lifeways with an increasingly intrusive and technological environment.
- To ascertain what the children/youth think about their schools and the education system with special attention to any clash with Rasta belief systems.
- To assess the extent to which the youth have internalised their childhood teachings from both a Rasta and South African perspective.
- Finally, to compare the view of the Babylon-Zion relationship as between Rasta-born (the youth) and the converts to Rastafari (the parents).
This research was multi-sited, and took place in three communities within the former Cape Province, constituting an area of 660,780 km², covering the South West region of South Africa. After the elections in 1994, this area was split into three provinces: the Northern, Eastern, and Western Cape (see Fig. 1 above). Demographically, 27.3 percent of South Africa’s population of 40,583,573 people lives in the research area, made up of the Northern, Eastern and Western Cape (Stats SA: 2002, p. 6, 7). This is the area shown in grey in the above map, which encompasses 54.2 percent of South Africa (ibid., p. 3).

Each of the locations I conducted fieldwork in is situated in a separate province. The names I have given these locations for the purposes of this research are: Irietown, Livity Square, and Freeland. Each location represents a different type of community and the unit of analysis is the household. Further details on these communities and fieldwork are given in Chapter Two.

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5 The map of South Africa was scanned from Stats SA (2002). The demographics appearing on the map was added, also using information from Stats SA.

6 These statistics are taken from the 1996 Census. Results from the 2001 census are only available from 2003.

7 There are multiple Rasta communities and families living within these provinces, as well as throughout the rest of South Africa so the geographical location of my research participants cannot be identified from this information. I am unable to give exact field sites in order to protect the identity of participants. Rasta communities are easily identifiable, even within larger locations and experience police harassment frequently.
Self-reflexivity

For me, writing ethnography is an act whereby all the lives you’ve lived - and those you want to, come together as one. In other words, an anthropologist will always view culture though a tinted lens made up of her own impressions, expectations and lived experiences. Much has been written about subjectivity and reflexivity in the field (Sax: 1998, Bowlin & Stromberg: 1997, Rabinow: 1986, Hastrup: 1995, Tyler: 1986, Clifford: 1986). Tyler (1986), likens the ideal ethnography to a collaged newspaper - made up of multiple “voices” and perspectives. Thus the ethnographer will add to the “fieldwork account” if she includes details of dialogue and any interpersonal confrontations and difficulties experienced in the field (Clifford: 1986, p. 16).

In this study, I have included these voices wherever possible whilst acknowledging that this dialogue has been chosen by me, not my co-reasoners - a term I borrow from Cathy Stanley⁸ (2002). Most of this dialogue has been boxed for ease of reference but should not be seen as an aside, as the voices in this text make up a crucial component of the final product. I have also used Rasta terms throughout this dissertation, rather than translations, attempting to be as faithful to their words as possible, whilst realising that how one wants to be seen, is not necessarily who one is. My involvement in some communities has been deep – I submerged myself in a world different to my own, leaving my world changed, as all experiences will ultimately change us. Leaving that world, and looking back objectively is a crucial part of the anthropological process, one where living culture ends and writing culture begins.

Before entering these communities I was admittedly somewhat nervous. Other than the accepted dangers of township living - the ghetto, as Rastas referred to it, I had been told by various people not to conduct this research. “Don’t do it – they don’t want you there”, “they hate white people”, “they hate women” were some of the warnings I received. Other than one white Rasta who wasn’t living in the ghetto, but in relative economic ease, who stuck his finger in my face and yelled “woman, stop your studies” (whilst still participating in the research), I encountered warmth and welcome from the communities. As Geertz (1973) has criticised, the anthropological gaze can be hostile, and Rastafari can be equally hostile to researchers and reporters who do not have their own interests at heart for they have to protect their families. Despite this, I found a similar experience to Scheper-Hughes (1992) in that some Rastas wanted their voices to be heard, saying – “no, don’t write about that (ganja), write about this!” This was an opportunity for their experiences to be documented.

There were however, still a number of factors that could have impacted on my acceptance into these communities, and required careful negotiation. Firstly, due to the criminalisation of ganja use in South Africa, outsiders are obviously viewed with suspicion and caution, as they potentially offer a very real and present danger for most Rastafari. Pimps, people who report to narcotics officers, are paid from R2000⁹ upwards to report on those using or selling ganja.

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⁸ This is as the word informant has negative connotations within Rastafari, an informant being a person who pimps to the police.
⁹ Personal communication from multiple sources.
Secondly, Rasta is to a large extent anti-establishment, or what they refer to as anti-systemisation. As such, an attempt to categorise, organise and study their way of life academically is often rejected. However, as will be shown, since the ANC government has come into power Rastafari has been increasingly making use of legal systems, the media, and academic research in order to prove their case for religious and cultural determination. Although members of several communities have questioned me as to why an outsider’s knowledge should be more valid than that of the research the Rasta themselves have been gathering, the use of my research findings for previous advocacy cases meant I was supported and encouraged by the majority of the Rastafari I encountered (Supreme Court of Appeal: 2000; Constitutional Court: 2002, p. 89, 96, 97).

In addition, as popular interest grows in Rastafari, the media will often film, interview and report on Rasta lifestyle. In the past, Rastas have had many encounters with the media where they have been misquoted, and misrepresented, leading to reluctance in some to be interviewed at all (See Chapter Six). In some cases communities thought I was a journalist until I was properly introduced. My pale skin, and gender was another potential obstacle to entering the research communities. Although Rastafari refer to themselves as the “rainbow nation under Jah”, racial tensions do exist, as several sources revealed during the course of this research. It was explained to me that in South Africa, it was a precedent that “the black man does the works”. As an aspect of Rasta is as a black consciousness movement, many white members felt they continually had to prove themselves. As a young, white, woman conducting research on my own often without my husband, I was transgressing cultural, and gender boundaries and notions of what constitutes “woman’s work” and “men’s work”. Advocacy work was also traditionally seen as a men’s role whereby men would leave their communities to mek a trod (Yawney: 1994b). (Gender roles in Rastafari are discussed further in Chapter One.)

Whilst conducting research I would usually wear a long skirt, ensure my shoulders were covered, and covered my head according to Rasta gender prescriptions. As a researcher, I am of the opinion shared by Bernard (1995) that my presence and acceptance in any community is not to be taken for granted. As such, I tried to ensure that I adhered to certain cultural norms such as covering my crown, so as not to antagonise people unduly with my presence. I also ensured that I explained my presence and motivations as a researcher to avoid any confusion that I might be Rasta myself; a narc; a journalist; social worker; or government official; and, in order to reassure actors of my intentions.

As a result, I was usually introduced to other Rastas as “Sista Pixi”, who’s doing a study at the University. The sister isn’t Rasta, but she’s mos Rasta-conscious.” In other words, the coded message

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10 Myself, the researcher as outsider.
11 Into the history and growth of Rastafari in South Africa.
12 One white sister had been following Rastafari for three decades, yet still encountered resistance and suspicion from some black elders.
13 A Rasta term used to indicate travel, specifically travel with the intent purposes of spreading the belief in Selassie I’s divinity and theocratic principles.
14 Narcotics officer.
15 An informant to the police.
16 A nickname.
was, that despite the affiliation to Babylon through a University, it was nevertheless safe to talk to me as I was conscious of and sympathetic to Rasta culture and lifestyle, consciousness being an important concept in Rastafari with a complex set of meanings associated to it which will be explored further in Chapter One’s overview of Rastafari livity.17

Although I initially wanted to provide the selection of children with a disposable camera each in order to document and photograph what they feel is important to their lives I was not able to obtain the funding to do so.18 In its place, I relied on participant-observation, specifically where infants were concerned, and on semi-structured and non-focused interviews with older children and youths.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This ethnography of Rasta childhood can be situated within two main themes: Rastafari; and the anthropology of the child. Rastafari itself can fall under many academic umbrellas, as will be detailed below. In addition to these, several key concepts related to globalisation, multiculturalism, ethnicity, religion, the body-politic and minorities are important to this dissertation.

RASTAFARI

As the wave of Rastafari reached all shores, scholars have reported on the phenomenon as it spread. The literature on Rastafari is equally scattered throughout several journals and disciplines ranging from politics and religion to anthropology and sociology. These texts can be extremely difficult to obtain as they are often only found in local publications such as Caribbean Review. I have thus obtained as much of the literature as was available to me, whilst still acknowledging a few unattainable core texts. One of these texts is important to mention, as it was the first official report on Rastafari, commissioned by the Jamaican government in 1960.19 The team consisted of Michael Smith, Roy Augier and Rex Nettleford, from the University College of West Indies.

Kitzinger (1966), an anthropologist, had written two articles on the Rastafari brethren in Jamaica where she notes “there has occurred during the last few years an evolution of religious doctrine, so that it is now markedly different” (p. 36) from the official report. Rather than emphasising repatriation, emancipation was now the goal. Taking her background material from Simpson (1955), she introduced her paper as follows

The Rastafarians have been a social problem for Jamaica ever since 1933, when one of their earliest leaders, Howell, sold 5000 postcards of the Emperor Haille Selassie at a shilling each making them out to be passports to Ethiopia (Kitzinger: 1966, p. 33)

She continued to outline their often violent relationship with the police, where they were “flogged and forcibly shaved” (ibid, p. 32). The police were referred to as Babylon, and the Jamaican Government as Sodom and Gomorrah (p. 32). 30 years later, followers of Rastafari were in “the promised land”, and South African Rastas were experiencing the same personal violations, where their locks where

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17 Lifestyle.

18 This strategy of allowing children to photograph and film their own worlds was observed when I attended the Children in their Places Conference at Brunel University, London.

19 This is one of the texts I was unable to obtain but which is necessary to note. Any referenced texts which I did not personally obtain will be clearly noted.

20 Only one of which is detailed here, 1966.
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shaved by police (Oosthuizen: 1990). Post-apartheid, the police are still referred to as Babylon, and the South African government represents Sodom and Gomorrah, but the political and the religious divisions within Rastafari that Kitzinger records (p. 35), have drawn closer together.

Kitzinger’s observations are extremely useful as the principles she outlines which Jamaican Rastafari followed then are almost identical to those offered by South African Rastas in this study. One of the most important themes she introduces is that of “educating the foetus”. For example, she states

Education does not start with schooling, nor even in infancy. “The child can be educated inside the womb – the way the mother and father live” – a highly sophisticated concept of parental influence.

the parents must first live the lives that their parents seek” (p. 38).

This principle is explored in depth in Chapter Three. What differs is the local interpretation and the flexible way in which these principles are followed depending on economic and other circumstances.

Simpson (1955), a sociologist, identifies six Rastafari themes: the wickedness of the white man; the superiority of the black man; Jamaica’s false prophets; the hopelessness of the Jamaican situation for black men; revenge; Africa, the homeland is heaven and the only hope for the black man (p. 169). This paper is useful as it outlines early Rastafari themes that resonate with current South African black consciousness rhetoric over 50 years later. However, the paper is brief and has not been used to great extent in this study. During apartheid these themes were applicable to the South African situation: the ‘black man’ was oppressed by the ‘white man’; and false prophets (the police and preachers) supported the apartheid system. Post-apartheid, these themes have developed into a rich tapestry of symbolism and ideology. Although preachers and police are still the false prophets - preachers especially for being part of a “vampire religion” (Johnson-Hill: 1996, p. 17), Rastafari have started engaging the system in a sophisticated and politicised form of protest, using the same legislation which has previously harassed them, to ensure their rights are upheld.

Simpson (1955) also described Rastafari as a Messianic cult (p. 167). The most well known substantial early texts on Rastafari were Leonard Barrett (1977), Horace Campbell (1985), Dick Hebdige (1979), and Cashmore’s Rastaman (1979, 1983). Both sociologists, Barrett (1979, 1982) and Cashmore credited Rastafari with being a Messianic Millenarian movement, one which sought complete political change and heaven on Earth through a divine intervention, or religious fire as heralded in Revelations. I do not subscribe to the idea of Rastafari being a “cult”, due to the negative connotations that are packaged with the term. The description of Rastafari as a Messianic Millenarian movement is also indicative of a sensationalised understanding of Rastafari as a ‘dangerous’ movement that was popular in early studies on Rastafari\(^\text{21}\).

Whilst Barrett and Campbell\(^\text{22}\) concern themselves mostly with the origins and development of the phenomenon in Jamaica, Cashmore (1983) traces the movement of Rasta from its start in Jamaica to

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\(^{21}\) Although the terms Messianic and Millenarian refer specifically to a belief in the second coming of Christ and are not necessarily ‘dangerous’, Rastafari was seen as a dangerous threat to political stability. When it was referred to in popular society as messianic or millenarian, there was a more derogatory connotation to the terms than when used in academic circles.

\(^{22}\) A political scientist.
Britain, highlighting the shared socio-economic conditions and sense of persecution by black people in both countries as a motivating factor for its popularity. A large part of his argument links to the idea that the friction with government crystallised a stronger sense of identity, and that the identification with Africa created a shared goal for a new black culture.

Participation in the movement linked its members with their fatherland and in so doing provided them with a nucleus of a new sense of selfhood or social identity based not in England or the West Indies but on Africa (p. 235). Ras Tafari... was a movement of counter-acculturation, the process of trying to eliminate the influences of the dominant white society and develop a distinct and separate culture (p. 242).

Cashmore (1983) and Campbell (1985) were consulted the most out of these scholars, especially for the comprehensive historical detail given about the origins and spread of Rastafari from Jamaica to England.

Hebdige (1979), reported on Rastafari as black British subculture, “the visual iconography of black Jamaican street style” (p. 29) influencing the post-war British working class youth to bring the world punk. Thus he saw British youth culture as partly a “succession of differential responses to the black immigrant presence in Britain from the 1950s onwards” (p. 29).

Although Hebdige is looking at punk counterculture, this text is extremely relevant as it introduces the idea of Rastafari symbols as holding capital. In this case, the rebellious spirit and struggle against Babylon, the experience of sufferation, trials and tribulations as expressed through reggae, became transplanted as a countercultural style.

Somewhere between Trenchtown and Ladbroke Grove, the cult of Rastafari had become a 'style': an expressive combination of 'locks', of khaki camouflage and 'weed' which proclaimed unequivocally the alienation felt by many young Britons (p. 36)

However, although Hebdige's theories about style as related to class are interesting and relevant, he was only referred to briefly as he was writing about punk counterculture within a British context and the influence of reggae on for example ska.

Watson (1974) at the time of writing refers to “Ras-Tafarianism” as “unique to Jamaica” (p. 331), requiring a “utilization of the Sociological concepts of class, status situation, life chances and political struggle” in order to be fully understood. Since then there has been an increase in isolated papers from multiple disciplines looking at Rastafari within a local context, however, not many are anthropological in origin, and are mostly in the fields of sociology (Kebede: 2001, Kabede: 1998); politics (Smith: 1994); and religion. Whilst I found the multi-disciplinary papers interesting, I longed for more anthropological texts on Rastafari, which I later found in Homiak (2000) and Yawney (1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1999, 2002).

With the exception of two contemporary scholars, Yawney and Homiak, little sustained ethnography exists on Rastafari. Yawney and Homiak have been researching Rastafari for the last three decades.

23 This is as the Queen declared this to be legal in the 1960s. Many people flocked to the United Kingdom in search of a more prosperous life (Cashmore: 1983)
24 I will refer to subculture as counterculture in this dissertation.
25 A punk style of music that is influenced by a reggae drumbeat. An example of such a band would be Sublime.
Due to the length of time and commitment they have made to research Rastafari, they have a deep understanding of the movement globally in its local forms, as well as a respect for Rastafari. They set an example of how to fulfil a role as researcher, and advocate, whilst still remaining sensitive to Rasta’s emic view of themselves; and allowing Rasta feedback and interpretations to find a voice in their work. Rather than attempting to classify within bounded walls, they trace the movement in its varying forms globally and comment on these forms contextually (1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1999). For these reasons, I have used Yawney (1988, 1994b, 1994b, 1995, 1999, 2002) extensively.

This study fits into a growing body of South African research. South Africa has always been in the Rasta conscience due to its discriminatory practises during apartheid, which has contributed to its image as a nexus embodying Babylon and oppression for the black man. However, large-scale Rasta communities have not been documented in South Africa until about 1990, with Oosthuizen’s unpublished thesis entitled “Rastafarianism”. This looked generally at Rasta as a religious movement in South Africa.

Whilst Campbell (1985) refers to South Africa a few times in his introduction to Ethiopianism (as a precursor to Rastafari), he does not specifically explore Rastafari in its local form. Rather he views “the growing Apartheid“ in South Africa as part of a number of evils in Africa that inspired the cry “Africa for the Africans”, soon to be appropriated by the Pan-African Movement (p. 49). Some of the main “evils” echoed Simpson’s (1955) discoveries that Rastas considered the ‘white man’, preachers and police as evil due to their treatment of Africans under colonialism and slavery. South Africa’s situation of legitimated discrimination and violence against ‘non-whites’ raised the ire of people globally. South Africa thus became a political rallying point – whilst apartheid flourished, Africans elsewhere could not think of themselves as free.

Elsewhere he explains how the concept of a free Africa became symbolic of emancipation in other countries. South Africa’s policy of apartheid was well publicised as an example of how Africans were mistreated in the symbolic homeland. As such South Africa was an obvious country for Rastafari internationally to focus their attention, to the extent that “when the South Africans exploded a nuclear device in September 1979 to intimidate the freedom fighters, Marley sang ‘have no fear for atomic energy for none a dem can stop de time’ [Redemption Song]” (ibid, p. 148). In addition, both Bob and Rita Marley gave their support for South Africa in their newspaper, Survival, saying

> Now they [Zimbabwe] got what they want do we want more? ‘Yes’, the freedom of South Africa. So Africa unite, unite, unite... Zimbabwe now, South Africa next. When all Africa free, all black people free (p. 147).

Other songs written by reggae artists about the South African republic were War, by Bob Marley, and Give me Hope Johanna, by Eddie Grant. After the first democratic elections in 1994, Rastafari became more visible, however links between South African Rastafari and brethren globally had existed previous to that. Yawney (2002), who has been conducting research in Rastafari in South Africa for a number of years, has discovered many such links, one being a relationship between Rastafari in

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26 I found it difficult to obtain any of Homiak’s work, whereas I read have several of Yawney’s papers.
27 Unfortunately I discovered this unpublished thesis too late to be of use in this study.
Kimberley, South Africa and those in Colon, Panama in 1920 (p. 2) through the Holy Piby: The Blackman’s Bible. This text had been introduced to Sol Plaatje, South African activist and member of the South African Native National Congress, by its author, Shepherd Robert Athlyi Rogers, and a church was eventually formed in Kimberley based on the Holy Piby teachings (p.2-3). By now, Rogers had travelled to Colon with the Holy Piby, which found its way to Jamaica via the Reverend Charles Goodridge, where Leonard Howell obtained it (p. 3) and started preaching Ras Tafari teachings.


Kroll (2000), a historical anthropologist, focuses specifically on South African Bushdoctors in the Cape, Rastafari alternative healers who use indigenous healing practises rather than primary healthcare. He shows how these Rastas practically make use of indigenous roots and herbs as part of their ideology of ital livity and maps their local interpretations of Rastafari. The use of roots and herbs is not restricted to Rastafari and are also used extensively by coloureds in South Africa (Ferreira: 1996).

Kroll (2000) made similar discoveries to this study about the ‘dispossessed’ coloured identity and how South African Rastafari are predominantly coloured. The concept of coloured identity in South Africa is important for this study as the majority of the co-reasoners were coloured - a marginalised identity which has been described as follows

Being coloured means being the privileged black and the ‘not quite white’ person. It means a distinction between being ‘sleek’ or kroes haired [smooth or curly haired], and between being kris (Christian) or slams (a derogatory term for Muslim). Being coloured is about living an identity clouded in sexualised shame and associated with drunkeness and jollity (Erasmus: 2001).

Rastafari seems to appeal to a coloured identity more than any other, as will be argued further in Chapter One, possibly because it provides a space where one can feel spiritually empowered, proud of the kroes hair which matts into dreadlocks and accepted in a religion which supports the oppressed and provides a framework for coping. Geographically, this space becomes what Delle Donne (2000) terms a “spiritual or mythic geography” (p. 2).

Delle Donne (ibid.), a researcher on religion, explores the spatial paradigm between Babylon and Zion. As she explains
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 (p. 1).

She convincingly argues that the Rasta body is a site of conflict containing elements of both Babylon and Zion. The struggle between these opposing paradigms highlights “the body as a social construct implicated within a complex set of power relations involving both Babylon and Zion” (p. 20).

Delle Donne’s framework is extremely pertinent for this study especially as the move to a democratic government in South Africa’s recent history has involved the globe. South Africa has been a focal point for emancipation for some time, with Rastafari missionaries from Jamaica and the United Kingdom making a trud to spread Rastafari livy (Yawney: 1994b, 2002). Rastafari then are still carrying Rita Marley’s cry of “when all Africa free, all black people free”. Until they are living in Zion - able to practise their religion without fear of arrest, their bodies are used to carry symbols of protest; dreadlocks, the ganja and I-speak. Delle Donne’s framework is thus used throughout this study.

I extend the metaphor of Babylon to include the State. The South African government is often referred to as a demon-ocracy by Rastas. These Rastas allege that although government claims to consult ones and ones about policy, they do not operate in a transparent manner. I extend Delle Donne’s (2000) concept of the Rasta body politic to the Rasta child and I propose that this child has become an even more heated site of power contestation.

This is as the State has a mandate to protect “the child” - a global mission spearheaded by UNICEF, who annually publishes The State of the World’s Children (2003). This image of what Christensen (2000) refers to as the “vulnerable child” is as much a social construct as the adult Rasta body. Coming from the poles of Babylon, this image of the child is diametrically opposed to the Rasta view of what I have termed the “symbolically pure” child.

Thus the body is a contested site in this study in three ways, as an adult Rasta’s body, as well as a child’s and as will be shown, a youth’s. As several scholars have argued, the Rastafari body is a politicised space, which contests its position in society through dreadlocks, bright colours, and the use of ganja (Delle Donne: 2000; Campbell: 1985, Hebdige: 1979; Kroll: 2000).

**THE CHILD’S BODY**

The child’s body, as argued by Prout (2000); James (2000), and Christensen (2000) is an equally contested site, revolving around the familiar debate of nature or nurture. Children have often been seen as the product of socialisation, as growing into culture, rather than having a unique culture of their own, which is just as valid as that of the adult. Increasingly, focus has moved to “reconstituting children as social actors in the interpretation, negotiation and utilization of their bodies. Entailing a shift in emphasis from seeing children as the outcomes of society...this [highlights] the ways in which children are also agents, participants shaping, as well as being shaped by, society” (Prout: 2000, p. 2).
As James (2000) outlines, children become defined by their bodies due to adults' focus on their physical growth however, while parents may monitor their child's development in terms of percentile growth charts and advice about childhood norms from medical practitioners, it is through their more mundane, everyday interactions and social interactions with each other that children develop both a consciousness of the self as an individual and as an individual child. And for those whose bodies differ from the norm, there is, in addition, the potential for an emerging acute self-consciousness (p. 27).

Within this study, Rastafari children’s parents are not preoccupied with growth; although the children do experience the attempted regulation of their bodies in school (Simpson: 2000). Rather the development of the child is assessed by how wise she is, in other words, how she behaves according to a Rasta livity. The Rasta child’s sense of self is as different from the norm - this is embodied in her through her dreadlocks. However, this does not produce an acute self-consciousness - as will be shown, these children feel pride in their difference, pride at being marked as chosen. Any teasing or stigma is an indication of the validity of their status, and they have a variety of strategies to deal with this in the classroom, or when they are in Babylon.

If one refers to Banks (1995), Rastafari can be regarded as an ethnic minority. Rastas share common territory, have a common culture, feel a sense of communal suffering, consider themselves to be 'one race under Jah', share religious beliefs, and are often coloured. Thus, an important part of the research process will be examining the theoretical space of the Rastafari participants, in other words, to what extent the group forms a socio-cultural movement, a socio-political movement, a religion, or an ethnic minority; and how the children create or form their identities based on these ideas of place and space.

As will be demonstrated, learning, and the attainment of consciousness through the process of reasoning, facilitates and encourages the learning of international and local black history, languages, literature and development through peer-group discussions. The Rasta child then grows up in this environment, his parents giving him additional tutoring in Rasta livity as described in Chapter Four. This comprises one aspect of an influence in identity formation, as can be seen in the diagram below.

![Figure 2. Diagram Showing The Main Spheres Of Influence On A Rasta Child's Identity Formation.](image-url)
The second major influence in a child’s life is school; not just the teaching, but also the environment, the child’s peers, and the child’s after-school activities. Chapter Five examines the school influence on identity formation from all those perspectives. Rather than interviewing teachers, principals, and observing school behaviour28 I asked the Rasta child’s opinion on school and present some vignettes from the answers I received. Some of the questions included how she is treated there, her likes and dislikes of the educational system, and what her favourite activities were. In addition, the parents were consulted as to the legal difficulties they encountered attempting to enrol their children, and which strategies they used to combat this.

A third influence is that of the media, or multi-media; which includes newspapers, magazines, comics, tv, music, radio, adverts and posters. It is virtually impossible to remove ourselves from marketing. Advertising is everywhere we look, and often includes images of taboos in Rastafari such as alcohol, cigarettes, public nudity - especially of women, and increasingly, images of Rasta. This topic will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

The most important aspect of identity acquisition to consider is the actor himself. The Rasta child is the gatekeeper in the diagram above (Fig. 2) and can choose to accept or reject aspects of the influences she is exposed to. Her sense of agency is the ultimate guide to her own unique identity. However, legislature can force both parents’ and child’s hand in that there are specific guidelines laid out according to norms of childcare which clash with Rasta principles.

For example, Rasta principles try to avoid the use of chemicals and primary health care, especially with regards to vaccinations. Whilst Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child “recognise[s] the right of the child to the attainment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health”, 24.2 b and c state an “emphasis on the development of primary health care”, and 24.3 advocates “abolishing traditional health practises prejudicial to the health of children”. It is thus important to consider how the child’s body is constructed in government policy.

The ‘Welfare’ Child: The State of South Africa’s Children

This research aims to analyse to what extent state policy and legislation aimed at improving the lives of South African children aids or hampers the cultural development of Rastafari children. Current legislation on children as it stands is often contrary to traditional or religious beliefs and behaviour (Alston, Parker & Seymour:1992; Ncube:1998). Similarly, media and contemporary representation of Rastas are often inaccurate and misleading. How does the child cope with the mixed messages from global society, versus the teachings of her parents? It also aims to explore how both children and parent Rastas negotiate adherence to their doctrines whilst living in an increasingly technological and computerised age, a sign which, according to many is heralded in the Book of Revelations as the end of the world as we know it.

28 This would be an extremely valuable exercise, however within the time frame and budget of the project it was not possible. This chapter deals with Rasta parents, Rasta community schools, and the Rasta child’s sense of identity through extensive interviews with the child and his/her parents.

The State Parties to the present Convention shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in this Convention to each child... irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

This is near to impossible if the state does not know of, recognise or understand the above criteria as related to the child. Recently cases regarding Rastafari religion and culture have reached both the constitutional court and the South African media (Bantam, 2001a&b) and have shown a lack of information about Rastafari in South Africa by South African academics and legislators.29

Children form ‘the other’ much as any other (Van der Geest: 1996). The image of the South African child through the public lens usually takes the form of a black street child, as was shown on the first page of this introduction. The word children, is usually accompanied by a specific view of the child as desperate, alone, and on the verge of death. Television adverts at the time of writing up depicted black and white shots of street children finding one of their members dead on the street, followed by the caption “Help Keep Street Children Off Glue” in childish writing (Pretoria Shelter); a malnourished child squatting down trying to cook a meal for his younger siblings - a representation of the many households headed by children due to the AIDS epidemic (SA Govt), and sick and crying children with no access to medication (UNICEF). Newspaper headlines construe South African children in similar terms, crying - “Suffer, Little Children” (Reynolds: 2002) and “Prioritise the Children” (Streak: 2001).

As Thomas (2000) asks

In a world in which childhood has increasingly been constructed in ‘welfare’ terms, and in which ‘welfare’ decisions are increasingly individualised, a primary measure of society’s valuations of children as subjects is the extent to which they are enabled to take a part in decisions about their own welfare, wherever they live. If they cannot be part of that process, how on earth can they be a part of the economy or of the polity? (p. 3).

South African children born into Rastafari grow up in an environment, which seeks to distance itself from Babylon or ‘the system’. Babylon represents apartheid type thinking, which these Rastas see as subjugative and reminiscent of slavery. However, as children born into the twenty-first century and officially governed by South African laws they are required to enrol in government schools, have inoculations against childhood diseases, and are in danger of being removed from their parent’s care for ‘drug-related’ reasons. The government insists on monitoring the welfare of its citizens, and in doing so, maintains power and control over the body-politic.

The Anthropology Of The Child: Who Is The Child And Where Can She Be Found?

Charlotte Hardman (1973) spearheaded the search for adequate theory on childhood by asking “can there be an anthropology of the child?”, followed by questioning

What approach could be taken? How can we interpret children’s games and their oral traditions? How could children be thought of, and how do they classify or think about the world? What difference does age make? What have other people said about children? (Hardman, C. 1973:1).

29 Here I am particularly referring to the afore-mentioned Gareth Prince case.
Since then, anthropologists have been trying to find ways of studying children that include the child as an active participant in her cultural life, rather than as a passive ‘vessel’ to be filled with cultural knowledge (Esterhuyse: 2001; Christenson & James: 2000; Stegeman: 1997; Caputo:1995). This interest is multi-disciplinary and focused on the rights and voice of the child as an individual, implying that the cultural experience of a child will not necessarily concur with that of an adult (Stephens: 1995; Lewis & Lindsay:2000; Graue & Walsh: 1998; Gottlieb: 2000; Toren: 2000).

Caputo (1995) traces the study of children’s culture in the social sciences, as well as anthropologically, and shows that not only have children occupied a marginalized position in that they are seen as culturally and biologically ‘incomplete’ adults, they have also occupied a silent space in which others purport to speak for them. She refers to this as “double marginalisation”, a term which is useful when considering the children of already stigmatised and marginalized groups such as Rastafari. As she states

> From their relative position of powerlessness, they have been kept silent as well. The situation points to not only the double marginalisation experienced by children, but forces one to question the kinds of power structures that are intertwined with the production of anthropological knowledge (Caputo: ibid, p. 23).

She further criticises psychological and sociological literature on the child as perpetuating the model that children are passive receptors of adult culture rather than being “actively involved in the production of their own social worlds” (p.29). This leads to “the question of the temporal dimension of the way in which the category ‘child’ continues to be constructed” (p. 30). In other words, look at the child as in the present, not in terms of “who are you going to be when you grow up”? This is not to say that the child’s ambitions are not important. For instance, in this study, many children wanted to be lawyers - an indication of events in the environment around them. Caputo’s comments ring especially true in Rastafari where children’s life worlds are made up of township influences, school, town, and the media, as well as their communities. In this environment with its multiple stimuli, “one adult culture” does not exist, and even Rastafari are made up from varying ethnic groups and identities.

While I acknowledge the importance of granting agency to children, including my Rasta subjects, for the purposes of this study I do not subscribe to the notion that children can be isolated from their family contexts, even for heuristic purposes. Thus the substantive chapters of this study are infused with “the voice of the child” (gleaned from interviews, vignettes, discussions with older children and participant-observation among infants and toddlers) but this is not a specifically child-centred study as it describes the experiences of the children and youths in Rastafari, both historically and socially. In other words, the childhood apartheid experiences of the parents are relevant to the childhood worlds of the new generation of Rastas (Reynolds: 1996; Jones: 1993), who construct their identities according to both past and present experiences30.

As LeVine et al. (1994) demonstrate in their multidisciplinary treatment of cross-cultural childcare, most parents try to ensure their children are equipped for survival in their particular cultural environment and that this is not universally consistent. Cultures across the globe have specific notions of what

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30 This is a distinctly Rasta practise whereby the past is expressed as part of the present.
constitutes ‘normal’ childcare; and base their decisions about good parenting, and how a well-developed and socialised child should act according to their own cultural frameworks and experience. LeVine et al. (1994) compare the child care practises of the Gusii in Kenya to middle class white Americans and propose that maternal care is largely dictated by cultural goals, “In their view, the two societies have sharply different cultural goals, which in turn are dictated by historical experience in the environment in which each group has lived” (xiii). LeVine et al. (ibid) describe a framework for the comparative analysis of child care which links adaptive processes such as subsistence, reproduction, communication, and social regulation to the afore-mentioned culturally defined goals of child care at varying population-levels (Table 1.1. p. 10-15). Thus “a description of child care in any human population must begin with how these adaptive functions are socially and culturally organised in the local environment of the child” (p. 13).

Gottlieb (2000) points out that despite the growth of anthropological literature “on the cultural construction of childhood and youth and their active renegotiation of cultural life, infants [still] occupy a marginalized place... in that literature” (p. 121). Two notable exceptions offered are that of Hewlett (1991) and LeVine et al (1994). She attributes this to six primary causes. Firstly, the lack of memory on the part of anthropologists of their own infancy, and the fact that many fieldworkers do not have children themselves, are seen as deterrents to researching infants. Infants are not usually seen as being anthropologically or theoretically approachable as a subject matter (Gottlieb: 2000, p.123-124). Secondly, an infant is commonly perceived as lacking agency, a perception which until Hardman (1973), was also applied to children. Gottlieb (2000) also points out infant proximity to women, still considered a “muted” group as attributing to the lack of literature (p. 124). Similarly, a baby’s seeming inability to communicate coherently or have rationality, and its ‘leaks’ make it difficult to come up with theoretical models (p. 125-127).

While Gottlieb’s criticisms are valid to a large extent, within the few years since this article was published, there has been an increase in childhood studies which take into account infancy (Gottlieb, 1998; Hewlett: 1991). One criticism which I challenge is being unable to research infants without being a parent, as it assumes that the majority of people have little to no contact with the “leaks” of infants. In my own case, having grown up as the eldest cousin of ten, and having au paired in Britain, I have had a lot of experience with such “leaks” and am familiar with topics such as child illness, pregnancy woes, and other maternal issues through having both family and close friends experience this.

In addition, I feel that not having the responsibility of having to care for my own children, I can devote a lot more time to research. I am also fortunate in that infants and young children respond well to me - on my occasional visits to past research sites, I am invariably greeted by hordes of children yelling “Pixi, its Pixi”, before climbing on me. I thus feel that although experiencing pregnancy firsthand would add an important dimension to infant and child research, it also might make an objective reading of a situation difficult as most parents have varying personal views about childraising. As Kavapula reports (1993) she found it difficult to deal with what she considered as excessive beating in Tongaan childraising practises. It is important to define exactly what is meant by infancy, as both the starting and end points of infancy are variable cross-culturally (Gottlieb: 2000, p. 122-123). As outlined
previously, for the purposes of this dissertation, an infant is defined as being between the ages of birth and one year old.

Although this is not a comparative study, it is important that the Rasta family and child are viewed in the context of a Rastafarian culture and not in terms of a Western paradigm, and the framework is therefore useful. However, this framework can also be somewhat limiting - it doesn't take into account political/religious motivations which influence child care, nor does it consider variability within a global community with extremely fluid borders as is the case with Rasta. This then brings us back to the issues raised in the beginning of this section regarding the nature of child care and parenting cross-culturally.

As LeVine et al. (1994) highlight, certain standards which were previously deemed universal with regards to healthy child development, and proper parenting; have been found to vary considerably according to the cultural goals of the parents. Whereas assertive, loud, demonstrative behaviour might be viewed as a sign of good socialisation and communication skills in a Western child; the same behaviour may be viewed as disrespectful, exhibitionist and dangerous in another. The questions that need to be asked are "what constitutes good behaviour for a Rasta child?"; "what values and beliefs are encouraged in the child?"; and "is it possible to socialise or 'induct' a child into a specific culture in the face of both globalisation and the child's own agency?" Although the first two questions will be covered to a large extent in Part II, which deals with infancy and early childhood; the final question can only be answered after an analysis of older children's identity formulations, and his own experiences of school, society and government which will conclude this study.

Jones (1993) and Reynolds (1996) both examine the worlds of South African children growing up during apartheid. This worldview is important to understand, as this is the world the Rasta parents in this study grew up in, which in turn influences their childrearing strategies. Both studies are extremely relevant as they document how children adapt and cope living on the fringes of society, and how these children experienced bloody and brutal clashes with the South African government. These children had a self-image of being ugly (Reynolds: 1996, p. 45), and grew up in an environment where children took it upon themselves to inflict justice on others, killing where necessary, and being shot at and killed themselves (42-43). These children's culture included their own knowledge systems (usually engineered towards survival) and communication networks, factions and loyalties to the extent that "while the policemen were throwing tear gas, [the girls] took off their panties and peed on them then wiped their faces" (p. 43). This is not behaviour that would be encouraged in many cultures, indeed removal of your underwear and urinating would be frowned upon as anti-social and stigmatising behaviour. Within this context it was necessary to mitigate the effects of the teargas and enable the children to escape from the police.

As Reynolds states

I neither wish to understate the impact that trauma may have had upon a child's life nor do I wish to exaggerate the impact...There lies the miracle: the strength of the family despite the system. Should you consider that these children were unfortunate in their experience of family separations, moves, contact with demolition, riot, the imprisonment of family members and similar upheavals
and therefore, not representative as a sample, then I refer you to the substantial literature within South Africa that documents the impact of the system on black lives and suggests in outline the experience that huge numbers of black children encounter (p. 44). 

Rasta parents’ childhood experiences echo Reynolds findings, and many of Reynolds’ comments about family separation, and imprisonment still occur with the children in this sample. The key then still lies in “the strength of the family despite the system”.

Thomas (2000) is a useful introduction to the history of childhood theory in various disciplines however, his approach is more sociological than anthropological in origin. In a study based in the UK, he looked at wards of the state in order to determine to what extent their voices were being heard by representatives of the state such as courts, judges and social workers. Some of the questions he raises are to what extent should a child be allowed to make his or her own decisions and whether or not a parent or guardian can waive the child’s rights in order to carry out parental duties. Despite having a good understanding of the legal, ethical and moral dilemmas involved in child research, this would have been more useful if thicker ethnographic detail had been used to get more of an indication of these children’s voices.

Constructing Childhood. Emic And Etic Definitions

Firstly, very little (Dreher: 1984; Yawney: 1988; Rowe: 1998) has been recorded ethnographically about the concept of childhood from a Rastafari perspective, which is a crucial aspect of how children are treated and regarded within Rastafari. It is therefore important to give parent’s perspectives and differing opinions as to how to raise a Rasta child, as opposed to any other child, and which values they feel are important. To focus exclusively on the child’s world in relation only to other children would thus reduce the complexity of childhood within Rastafari, and its multiple associated meanings.

The term child has a fluid and contextual meaning within Rastafari which can be interpreted in at least four different ways:

1. a biological liminal phase following developmental and socialisation discourse models
2. political rhetoric (the lost South African childhood)
3. a religious concept (children of Jah)
4. all Rastafari

As described above, many scholars agree that the concept of childhood is a construct (Caputo:1995; Hardman:1973; Thomas: 2000), a set of shifting parameters that usually defines when a child is old enough to be given adult responsibilities. These parameters, whilst being linked to age, are also tied into biology, the human child grows until she becomes a larger, fully developed human adult. The process of becoming an adult is one that cannot be stopped. Within Rastafari most adults refer to children of both sexes as both children and as youths from infancy, although I noted that the term youths was used to refer to boys more frequently from about the age of three upwards, with the girls being referred to as young queens. Youth in this case therefore quite literally refers to the essence of youth, the person’s young age, rather than the politicised meaning the term youths has come to have in South Africa. It is also interesting to note that the Rastafari National Council has a sub youth
INTRODUCTION

Pauline Bain

According to the National Youth Act of 1996, youth are defined officially as young adults from the ages of 14-35 years. Within popular culture it is a term usually used to refer to black, politically active adolescents usually affiliated to organisations such as the ANC and PAC Youth League. It is interesting to note that while male adolescents in Rastafari globally are often referred to fondly as young lions, South African Rastafari have an additional layer of meanings when they speak of their young lions, as that is the name that was commonly used by PAC and ANC child soldiers during the struggle for the abolition of apartheid. Many of these parents, especially fathers, were denied their own childhoods and access to education through the enforced Bantu Education System and subsequent political activity. Scheper-Hughes articulates the situation as follows:

Even the most hopeful and celebrated of political transitions in South Africa has produced in its wake what some have called a “lost generation” of youths, those who gave their childhoods and some even their lives to the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1970s and 1980s. Robbed of schooling, manipulated by political slogans (“Revolution Now, School Later”), controlled by gangs, arrested and tortured by the police, and pursued by local death squads, township kids are described as children without childhoods (1998, p25).

Although as described above, Rasta do use the terms children and youth to describe the physical, liminal space a child occupies; the past politicised experiences of the parents do impact on the child. This is in terms of the narratives they share and the expectations that they have of their children to take advantage of the opportunities they have provided, and to continue the struggle for independent thinking and livity.

Childhood is also referred to as a sacrosanct period where a child is closer to Jah, and for this reason is seen as precious. Thus, adults speak of themselves as Jah Children and strive to achieve the innocence seen in children, the innocence they feel they were denied due to the traumas of apartheid and urban life (Babylon). The imaginary line between child and adult is also further blurred by the fact that many Rasta women give birth at a relatively young age. In this study, the average maternal age at the birth of the first child was 15. These issues will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

Attaining Social and Symbolic Capital

Due in part to the media, Rasta has gained both symbolic and social capital. Hawe and Shiell (2000) caution about the use of the term social capital as it has come to have multiple meanings in academic discourse. They distinguish between three broad schools of thought regarding social capital. These are firstly, social capital as metaphor, comparable to economic capital in its durability, and the costs to the individual in terms of time and energy expended in establishing and maintaining the necessary networks (p. 873). Secondly, social capital as rhetoric, where

by straddling both the social and the economic, the notion of social capital has attracted the interest of both sides of politics (p. 874).

In other words, the promised inclusion of the community voice can have profitable spin-offs, as well as garner the support of civil society. The final aspect is that of social capital as science, which is mostly
related to epidemiology and related theories about the links between income disparities and health (p. 874).

For the purposes of this study social capital encompasses the following two aspects. The first fits the classic definition that “membership of a social group confers obligations and benefits on individuals” (p. 872). The network of Rastafari, both in a formalised and non-formalised sense, enables members to live a lifestyle of their choosing outside of Babylon whilst still ensuring a good standard of living. The second draws on both social capital as metaphor, and rhetoric as Rasta has increasing value within a capitalist society, for its associations with reggae, black consciousness and philosophy. This attributes Rasta with a symbolic capital beyond that of the emic Rasta networks, and into the global arena as can be seen in the multitude of adverts, both on television and in print, using Rasta imagery and symbolism to sell products to a mass market.

**METHODOLOGY**

In order to understand the relation between Rasta children’s rights and government policy with regards to children, it is useful to draw on existing theory on multiculturalism, and the anthropology of power, and policy. In order to do this, I compiled the following research framework comparing the ‘macrocosm’ view to the ‘microcosm’ with regards to the following key fields:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MACROCOSM: STATE POLICY</th>
<th>MICROCOSM: RASTAFARI BELIEFS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH</td>
<td>State recommendations promoting primary healthcare</td>
<td>Cultural beliefs about childhood disease, the use of marijuana, experiences with healthcare systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>State regulations, global regulations such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, social workers’ understandings of Rasta belief systems, minister of educations point of view</td>
<td>accessibility to state education, discrimination experienced at or whilst trying to attend school; the Rasta educational ideal; observe and report on newly formed Rasta community schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDENTITY FORMATION</td>
<td>State multicultural policy, media interventions and ways in which they portray Rastafari</td>
<td>Parent and community interventions, child interaction with non-Rasta children, child reaction to media and state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPACT OF LEGISLATION</td>
<td>State powers with regards to removing the child from the parent’s custody, laws against marijuana use</td>
<td>Impact of arrests and social workers’ actions on children; Rastafari sense of persecution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: State Policy/Etic View (Macrocosm) vs. Rastafari Culture/Emic View (Microcosm)

Within the dynamic relationship between the state, and Rastafari as a resisting force, conflict is usually centred around specific points of contention. The etic view, that of the state, does not necessarily see the vision the Rasta does (Rasta practices are viewed as ‘deviant’), and with a mandate to good governance will try to ensure that deviance is suppressed (Shore and Wright: 1997). The emic view, from the point of the Rasta, feels oppression and intervention by the State in his daily life choices. The ethnography in the remaining chapters presents a window into the world of the Rasta family. State and
Rasta share vastly different cultural motivations, and have opposing cultural aims for children. One of the arenas in which the power over the body is contested is in the health system (See Chapter Three). Another is the education system (See Chapter Five). The state uses legislation to enforce its often moralised and homogenised policy, leaving Rastas with little alternatives to practise a different livity.

With the above key fields in mind, I started the process of data collection, as described in the previous section on methods. Two central actors appear in all these fields, the Rasta child, and her rights to cultural and religious freedom; and the South African State and its regulations regarding children. My methodology thus had to take into account how childhood is constructed within Rastafari as compared to other societies concepts of childhood; my roles within and outside of the community; and the safety of myself and my research participants. The latter is important, especially when considering the moral, rather than factual arguments used in popular discourse against ganja (See Chapter Six and conclusion). Whereas in mainstream South African society, and legislature, marijuana is classified as a drug and illegal to own or use; within Rastafari, marijuana takes on a symbolic role as ganja - the sacred herb used to facilitate contact with Jah, and as such is viewed and used in a distinctly ethnobotanical manner.

To tease out the answers to these methodological concerns, I divided my co-reasoners into groups for ease of analysis. The figure below illustrates different stakeholders who are involved in the complex relationship between the child and the State. Ideally, I would have liked to conduct semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from group 3 below, but with the exception of 3B, this was beyond the scope of this study due to the limited time and resources available. Instead I focused on 30 children at varying stages of the life cycle in Group 1, and their parents (2A) and peers (2D) from Group 2. I then used secondary sources such as press releases and statements; published reports and other information on and by the stakeholders in Group 3 for comparative analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP 1: children</th>
<th>GROUP 2:</th>
<th>GROUP 3: other stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Foetus (0-birth)</td>
<td>parents</td>
<td>Teachers (non-Rasta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Infant (birth - 1)</td>
<td>extended family</td>
<td>Teachers (Rasta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Early Childhood (age 1-6)</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>Minister of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D School Age (age 6 upwards)</td>
<td>peers</td>
<td>Dept. of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Shifting: Age 18-35</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>NGOs/human rights orgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
<td>General community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Research Sources

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Ordering and Interviewing
The implications from variations in meaning for childhood meant that the categories I had set up in order to arrange my data, as illustrated in Table 2, and my questions, had to somehow allow for this fluidity. I thus defined a parent as a male or female who had raised a family, or brought a child to term. The case of a young girl who had fallen pregnant but experienced a stillbirth could then be grouped in Group 1E, as she was 15 at the time. In this study, for the purposes of general discussion infant refers to the stage from birth to one year; and early childhood is the period from one year to six years old (which is when the child usually starts school). Following Rastafari pattern of usage I use the term child and youth interchangeably to refer to children up to the age of ten. Thereafter the term youths will denote young adults up to the age of 35, regardless of whether or not they attend school. This is purely to facilitate ease of discussion.

Groups 1D, 1E, and 2A were interviewed using a blend of focused and nondirective interviews. A focus interview has four main characteristics:

1. It takes place with respondents known to have been involved in a particular experience
2. It refers to situations that have been analysed prior to the interview
3. It proceeds on the basis of an interview guide specifying topics related to the research hypothesis
4. It is focused on the subject's experiences regarding the situations under study

( Frankfort, Nachies & Nachies: 1996, p234)

Nondirective interviews are more flexible and allow the research participant to supply a lot of data which is important to them whereas the focused interview allows for flexibility as well as being 'standardised enough to register strong patterns' (Oliker in Frankfort et al: 1996, p234).

There were two broadly similar sets of questions - one for children and one for parents, which were intended as a guideline and a way in which to loosely compare data. Some questions overlapped and some individuals could answer questions from both questionnaires. For example a girl who has experienced pregnancy could answer questions relating to her experience that were found in the parents questionnaire. These techniques were well suited to the target study group as to allow for self-expression and fit in with reasoning techniques. Keeping the interview structure loose ensures more information, which usually proves relevant at a stage later than data capturing. I have not included these questions in the appendices as many of the questions are covered throughout the dissertation.

Both questionnaires were divided into rough themes: general information, religious beliefs and identity, health, education, and government (state interventions). These themes were chosen for the following reasons:

a) **General information:** Here I was trying to get an idea of general prevailing attitudes and social orientation with regards to household composition, income, occupation, views in childhood, some identity cues such as role models, kinship and activities before focusing on specific topics.

b) **Religious beliefs and Identity:** These questions were designed to see how Rastas articulate their religious and cultural identity in response to external and past cultural influences. It also highlights the value systems epitomised in Rastafari.
c) **Health:** The Health section allowed for insight into the Rastafari personalistic medical system, as well as an indication of how religious and cultural rights are implemented in practice.

d) **Education:** This gave a background to the child’s formal and informal educational history, as well as how the concept of education is expressed and negotiated in rasta terms. This also ascertained any problems Rastas had experienced enrolling children in schools.

e) **Government/ State Intervention:** This was a section that gave the participant an opportunity to express their views on government, what changes they would recommend, and what problems they have experienced.

Parents’ and youths’ interviews were not identical and were phrased differently in most cases. In addition, mothers were asked a set of questions about their pregnancy experiences and breastfeeding. The youths were asked the questions as they appeared, however, if a question stimulated further discussion, this would be encouraged and recorded before the focused interview continued. I also asked additional questions as they were prompted by the youth’s or parent’s narrative. If a question came up later in the interview which had already been partly answered, it was still repeated as advised by Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (1996) “I know you partly answered this question already but…” (p. 240). However, in some cases where the recollection on the part of the actor was painful or traumatic to relive, I opted not to repeat these.

**Roles & Ethics: Some Considerations**

Participant-observation was an invaluable tool as it allowed me to note the differing interactions and roles between children and adults; adults and adults; and children and their peers in constructing their world, as illustrated below.

![Figure 3. 2D Matrix Illustrating The Differing Interactions Between Adult’s And Children’s Worlds.](image)

1: children initiate interaction with other children
2: children initiate interaction with adults
3: adults initiate interaction with children
4: adults initiate interaction with other adults
The shaded area is therefore the only area in which children take an active role in initiating interactions between their peers and adults in the community. However, just as children give an insight into adult culture, adults give an insight into the world of children that is valuable for the researcher.

Previously I listed some of the roles that could have been attributed to me whilst in the field. One of the primary challenges is what role the researcher should play in relation to the child. Christensen (2001: AMMA lecture, 1993) makes reference to “the least adult role” and that of another adult. She describes three different approaches to working with children, two in an “adult” role, and one where the researcher tries to fit into the child’s world.

The first of these is exemplified by Bluebond-Langner (1978) in his role of general helper.

Like a volunteer, and like most anthropologists in the field, I willingly did whatever they (the hospital staff) told me. I played with the children, helped with the meals, accompanied the children to various parts of the hospital, and assisted in procedures (Bluebond-Langner: 1978).

At the opposite end of the pole is Laerke’s approach who “aimed to be as ‘child-ish’” as possible.

I dressed like the children, ate with the children, stood nicely in line with the children and so forth. I did not speak with the staff on a daily basis and therefore I knew only what one as a pupil at school would know, which generally wasn’t much with regard to the overall planning of the school day’ (Laerske: 1998).

Christensen described how she herself tried to remain as objective as possible. When a child tried to hug her, or wanted to be picked up, she would dissuade him rather than reverting to mothering instincts. As Caputo (1995) notes, children often respond to an authoritative voice, and try to give the researcher what they think she requires.

I decided to map a path between the three depending on the situational context. For example, when a parent’s bakkie\(^\text{32}\) broke, or if someone urgently needed to go to hospital I would use my resources in terms of transport to assist. Similarly, I would also help prepare food if required and in one instance was required to help order a group of children during their workshop. I tried to be relaxed and informal with children, specifically in the light of previous contact with social workers or state agencies they would be hostile to.

I sat on the floor with them during activities and tried to refrain from being authoritative or taking a “parent” role. I engaged the children in adult terms, giving explanation where requested and did not use “baby language” or talk down to them. Similarly, I reassured them that I would not be repeating any information to parents, peers or other community members so that children would feel free to express themselves. Through previous fieldwork and personal experiences I know that children relate to me quite easily in comparison to other strangers, or adults. I attribute this to me being a young adult who is quite short, and as such does not tower over young children physically as well as having a relaxed attitude with children.

\(^{32}\) Small truck or van.
Researhing children brings about many methodological, ethical and theoretical dilemmas in addition to the usual anthropological issues with reflexivity (Geertz: 1973, Clifford and Marcus: 1986, Hastrup: 1993b, 1995). As some scholars have noted (Christenson: 2000), there is a question mark about whether or not it is necessary to obtain the parent's permission first. Most adults, (especially those who are parents themselves) would agree this is important. As guardians they want to protect their children from potential abuse. However, if the researcher studying children's culture encounters a child who wants to exercise a sense of agency in being interviewed or photographed to become part of the study against their parents' wishes, should we continue with the interview or respect the rights of the parents?

To what extent should a researcher be responsible for the child being interviewed and to what extent should one get involved in the participant's lives? Due to the sensitivities in working with Rastafari that have already been discussed in these chapters, I decided it was important to respect the relations I had built up. I introduced myself to the Rastafari National Council and ensured I distributed leaflets, explaining who I was, my research intentions, and that complete confidentiality would be ensured. Incidentally, this is on the part of the children as well. Anything they, or any other members of the communities told me was not repeated to parents or peers. In the study itself I have used pseudonyms for both people and places.

Why should we always see involvement with children as having even more ethical problems? Is it because they are seen as not being fully responsible for their actions, being too ‘young’ or socially undeveloped to comprehend the full extent and consequences of their actions? Christensen (2000) attributes this attitude to the social construct of the “vulnerable child”, with the adult assuming responsibility. In these cases is the child allowed agency? Where children and youths are involved in using ganja as part of a religious ceremony or in their homes with their families, the ethics of the matter becomes even more pertinent as they are exposed to the same state-facilitated dangers as their parents, and several children had experienced being arrested and imprisoned with their parents. It is worth noting that with the exception of one family, every single family in the sample had experienced the father, and in many cases, the mother being imprisoned. The ‘exception’ also viewed the state as a danger as although they have not been arrested, they have been searched for ganja and harassed on numerous occasions.

METHODS

I used a range of anthropological methods to gather my data, and found that I had to adapt and change my methods as the study developed. The main technique used was that of participant-observation, whereby I would stay with a family in a community and make observations whilst participating in daily life in a Rasta household. I also conducted focused interviews with parents and older children separately using semi-structured questionnaires and non-focused interviews as they arose. In addition, I made use of gathered life histories, visual data in the form of still photographs, taken with the actors’ permission, and data from secondary sources such as clinic cards, photographs I was shown, newspaper clippings, and personal correspondence I received.

33 An organisation of Rastafari in South Africa.
Initially, much as Hecht (1998) reports in his ethnography of street children in Brazil, “I was hesitant at first to take notes in their presence, photograph them, or tape-record the conversations” (p.8) despite Bernard’s (1995) recommendations to allow participants to get used to the idea of the researcher taking notes as soon as possible in the fieldwork process. In my case, this was due mainly to two factors: one, the frequent religious use of ganja, which is a banned substance; and two, an issue of misrepresentation. Any photograph of a Rasta smoking ganja could be used against him as it is showing him partaking in an illegal act. Although legally, there is no proof that the substance he is smoking is ganja, if his features are visible he is still vulnerable to harassment by the SAPS\(^{34}\), his home and his person open to being searched, and if any ganja is found, there is a high probability of him being arrested. However, many Rastafari\(^{35}\) puff frequently during daily activities as they see the practice of Rasta as an ever present reality which incorporates all aspects of their lives.

For this reason, it was impossible not to sometimes include this ritual activity in photographs although I ensured I always asked permission to photograph individuals which gave people the option not to be included in photographs. I also ensured families received copies of their photographs, and used discretion with regards to photographing religious activities such as Nyabingi so as not to disrupt the atmosphere. The children appearing in photographs in this dissertation, are not necessarily the same children whose stories appear in the text. Similarly, although it has sometimes been necessary to use the real names of the Rasta children due to their symbolic value (for example: Jah-Rynamo), the identity of the children and their families is still protected through pseudonyms. In other words although an existing name like Jah-Rynamo may be used as a pseudonym for a child, it is not used when describing events that happened to the child bearing that name.

Whenever appropriate, I obtained permission to record some interviews on a digital recorder, on the condition I would erase it after writing up my notes. In most cases I was unable to record so tried to make notes throughout and directly after each interview, workshop or meeting. In one instance, a Rasta woman I was interviewing was telling me about a time when she was arrested for ganja. The interview was being recorded and her husband quickly intervened and told me to turn off the recorder and that we mustn’t talk about ganja. This couple were frequently raided by police. On another occasion I was taking notes when I was asked “you’re not taking this down are you, you mustn’t write that I’ve said this about the sister”. It is for these reasons that I do not use people’s real identities or locations in this research. I mostly spoke a mixture of English, Afrikaans and I-ance\(^{36}\) during the course of this research, and sometimes used a Xhosa interpreter when the need arose. My notes were mostly recorded in a mixture of these languages for the purposes of later analysis and so that I didn’t miss anything important in the immediate translation.

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34 South African Police Service
35 One does not have to smoke ganja to be Rasta and some Rastas abstain, or smoke infrequently.
36 A specific manner of speaking in which the positive is exchanged for the negative i.e.: overstand, rather than understand; and the “I” is emphasised for example, ‘we’ is said as ‘InI’ or ‘IandI’. See Homiak & Yawney:2000, for further information.
During the course of this research, a film crew from a weekly, prime-time, exposé television program called 3rd degree, visited one of the locations in order to do a feature on Rastafari. Three children were filmed smoking ganja without any consideration on the part of the journalists for the consequences of revealing the names, faces and location of these three children. The parents were not consulted either. In South Africa, “saving the child” forms a large part of developmental and advocacy discourse, especially with regards to homeless children and the use of dagga\(^{37}\) and mandrax. This discourse is disseminated to the public at large in the form of popular media (newspapers, film, documentaries, news, TV, radio) but not much attention is given to the culturally variable use of ganja. Rastafari then are often forced to face a moral backlash where they are stereotyped as general drug users, druggies or dirty filthies, and as such have their rights as parents removed by the State. For this reason, the topic of ganja and children will be touched upon, largely to show how the cultural understanding of ganja by Rasta families is very different from public and State perception of ganja as a dangerous ‘gateway drug’.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Jah Children is written with the total life cycle of the Rastafari family in mind. Each substantive chapter deals with a particular period in the cycle (see Fig. 4 above). The first quarter is the period from the time a woman learns she is about to become a mother, to the birth of the child and its subsequent arrival home. The second quarter deals with the child’s integration and socialisation into Rasta home and community life until she starts primary school, which is usually at the age of about six years. The first two quarters make up Part II. This point marks a move away from a predominately Rasta influence and environment into that of education and learning within the framework of the South African

\(^{37}\) An Afrikaans term for marijuana, which has been appropriated within colloquial language.
education system. It is at this point, in Part III (quarters 3 and 4), that the growing child is exposed to
the most external influences in her identity formation process, through schooling and the interaction
here with non-Rasta peers, and teachers.

Part I: Contextual Background
Part I, which includes Chapters One and Two, gives the background to the textured detail making up
this ethnography. Chapter One gives a broad overview of the historical and cultural development of
Rastafari in Jamaica and its rapid spread globally. This includes a description of its main symbols,
teachings and practises. The chapter then looks at the structures characteristic of Rastafari in South
Africa, whilst attempting to define who and what constitutes a Rasta, and which forces have led to the
popularity of Rasta in this country. Identity, ethnicity and landscape all come into play in this
discussion. Chapter Two introduces the unit of analysis, the Rasta households involved in this study.
The communities and geographical space these families grow up in are discussed without revealing
their physical location.

Part II: To Grow A Child - Beliefs about Childbearing and Childraising.
Chapters Three and Four follow on from the general introduction in Part I by probing in greater detail
what cultural meanings are associated with childhood, and bearing children in Rastafari. Chapter
Three deals with pregnancy, birth and child mortality as a child's life begins with conception, not only
birth. The mother’s actions during pregnancy impact on the unborn foetus, resulting in a pattern of
high birth weights and low infant mortality rate. There is ambivalence to contraception and prenatal
care, however necessity sometimes prevails, especially with regards to contraception. Chapter Four
looks at the acquisition of Rasta culture (Esterhuyse: 2001) by the child whilst an infant and toddler.
This mostly presents the perspectives of Rasta parents about childrearing, and state intervention in
the above life cycles; as well as the role of religion in childrearing. Part II also highlights the world in
which Rasta infants develop.

Part III: Multiple Identities and Meaning - Education, the Media and Policy
Part III looks at a Rasta child’s use of agency, to what extent she copies adult culture, and how she
makes sense of the world around her using the Rasta framework she has grown up with. Chapter Five
gives an outline of the many changes which have taken place in the South African education system
over the past few years before outlining parent’s comments on education and the education system,
what their ideals are, and what problems they have encountered enrolling their children in school.
Several children then comment on their experiences in school, what they like and dislike, and they
make suggestions for educational reform to the South African Government. Some case studies are
also given to show how Rasta children have already challenged discrimination by several schools; and
have caused change and reform on a national level. There is also a description of a Rasta community
school that is currently operating successfully, and proves a useful model. Chapter Six examines the
portrayal of Rasta by the media, and how the welfare image of the child is used as leverage in the
ganja power struggle. The relationship between the state, Rastas, and the media, as expressed
through policy, protest and the resulting social commentary is part of a power struggle, which has the
capacity to engineer change towards a system more reflective of civil society. The child is both an
observer and participant throughout this process - the child’s sense of agency is the ultimate gateway in choosing which information resonates with her personal sense of identity.

The Impact of Policy
The dissertation concludes with a comparison of the ideals outlined in legislation as above, with the particular experience of those Rasta interviewed. It also looks at how a dynamic relationship between Rastafari, the media, and government has developed over the past few years, resulting in an increased Rasta profile, and a change from negative to more balanced journalism. Previously, Rastafari rejected Babylon ideals by opting out of the system, necessity and the success of others has caused many Rastafari to use Babylon tools, such as the internet, modern communication systems and the legal system to challenge government about the application of their rights in practise, not just on paper. The Babylon-Zion opposition facilitates this with the flexibility of spatial place in that Babylon more broadly represents oppression, and Zion freedom from this oppression (Delle Donne: 2000; Johnson-Hill: 1996). Children are expressing a desire to be involved in advocacy work for Rasta, and are creating an identity of a new South African Rastafari which is a mixture of Rasta ideals and proactive, united activity.
PART I

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND
CHAPTER 1 – ‘RAS TAFARI’ AND THE SPREAD OF RASTAFARI TO SOUTH AFRICA

The journey to J ah continues. Since 1979, the Rastafarian movement has surfaced in a most vivid way in such unlikely places as Australia, Holland and New Zealand, as well as many Caribbean islands. Clearly, the movement has a global significance: wherever nonwhite people find that there is a disparity between their own material positions and that of whites, where they experience oppression and perceive injustice, there is fertile ground for the growth of the movement. Over the past ten years, hundreds of thousands of blacks have been touched by the force of Ras Tafari and taken steps along the spiritual path to their God, in their words, J ah. (Cashmore: 1983, v.)

Rastafari is a global culture that has grown phenomenally since Cashmore’s observations in 1983, and shows every sign of becoming increasingly popular. It crosses ethnic boundaries and oceans to spread its unique livity. Who, and what is Ras Tafari? Where did it start and why? What is its mystery and attraction? It is impossible to understand the ideology of Rastafari without an idea of the historical and social forces that led to its creation. Similarly, it would be difficult to follow the logic of certain ritual behaviours or the expressions of the body politic without knowing something of Rasta doctrines. This chapter aims to give an historical and ideological background to Rastafari internationally, in order to fully understand the spiritual and symbolic attraction of Rastafari in South Africa, and how this, and reactions to Rastafari affect the raising of children.

1.1. HISTORICALLY AND GLOBALLY

Definitions
Rastafari is a global movement\(^1\), which originated in Jamaica in the 1930s. It is named after the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I\(^2\), whose coronation as “Ras Tafari, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, the Conquering Lion of Judah” on the 2 November 1930 (Akhell: 1992) signalled the second coming of “Eyesos Christus”, and the birth of Rastafari as a movement (Campbell: 1985; Yawney: 1995; Akhell: 1992; Cashmore: 1979). Rastafari has been a source of fascination for academics in varying disciplines, the pockets of literature about Rasta appearing to follow periods of high visibility by Rastafari in the popular press, following political activity by its members. The theories about Rasta thus trace a parallel to Rastas’ activities.

For the purposes of this research I use Ras Tafari to indicate the man, Haile Selassie; and Rastafari as a noun, in other words, as a group, culture, or religion\(^3\). Rastafari has been defined as one of the “‘new social movements’ – the highly decentralised, informal, autonomous, local and yet similarly transnational struggles... “ (Smith: 1994); as a black consciousness movement (Cashmore: 1979; Campbell:1985), a religious ‘millenarian’ movement (Cashmore: 1979, Barret: 1977), and as “one

\(^1\) The term ‘movement’ has a very specific definition, and is only one of many terms used to collectively describe Rastafari.

\(^2\) Pronounced in the first person as Selassie ‘I’.

\(^3\) Rasta, Brother, Sister, Rastaman, Iman, and J ahman are all emic terms used to refer to the individual; whereas brethren, sistren, I (I and I), and Ones and Ones, refer to the collective (Turner:1994; Smith:1994).
powerful contemporary expression of the earlier internationalist movement of the exploited that was Pan-Africanism" (Turner: 1994).

Although all these categories could be applied to Rastafari in specific contexts, Rastas themselves defy such categorisation; expressing specific dislike of the term ‘Rastafarianism’ as it is symbolic of a mainstream way of thinking and ordering systems, which Rastas oppose as Babylon. As Homiak and Yawney (2000) state “ism implies schisms and divisions” (Homiak & Yawney: 2000, p. 9), a sentiment I have heard repeated exactly by Brother Simeon. Two of the most prolific contemporary researchers in Rastafari, Homiak and Yawney, give the following definition

Rastafari prefer the term livity, contending that Rastafari is a way of life informed by theocratic principles. A theocracy is a group of people that claims a Divinity as its leader…In the theocratic world view, sacred and profane, church and state, are inseparable, because one moral foundation informs all behaviour (p. 1).

However, as they caution, it is extremely difficult to generalise about Rasta as it is a continually changing “travelling culture” (Clifford: 1992; Yawney: 1995, p. 61), which is influenced by an ongoing engagement with the local and the global. The rest of this chapter will thus concern itself with a description of the common practises and symbols which appear to represent Rastafari globally. To a large extent the historical and international information will be gleaned from a review of the existing literature. The uniqueness of Rastafari locally will be discussed in relation to the global in the latter half of this chapter.

**Historical Outline**

Prior to Haile Selassie’s coronation, Marcus Garvey, a renowned Pan-Africanist and black consciousness leader predicted: “Look to Africa where a king would be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near” (Akhell: 1992, p. 15). In Jamaica, this, along with Selassie’s ancestry⁴, heralded the arrival of the Lord, as prophesied in the Book of Revelations. Some Rastas claim that Haile Selassie I was Jesus in the second coming, as “he will come like a thief in the night”. As Campbell (1985) explains,

> For the rural poor, the crowning of an African King who could claim legitimacy from the Bible and from the line of Solomon led to a new deification, replacing the white King of England with a black God and black King (p. 69).

Jamaica, with its history of slavery and oppression, was a fertile breeding ground for a “movement, created by black people, for black people” (Akhell: 1992, p. 4). In 1914, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica, which aimed to promote black consciousness and pride. As Cashmore (1983) explains

> Garvey’s importance was in the provision of at least blueprints for new ‘conceptual maps’…In positing fresh targets for black peoples, to original ways of reaching them, and changed roles for the ‘New Negro’…Garvey offered his followers a conceptual map of society; in other words, a new way of making sense of the world (p. 25).

Leonard Howell is generally attributed with being the first preacher of Rastafari principles in Kingston (Homiak & Yawney: 2000, p. 4; Akhell: 1992, p. 18; Campbell: 1985; Cashmore: 1983, p. 25). He was

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⁴ According to Akhell (1992), a Rasta himself, ‘the Emperor’s official ancestry is traced to the meeting of David’s son, King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba which produced a son and is recorded in the Bible over 3,000 years ago’ (p. 15).
arrested for sedition in 1933, preaching the principles of repatriation to Africa; the acknowledgement of Haile Selassie as “Supreme Being and only ruler of black people” (Akhell: 1992, p. 18); and superiority of the Black race. A few years after Howell was released from prison, he founded the commune of Pinnacle in 1940, where he relocated over 1000 Rastafari (Homiak and Yawney: 2000, p. 5; Cashmore: 1983, p. 25).

In 1954, the commune was destroyed by the state, after a widespread anti-Rastafari sentiment took hold of Jamaica (Homiak & Yawney: 2000; Campbell: 1985; Cashmore: 1983). Violence between Rastafari and the state continued for the next ten years, with the government associating and blaming ganja for the Rasta threat.

It was convenient to view the problem not as some social structural inadequacy, but rather the ganja, tracing a causal path from drug consumption to violent behaviour. A debate on the effects of ganja followed but it proved ineffective (Cashmore: 1983, p. 32).

Cashmore draws on a useful metaphor of ‘mirroring’, which is highly relevant to this study. He reports that Rastafari and Jamaican society entered into a ‘mirroring relationship’ whereby each saw the enemy in the other.

To the Rastaman, the wider society was Babylon, the agents of which were conspiring to suppress him with whatever means available...To the wider society, the view of Rastafari were ‘lazy, dirty, violent and lawless scoundrels’...The Rastas and the wide society held a mirror to each other and both saw evil (Cashmore: 1983, p. 32-33)

In other words, whenever the Rastaman experienced harassment, violence, or stigmatisation from a member of Babylon it reaffirmed his beliefs about Babylon being evil. Similarly, when a Rastaman was violent, or destructive, it confirmed the popular view that Rastafari was a dangerous, drug-taking cult. The dynamic between the two is later introduced by Leonard Howell; and described by Homiak and Yawney (2000) as “symbolic oppositions between Zion and Babylon – two mutually opposed domains ruled over by Emperor Haile Selassie I and the Pope of Rome, respectively” (p. 4).

According to many scholars (Cashmore: 1983, Homiak & Yawney: 2000, Yawney: 1994b, 1995; Chude-Sokei: 1999; Dovlo: 2002; Kebede: 2001), as people migrated they spread Rastafari principles. This grassroots dissemination, as well as the increasing popularity of reggae music, resulted in it gaining some symbolic capital. However, this symbolic capital was used most frequently outside of Rastafari by counterculture and black empowerment groups. The next generation of Rasta (1963-1978) in Jamaica took up the cry of ‘liberation before repatriation’, a move which has been described by scholars as a move away from the religious dimensions which espoused a return to Africa, to a more politicised face designed to improve the conditions of the black minority within wider society (Cashmore: 1983, p. 33-34). It is this multi-faceted component of Rastafari which has spread globally, incorporating local struggles into an expression of a global community existing in a space which is not physical, but shares a spiritual and symbolic dimension that can permeate any boundaries, as if by osmosis. The rest of this chapter explores some of the core principles making up Rastafari livity, and their expression in South Africa.

1.2. I-TAL LIVITY

Thus, despite the varied classifications and discourse about Rastafari there is a specific and recognised identity related to Rastafari, which most academic and popular groundroots interpretations link to the following common external signs or symbols. These symbols of Rasta usually include the use of marijuana (ganja) as a sacrament, dreadlocked hair, the colours of red, yellow and green, the symbol of the Lion, Ethiopia, and the use of Biblical texts and I-speak.

However, other than these external symbols, there is a less definable shared religious and cultural feeling intrinsic to Rastafari, which would fall under Hastrup’s category of soft facts (1993a, 1993b, 1993c). It is impossible for an anthropologist to document someone’s feelings accurately, to feel for herself the revelatory euphoria, the epiphany when a Rasta feels “the scales fall from my eyes” to realise their full potential as a Rastaman. Similarly, it is difficult for a researcher from a completely different environment to the township to fully feel the extent of sufferation most Rastas feel yoked under in a common bond of oppression by Babylon. However, it is always possible to relate shared human experience, and through the long and often challenging process of research, I often did feel as though J ah Guide when for example I was lost and coincidentally, a Rasta guide would appear on the way to visit the same people as me.

In order to catch a glimpse into the religious experience of Rastafari, the strict discipline of daily livity should be understood. ‘-tal’ means pure, natural or clean (Haessig, 1996), and Rastafari aim for a lifestyle as close to natural as possible. By this they mean the avoidance of man-made substances such as pharmaceuticals, and a mainly vegetarian lifestyle. The body is the visible expression of their spiritual belief system, and a central part of livity is the control and self-discipline of the body and its ‘fleshly desires’, both internally and externally.

The Body as Temple

Using the metaphor of the body as a temple, we can explore the strategies Rastafari take in order to purify themselves internally. The most obvious control one can have over what is inside the body, is to monitor what goes into the body through the foodways. Rastas base certain dietary restrictions and taboos on Biblical teachings. Leviticus 11 describes these in detail. Basically these state that one can eat the flesh of “Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud” (11:3), however, this excludes animals such as the camel and horse (“divideth not the hoof”), the hare, and pork (11:3-8). Similarly, crustaceans such as prawns, and other finless and scaleless creatures such as eels and snails are taboo (11:10-12). Birds of prey are not to be eaten, nor insects, except for the locust, beetle, and grasshopper (11:13-23). This translates to an avoidance of flesh, including beef, poultry, mutton, fish and sweets. Most of the Rastas I spoke to also avoid any alcohol, tobacco or other drugs; any food to do with the grape, such as raisins, or wine; vinegar, or salt - seasoning their food with herbs instead. They are vegetarian so as not to harm any creature.

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6 It is interesting to note that although Rastafari interpret Leviticus as promoting a vegetarian lifestyle, other faiths, for example, orthodox Jews don’t share this interpretation.
As will be shown in the ethnography, adherence to these principles varied over an individual’s lifetime, as well as according to external pressures.

Ital, derived from the word vital is food vital to life, in other words, fresh vegetables, fruit and herbs. There is also the avoidance of foods which will pollute the body. Adherence to these dietary restrictions are the first steps in a process of self-purification and self-discipline. Fire is a recurring image in Rastafari, symbolic of the fire aimed at Rastas by the larger society, as well as the power of Jah. The act of cooking fire food, food cooked in an open fire and removed without implements, takes on a ritual quality compared to the act of smoking ganja. Ras Simeon described this process as follows, using his hands to trace the passage of the ganja smoke:

It is like the holy trinity. You breathe the ganja in through the mouth, through the body to the heart, and then up to the head, through to Jah and out the nose.

Much as the food is purified through fire, the body is purified through fire, both symbolically, in terms of sufferation, and physically through the passage of ganja smoke through the body. This facilitates the achievement of consciousness and the ultimate purification of the soul through the holy fire of Jah. So, as the brother above describes, the smoke traces a path through the mouth, and is drawn into the lungs near to the heart. Once it has touched the body and the heart, it is drawn up into the nasal passages, where it has proximity to the brain and the crown (symbolic of Jah) and out through the nose. The smoking action is also described by Kroll (2000):

One youth asked me why I exhaled through the mouth instead of the nose. His father explained to me that, normally, when we breathe for Jah, it is the other way. He continued that exhaling through the nostrils pases te smoke through the nasal passages which are closely connected to the brain. They have a large surface area, and thin, permeable mucous membranes, facilitating the rapid and direct absorption of the active substances in smoke (p. 44).

Marijuana therefore plays an important role in the construction of Rasta identity, as it is part and parcel of their ritual activity. It must be stressed that the use of ganja is approached from the same principles of self-discipline as diet, with even children knowing that it must be afforded great respect. As one nine year old explained, “when a Rasta puffs ganja, he mustn’t be like a drunk person!” As alcohol is abhorrent due to the resulting lack of self-control it is held up as an example of substance abuse, clearly removing ganja from the stigma of a drug.

The words Rastafari use to describe their sacrament indicate how ganja is constructed by them. The nuances of language use can give a wide range of meaning to the same object. There has been a long-raging debate globally about whether or not to decriminalise marijuana for medicinal and other purposes that has resulted in multiple political nuances in the words used to describe the plant. Thus the social understanding of cannabis sativa through an actor’s use of a particular name or phrase can reveal his attitude towards the object. For example ganja, or herb indicates it is holy, useful, medicinal. Ganja is the most commonly used name, and appears to be an attempt to separate the marijuana smoked in a religious manner, and those smoking it; from that which is smoked recreationally by non-Rastas. Herb draws attention to its healing properties and the fact that as part

7 Personal communication, Ras Simeon.
of the road to internal purification many Rastas will not consult doctors or take Babylon medication, using ganja as a tonic instead\(^8\).

It is interesting that youth countercultures and people who use ganja recreationally without religious backing have adopted some of this terminology to indicate their status as pro-ganja. So for example, in a discussion about ganja with a stranger they would get an indication of the stranger’s stance on smoking ganja by the word used to describe it in discussion. The word, weed, has negative connotations as the term “weed” is usually used in reference to an unwanted plant which is usually destroyed. If dagga, or drug is used, this usually represents an “official” stance that the possession of marijuana is a criminal offence, and the belief it is always smoked with buttons\(^9\). Thus, the Rastas interviewed seemed to have an aversion to the term dagga, despite many of them speaking Afrikaans as a native language. This is because the term is a reminder of apartheid tensions and brutality.

The avoidance of drugs, which many Rastas refer to as chemical include those prescribed by doctors, hospitals and pharmacists. The path to health is as follows, to remain positive and strong in faith; daily meditation; a daily tonic in the form of ganja and herbs; and the use of herbs to treat any ailments. Related to this is the avoidance of contraception as artificial, and the consumption of any other substance that might pollute Jah House.

The Vow of the Nazarene

An Ital livity is also externalised with the taking on of the symbols of Rastafari. Growing dreadlocks is not a decision taken lightly by Rastas as it symbolises the internalisation of the Vow of the Nazarene and a commitment to Jah, as well as a return to a more natural, original state. A biblical verse often quoted with regards to this vow reads as follows

\[
\text{All the days of the vow of his separation there shall be no razor come upon his head until the days be fulfilled in which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy and shall let the locks of the hair of his grow (Numerology 6:5)}
\]

Also to be found in Leviticus 19: 26 & 27 is the prescription that

\[
\text{Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of they beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you (St J ames Bible: 103).}
\]

Rastafari interpret this as they should not shave, cut their beards or hair, or cut their flesh in any way. This is the external symbol of their path in life, and as Sister Anjelica explained

Dreadlocks are not supposed to be fashion. Look at them - they are dread-ful, they look dread-ful, and are supposed to put dread into the heart of the sinner.

Thus, the wearing of dreadlocks is an intrinsic part of the religion as it is bound up in the notion of being marked as chosen. If you are not prepared to live a strict livity according to your Vow, others will see. Dreadlocks thus symbolise an entire set of beliefs and a connection to the Godhead, or Ital living, the belief that one should live as naturally as possible. One dreads for Jah and the length of a

\(^8\) The medicinal benefits of marijuana are well-documented. For a more detailed explanation of ganja use in Rastafari, please consult Bain: 2000.

\(^9\) Mandrax
man’s dreadlocks are often taken as an indication of the length of time he has followed Rastafari beliefs.

The Place Of The Women In Rasta Society

The space occupied by women in Rastafari is well-documented (Yawney: 1994a, Turner: 1994).

Though she cannot figure socially, a woman possesses Power. Not the common social power... but a religious power (Creyghton: 1992, p 52).

In the Rastafari family unit, the woman is the Queen, and she strives to remain humble and righteous (Akhell: 1992). One of the ways in which this is shown is through the woman’s clothing and mannerisms. This expressed in varying ways by Rastafari men and women. Some attribute this to modesty, and a way in which to protect yourself from sexual attention – “As jy so dress, skelms won’t krag you” (If you dress like this, the bad people won’t rape you. Sister Sara). The way in which a woman dresses is also seen as an indication of her spirituality – “when your outer side is irie, then you’re a softer and a more spiritual woman”. (Sister Sara). Rastafari would often quote Biblical passages that state men and women should dress differently, namely

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God (Deuteronomy 22:5).

According to Brother Simeon, each male Rasta has an Elder that is responsible for him. As written in the Bible, women are seen as being born without sin. Their husband is responsible for them, and bears their sin. Women subsequently pay for this by giving birth. Sister Anjelica reiterated this to some extent in that women dread for their husbands, whereas the man dreads his hair for Jah. They also cover their locks in the presence of men, and wear it as a sign of respect for their husband. According to her, the man is the head whereas the woman is the heart. Thus, women cover their heads especially when smoking, so as to symbolise this acknowledgement to Jah.

The main dress prescriptions for a woman are therefore long, loose-fitting clothes, no trousers, and the head to be covered at all times. I noted that head coverings are variable according to age, community and Order level. In other words, depending on the level of social control within a specific Rasta community, head coverings varied. Whilst women following the Twelve Tribes Order or individual Roots Dawtas interpreted dress prescriptions according to their individual lifestyles and needs, sometimes wearing trousers and keeping their dreads open; other Rasta women living in stricter Rasta communities adapted their behaviour accordingly and measured their own worth and spirituality according to how diligently they followed Rasta doctrines.

However, this is not a rule as such, as ”Jah is the only one to judge, not man”. Sister Rachel had her head uncovered when I met her, and did not cover it in the presence of a male when he entered her home. She did comment that she would never be photographed with her crown open, and covered her hair when we went outside. I found that mothers did not seem too concerned with gender issues, other than stating education was important for girls and that they should dress and behave as Rasta girls (dresses or skirts). In comparison, it was younger or single women who seemed to have more
conflict related to how they wanted to dress and act, and what their communities were telling them was the correct way to do so.

One of the first sistren meetings I was invited to in Irietown was dominated by a young woman, Sister Grace, arguing with the other Rasta women about going to shebeen and dancehalls. The next day I interviewed one of the members of the group, Sister Michelle, who had been taking minutes. During the interview she told me how embarrassed she was at the younger women’s behaviour stating “that is not how a Rasta woman acts, this shouting and fussing and fighting”. Whilst acknowledging that the Sistren meeting provided an important forum for women to relax and share concerns without men being present, she nevertheless felt that Sister Grace’s behaviour was inappropriate and concluded by saying “she is still young and may learn. But anyway, she’s not a real Rasta sister”. This excerpt highlights the characteristics a Rasta woman is encouraged to have, as well as which behaviour is discouraged, namely shouting, and arguing.

Thus there would seem to be a perpetuation of a hierarchical and patriarchal order as the Elder guides the male Rastas who are in turn responsible for their wives, sisters, and daughters. In terms of language usage and symbolism many Rasta women refer to their husbands or partners as their King, whereas they take the place of Queen. It is customary for women to talk to other women and not to the men. This is seen as an infringement firstly on one's King, and secondly on unspoken social rules, however in practise, both sexes greet each other as a matter of courtesy and an all-important indication of mutual respect.

As Rastafari is a global religion, global issues such as feminism are starting to impact especially as many female Rasta artists and writers are openly critical about gendered Rasta practises. Turner (1994) states:

> the women-centred character of Nyabingi in East Africa was lost in its transfer to the new world. At Nyabinghi gatherings in Jamaica, women were marginalized and subordinated at least since the 1960s. 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 except through the guidance of their ‘kingmen’…What interventions transformed the independent Jamaican woman of the Free Villages into a domesticated and idealized queen? (p. 30).

Her answer lies in the influence of colonialism. Similarly, Rowe, a Rastafari sister maintains “there can be no denying that Rastafari is a patriarchal movement...Rastafari is based on the Bible, it therefore follows that its structure and philosophy would pattern that which unfolds in the Bible” (Rowe, 1985 in Yawney, 1994:p. 66-67). Since the 1970s Rasta sistren have increasingly moved towards independence, although as further noted by Rowe and Yawney (ibid), this has been largely service orientated. Similar findings were made in this study, although largely orientated towards social work and healing. For example, Sister Rachel runs her own informal business trading in herbs and medical remedies. Sister Sara is a social worker and as such works away from the home and

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10 This was originally an Irish name for an informal pub, which has been widely adapted to refer to informal pubs in specifically, South African townships.
her husband during the day. Sister Zanele is contemplating completing her Masters in Nursing, and Sister Lila also has nursing experience.

However, as Yawney (1994) cautions, the ethnographer has a social responsibility to leave Rastafari sistren to make their own decisions about gender issues if the ethnographer’s involvement might affect them adversely (65-66). Very few of the mothers in this study mentioned they would prefer to wear trousers, although it has become an issue in Rasta debate globally. A few years ago, women were included in a Rasta Convention in Barbados. According to Moss (1998), the discussion on women’s role in the Rastafari community caused more controversy than talking about the dead as one female speaker was wearing trousers. Many male Rastas left the room or spoke loudly amongst themselves during this discussion. However, she quotes Ras Ivi, who said “This is the first occasion on which women have been included in the reasoning” (p. 14), and seems to view this as a positive sign.

‘Heaviness’ and ‘Lightness’: The Journey to Jah

Throughout this journey to Jah I envision a movement between two poles, ‘heavy’ and ‘light’. The heaviness of “this earthly flesh” weighs on the individual. A desire for lightness leads one into the spiritually bereft world of Babylon, a place of “fleshly desires”. It is only by taking on the heaviness of disciplined living, and willingly experiencing sufferation as the chosen children of Jah, that true lightness is achieved through spiritual rewards in this lifetime.

In Rastafari, those that for example, live in sackcloth in ‘the bush’, and are fervently religious are often referred to as ‘heavy’ in their religion, or they follow a strict livity. Another interpretation of the word “heavy” was used by Ras Sol, who commonly referred to urban Rastas as “AK heavy”, as in an AK47 as it was felt they were more affected by Babylon harassment and sufferation.

Most try to follow the doctrines to the best of their ability according to their personal relationship with Jah, but the external measure of this success can be judged by behaviour. This metaphor will be extended further in the next section, which looks at the manifestation of Rastafari locally, in South Africa.

1.3. SOUTH AFRICA: FROM APARTHEID TO DEMON-OCRACY

South Africa is infamous for its racial policies from 1948 - 1994, whereby all South Africans were divided according to colour. Nelson Mandela has become a symbol of freedom and equality internationally as a result of his long imprisonment, and his eventual presidency. South Africans are still on the path to freedom and equality, and Rasta ideology, with its messages of overthrowing the downpressors fits in with this collective enterprise.

11 An often repeated phrase meaning the body, rather than the soul.
12 A Russian military weapon commonly used in South Africa.
Prior to about 1999, Rastafari was not viewed seriously as an ethnic minority or group with cultural rights in South Africa despite having existed here since the 1970s. Rastafari was not -- and still is not -- formally recognised as either a religion, culture or ethnic group by the South African Government, despite the replacement of apartheid with a representative government, democracy and one of the most liberal constitutions in the world on paper. Accordingly, ever since its inception in South Africa, Rastafari has been actively involved in challenging Government to uphold its promises to minorities, and through resistance has managed to impact upon the instruments of the State. A major site of this struggle is that the Rastafarian sacrament, ganja is also the banned substance, dagga.

South Africa’s Rastafari are relatively few in number, approximately 15 000 out of a population of some 44 million South Africans, and they are very diverse, encompassing mainly coloureds but also black Africans and whites. While adherents are found all over the country, most Rastas live in the three provinces that were formed out of the former Cape Province – Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape (see Fig. 1 on p. 4), both in individual family units and larger community groups in informal settlements.

As Rastafari promotes sustainable living and self-reliance independently from Babylon it also has an appeal from a practical perspective in a country whose infrastructure was historically biased against the ‘non-white race group’ (Kroll: 2000; Herbst :2000; Bain :2002). Despite its popularity, Rastafari is not currently formally recognised as a religion in South Africa even though in “late 1996 the Rastafari movement was accorded observer status within the Economic Social and Cultural Council of the UN (ECOSOC), achieving official credibility and legitimacy for a previously denied and outlawed social grouping” (Baku: 1997, p. 10). As a result, the lifestyle Rastas wish to live according to their religious beliefs are often criticised and Rastas themselves experience discrimination from state sources that are supposed to assist them.

Rastafari has been placed within the context of political theory (Campbell:1985), minority theory, that of social movements (Smith:1994), religious movements, black consciousness and counterculture (Hebdige: 1979). I maintain that the new generation of Rastafari in South Africa incorporate all of those aspects without being defined or regulated by just one. This is as these youths grow up in an already marginalised community; describe their religion on school forms as Rastafari; speak of empowerment for the black man; and protest mainstream dominance with dreadlocks and ganja. Rastas themselves usually dismiss all such definitions, saying to me simply.

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13 For the right to religious freedom, not only in principle, but also in practise.
14 Ganja is one of the preferred names Rastas give cannabis sativa, and is used throughout this study.
15 Dagga is an Afrikaans word for marijuana and is the term most commonly used when ascribing a negative connotation to the act of smoking. As such is it used by narcotics officers, prosecutors and the media when describing criminal activity. Rastas refer to it scornfully, for example “what’s this dagga youre talking about. I don’t smoke dagga”.
16 From a discussion with Gareth Prince. As no surveys/census have been taken on specifically Rasta households it is virtually impossible to judge, however, Rastafari membership is growing exponentially in South Africa.
that Rasta is a livity. The fluid nature of Rastafari is a strength that enables it to survive, grow and migrate to other cultures globally, emphasising aspects of its many faceted sides as the political and social context changes over time.

Thus Rasta in South Africa has always been an extremely politicised movement as it came full cycle in a process of change. During apartheid, black consciousness, upliftment and freedom from the apartheid downpressors was emphasised as well as the attainment of human rights in face of the gross human rights violations experienced. At the present time, Rasta’s emphasis is on being recognised as a valid religious and cultural grouping - a minority whose rights deserve to be protected according to the South Africa Constitution\(^\text{17}\). Rastafari in South Africa is also going through an active phase of growth from both the birth of Rasta children, as well as by others converting to Rasta.

**The State: Weathering the Rock**

The State, government and policy have always been an important part of discourse about power, especially where minorities and children are concerned as they have a moral back-up in the form of global activism. After the apartheid government, it is the ‘new’ South African Government’s responsibility to ensure their needs and rights are adequately catered for, under increasing pressure from their constituents. South Africa is heralded as the Rainbow Nation, with eleven official languages. However, as has been noted by several scholars, as with any multicultural country the practicality of administering cultural rights for all in the everyday governing of the state is a mammoth and usually unsuccessful task (Clark, Forbes and Francis: 1993; Gunew:1993). Meeting the challenges of governing the majority whilst still being sensitive to the needs of minorities often results in marginalized fringe minorities being excluded altogether from this process, as their claims are not seen as valid or powerful enough.

The Rastafari in South Africa are one such case, with many viewing them incorrectly as a cult or sect, “dirty”, or “drug addicts”. As a result they, and their children experience intensive struggles and clashes with governmental bodies and individuals on a daily basis. The lack of understanding of their socio-cultural belief system, coupled with discriminatory behaviour on the part of government means that the law, does not necessarily protect them but it is the engine powering most of their problems. However, since Rastafari have challenged the government, specifically with regards to the use of ganja, there have been dissenting voices within the legal profession calling for the recognition of Rasta’s religious beliefs in practise (Johnson-Hill: 1996; Delle Donne: 2003; Sachs in Constitutional Court: CCT36/00).

\(^{17}\) Often hailed as being one of the most progressive in the world.
Shore, C and Wright, S (1997) have the following to say about anthropological and governmental discourse:

> Looked at anthropologically, the relationship between policy and morality sheds interesting light on the art of government. Both policy and morality attempt to objectify and universalise ideas. Both are guided by a broader set of cultural ideals... Both are located in the realm of ideas, outside the individual yet manifest in individual thoughts and actions. However, whereas morality is explicitly concerned with ethics, policy purports to be more pragmatic, functional and geared to efficiency (p. 10).

However Rastas view government not as moral, but immoral - as a manifestation, and instrument of Babylon. Part of Rasta religious rhetoric is to Chant down Babylon, in other words, to fight against the injustices of a government perpetuated system. Policy on school attendance; what constitutes criminal behaviour; and which religions are endorsed by government, have resulted in marginalized groups such as Rastafari becoming increasingly victimised once entering the bureaucratic system. As Shore and Wright (1997) argue “policies - and the iron laws they purport to rest upon - often function as a vehicle for distancing policy authors from the intended objects of policy” (p.11). They also view policy as “a mechanism for disguising the identity of decision makers”, as having a “legitimising function”, and as ruling out disagreement (ibid: p. 11). Since the abolition of apartheid, Rastafari have been taking increasing measures to challenge the facelessness of policy and government though the Constitution, and highlight the human rights violations that are being committed in the name of social order.

Thus, if one were to use a metaphor of the State as a rock, the dynamic interaction of these two opposing forces can be explained around the action of weathering. Despite a rock being solid and seemingly immovable, it can over time be weathered down. The South African government, in both its apartheid and renaissance form, is the rock. The process of weathering began during apartheid, as will be seen from narratives of parents who were Rasta during the struggle. The abolition of apartheid was seen as only one step in a process of transformation and change, which as was described earlier, was a process the youth were actively involved in. The next step for Rastafari parents is to ensure their children have the freedom to follow their Rastafari livity. The ethnography presented in this study shows how the current generation of Jah Children are negotiating their sense of identity as Rastas, in the face of a changing country and globalisation. In terms of the metaphor, these children and the State have been shaped and changed by interaction with each other, weathered by the South African environment, and time.

**Brief History of Rastafari in South Africa**

> Until the lions have their own historians, history will continue to be written by the hunters. (Mbeki:1997 in Mabusela:2000).

This quote was deliberately chosen to emphasise the rhetoric of nation building that is being used by the current government. I have also used it as it resonates with Rasta symbolism and their idea of reasoning. The lion is an important symbol - it represents both Africa (as one of the “big five”) and Haille Selassie who is referred to as the “conquering lion of Judah”. It resonates with the idea of
“brainwash education” (history will continue to be written by the hunters), in that Rastas emphasise the learning of black culture and history, not colonialist history. South Africa is thus also heralding a “return to your roots”, although Mbeki’s comment is obviously politically motivated, which would appear to create a better environment for Rastafari. As they are empowering themselves through principles of black consciousness, the new democratic government is using similar rhetoric in an attempt to redress imbalances of the past regime. In order for the rhetoric to have integrity in the eyes of citizens it needs to do more than pay lip-service to minority rights. It is for this reason that I propose Rastafari has been making rapid gains politically and socially – for example, many Rasta children now attend school with dreadlocks; the police force have to allow police to wear dreadlocks; and similarly, employers have to respect the religious principles of their employees.

The history of Rastafari in South Africa is one of struggle, and one that echoes the cry of many South Africans during apartheid - to end apartheid, putting an end to artificially constructed race and class distinctions. This mirrored the situation of class and race inequality elsewhere in the world. In South Africa, the Independent Church Movement broke away from the teachings of Dutch Reformed Church missionaries to promote black nationalism in the 1870s (Campbell, 1985). ‘Africa for the Africans’, a Pan-Africanist slogan, prompted the support of international organisations, who sent their church leaders to contact the breakaway religious organisations in South Africa. The apartheid system led to the emergence of ‘protest’ artists. Amongst these were Peter Tosh, who sang ‘We Must Fight Against Apartheid’, and Bob Marley. Both publicly threw their support behind black people in Southern Africa, and spread their belief system at the same time. (Campbell, 1985: 45-50).

Kroll (2000), attributes dissemination of Rastafari through South Africa to reggae (p. 31), as well as the missionary trods of Nyabinghi Elders (p. 32). As outlined in the introduction, the support of international reggae stars such as Bob Marley, and Peter Tosh for South Africans resisting apartheid resulted in reggae attaining an underground popularity. Discussions with co-reasoners who had been amongst the first to practise Rastafari revealed that it began in Kimberley, a fact that has been confirmed by Yawney (2002). It is difficult to ascertain how long Rasta has existed in South Africa, although according to Yawney (ibid) the Holy Piby connected Kimberley and Colon from the 1920s (p. 2-3). Some co-reasoners, such as Brother Peace below have been active Rastas since 1975.

From its roots as a banned counterculture, Rastafari has reached a level of popularity within South African society, even amongst mainstream youth, who mostly know Bob Marley’s songs, and wear dreadlocks as fashion. I asked the Rastas in my sample who were not born into Rastafari what attracted them to the movement, and why they want their children to grow up Rasta. Some of the answers to the latter question are detailed in Part II. Those who answered both questions at once are covered here. A discussion of the answers will follow.

\[\text{As is explored further in Chapter Five}\]

\[\text{Others believe it was not the DRC particularly but the general paternalistic/racist attitudes & assumptions of most white missionaries & churches at the time which provoked the departure of critical black clergy to establish, their own churches. The acceptance by white churches that the European culture was Christian; & the inability of the missionaries to distinguish between the faith (Christ as per Acts of the Apostles) & their own cultural practises left a wide opening for black leaders to pursue Christ in an African cultural setting, addressing contemporary African problems such as illness & witchcraft.}\]
Brother Peace had been taught how to read from the Bible by his mother, a domestic worker. His main introduction to Rasta was the Kebra Nagast\(^{20}\), reggae, the Bible, and a resonance with the lyrics he was hearing, which described his situation of oppression as a diamond mine worker. As a result of his experiences in Rasta (He is a high priest), he wants his daughter to grow up with “the true education – the light of the Almighty”. Brethren David and Bob have similar aims and rationales for their youths to grow up according to Rasta principles.

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\(^{20}\) Purported to be a lost book of the Bible: The Book of the Glory of Kings of Ethiopia. The Kebra Nagast traces the descent of Haile Selassie I to Solomon.
These brethren both describe their childhood during apartheid as “not positive” and full of fear. Both were also inspired by reggae lyrics. The other Rastas in the sample were introduced to Rastafari as follows:

**BOX 3 - CO-REASONER’S INTRODUCTION TO RASTAFARI**

**SISTER EILEEN**
Through music, through Bob Marley’s message. Every time we see it with the bible. Was irie for InI to listen and hear. InI explain Psalms. I didn’t puff ganja then. Reason about Jah in the Bible and things. Reasonings and explain. You learn many things. What is love? Didn’t explain that in church. In Rasta, love grass, nature, natural things, etc. Christians don’t know deeper meanings. From that time, I respect everything, after that I must try and do the ten commandments. Its so hard. Its so hard to give love to everyone and everything. You mustn’t be like that in your yard. Must first do love, then you obey all the commandments. Irie.

**SISTER SARA**
I saw a lot of brothers where I lived. I used to think what is this ugly hair and this dagga rooking (smoking). Then I see they’re friendly and I think, no man. My life was such a mess, I even tried to kill myself, you know these teenage years. Here is love and peace. That is when I find Rasta.

**BROTHER SAMUEL**
Personally see a lot of Rastas. I was into the wailers, Bob Marley. I listened to the messages and then read further (in the Bible). No man can make another man a Rasta. Was like Jah knocking at the door. Inspiration comes from within. Many people think its just dreads and ganja. InI know this is just a small part.

**SISTER SONJA**

**SISTER NOMONDE**
The I-man is a priest of ganja.

**SISTER MICHELLE**
King introduced her. Mainly I-man. Travelled a lot to the festivals. The sistren gave me inspiration. Sets a nice example.

**SISTER MAY**
When I was very small. It was hard for me to accept. I was in school mos that time. Are a lot of Rastas in Street M. My friends’ brothers were Rastas.
The main themes introduced in the narrative above are peace and love; reggae lyrics and music; influence of friends and family; and in many of the Sistren's narratives, their Iman. The Bible, and ganja also feature.

Thus, one can see how Rastafari spread as a socio-political and black consciousness movement through South Africa, bringing with it religious and cultural customs appropriated from the religious and political ideologies that served its ends. Most of the Rastas interviewed for this study have an extensive knowledge of the origins, political intent and religious aspects of Rastafari in Jamaica, and draw on these as the foundation for their belief. Their personal experiences of apartheid have led them to look for peace and love, which they are now teaching their children.

On 28 December, 1997, the Rastafari National Council was formed at Palm Springs, near Soweto (Yawney: 2002, p. 3). Since then, it has been gathering existing, and new members into a cohesive group in order to be able to influence the impact legislation and Babylon has on their lives more effectively\(^2\), whilst still remaining true to the principles of theocracy through mass reasoning sessions. I have been told by my co-reasoners that each province in South Africa is represented by a House consisting of representatives of communities in the province. I have also had experience where individual communities refer to themselves as Houses. In addition, court documents presented during the case of Gareth Prince state otherwise:

> In this country there are four Rastafari Houses and one Movement, namely, the Nyabinghi Order, The Universal Movement of Rastafari, The Twelve Tribes of Israel, The Emmanuellites (Bobo Dreads), and the Burning Spear Movement (Constitutional Court: 2000, p. 10).

The majority of Rastas in the sample were from the Nyabinghi Order, one followed the Universal Movement of Rasta (as did his children), another Bobo Shanti, and another was a Twelve Tribes Rasta. As I have heard the term "House" used in all the above contexts, I argue that the local interpretation of Rastafari is not as fixed as elsewhere, with various practitioners giving their own meaning to Rasta concepts. Priests, also known as Elders, or Ancients; perform religious ceremonies, and mek a trod to other provinces to tell people about Rastafari, but contact between communities can be sporadic due to the expense of travelling South Africa’s great distances.

Despite progress, Rastas feel that more reforms have to be made before they are living in Zion. Youths concur, as described in the conclusion. Thus Rastafari say they are living under a democrcacy, which is not to be trusted.

### 1.4. IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY

Essentially, the identification with Africa is the foundation of Rastafari consciousness (Campbell, 1975). The South African Rasta in particular, has a unique identification with Africa, as unlike his Afro-American counterparts, he is born on the continent most Rastas look toward.

In terms of ethnic and cultural identity, the Rastas are, by the very nature of their beliefs difficult to categorise. Ideologically, they identify with black Africans in terms of the socio-political aspects of

\(^2\) This is not the only organisation in the Nyabinghi tradition, but one whose members I was involved with most.
Rastafari and its quest to return the African to the homeland Africa. However, the majority of South African Rastas are coloured, and speak Afrikaans rather than a black language, indicating their partly Cape-Dutch ancestry. They seem to affiliate themselves to the Khoi-San in many respects (Kroll: 2000; Herbst: 2000), specifically in terms of use of indigenous knowledge systems, which would seem to correlate with such ethnic hybridity. The socio-religious aspects of Rastafari originated in Jamaica, away from Africa, so the South African Rasta brings a Jamaican-African inspired cosmology back to Africa. Hence, the South African Rasta must negotiate a variety of cross-cultural belief systems very different from the diaspora orientated Rasta of Jamaica.

Coloured Identity

According to Du Toit (1975) "The racial classification ‘Coloured’ includes Cape ‘Coloured’ (Mestizo), Cape Malay, Chinese and other Asiatics and Griqua. After the Population Registration Act of 1950, the latter was classified as ‘Native’ (p. 105). It was this arbitrary distinction, along with the enforcement of segregation of different racial groups that led to the coloured identity being one tied to racial and sexual politics (Hendricks: 2001). As she maintains “to conceive of people as of ‘mixed’ descent it is necessary to believe in the existence of separate ‘races’, ‘racial purity’ and concomitantly, that sexual intercourse between ‘races’ – ‘miscegenation’ – produces a hybrid group” (p. 29).

I was told a story by Sister Miriam that illustrates ‘race’ relations within a local Rasta community. Sister Miriam, a white sister, has a coloured child, who was going to be sanctified (baptised) along with several other coloured and black children in the community. Before the sanctification, she experienced discrimination from the Elder officiating the ceremony, a black Ancient from Jamaica, as he did not know her history, in that she had been a follower of Ras Tafari for three decades. She knew how excited her son was at the thought of sanctification, and was concerned that he would be rejected because she was white. Sister Miriam then took the sleepy youth back to his bed, so that he would avoid the disappointment and humiliation of rejection. A coloured Elder sister followed her, and asked her what she was doing. Once she had explained the sister said “come. If Robert can’t be sanctified, then neither can my youth, cause I’m coloured too – and so is he”. She returned, and other than receiving a sharp look from the Ancient, nothing was said and her son was sanctified with the full support of the community.

In Herbst (2000), my findings highlighted that due to the liminality coloured people in South Africa had experienced during apartheid, they are in need of spiritual, psychological and physical healing.

I maintain that the people who were being discriminated against on a daily basis were in need of healing in a variety of ways. Firstly, due to the injustice of apartheid, which took away basic human, and land rights, disadvantaged South Africans were psychologically wounded in many respects. Secondly, their spiritual needs were not being met by the predominantly white Christian hegemony, which led to a proliferation of African Zionist churches. However, this still meant that a large proportion of the population (coloured community) were effectively removed from this as neither ideology would necessarily appeal to those who were not white Christian or African spiritualist in orientation. Thirdly, recourse to the Western biomedical system was restricted depending on colour and financial restrictions. As even travel was segregated, some people found it extremely difficult to obtain medical help when needed. Over and above this, during apartheid, indigenous healing systems were not recognised nor encouraged.
Thus, much as in Jamaica, Rasta provided a new set of conceptual maps (Cashmore: 1983) for the oppressed coloured in South Africa, and filled the spiritual, psychological and physical needs of these coloureds. The example of Sister Miriam and her son Robert, shows how in a sense, the anti-black racism fostered during apartheid is being subverted with an emphasis on the worth of black ancestry and a suspicion of white ancestry. It also demonstrates how a new pride in a coloured identity is developing.

Dreadlocks take on another significance in South Africa, as part of this contested coloured identity. As mentioned in the introduction, during apartheid coloureds were made to feel they were “less than white”, but “better than black” (Erasmus: 2001). Part of this identity had to do with skin colour and hair texture as many coloureds, whether one was pale or dark, straight-haired or kroes. Whilst coloureds emphasised their whiteness during apartheid, many are now emphasising their black ancestry by emphasising their kroes hair with dreadlocks. As Kroll (2000) explains further:

Many young Cape Rastas feel that becoming Rasta is an alternative to gang membership, which begins early in the often brief lives of ghetto youths - “Either you is a Rasta, or you is a gangsta”. The Vow of the Nazarite is therefore a vow of separation from Babylon (p. 45).

In other words, their dreadlocks mark them as already part of an established group, one recognised and shown respect by the gangstas. When I was doing fieldwork I was often told to park my bakkie outside a Rasta stall, the explanation given that “the gangstas won't mess with InI - they know InI”. There were however many reported incidents where the rudeboys stole ganja plants from Rasta gardens just as they were ready to harvest, indicating that gangstas and the Rastaman keep an eye on each other at all times.

The ethnography presented shows that many coloured Rastafari women become Rasta to escape from abuse and violence. Similarly, many young men join Rastafari to escape gang life, and getting in fights. The coloured identity in South Africa has traditionally been very conservative (Pickel: 1997) which has two ramifications. As Erasmus (2001) phrases it - “hou jou koek in jou broek”. In other words, don’t come home pregnant, or you’ll be kicked out of the house. Rastafari can be seen as a sanctuary for those ostracised from their conservative communities. The Rasta identity provides the means for resistance, whilst still following a system of morals and values that the individual subscribes to, such as modesty.

Rastafari also offers a more homogeneous identity to coloureds - a sense of ‘culture’ that is ‘authentic’ and not construed by apartheid social engineers. The search for ‘roots’ emphasises these Rastas’ value of the kind of homogeneity and ‘knowing’ that Rastafari offers. Coloureds experienced discrimination during apartheid from both white and black groups. As Rastafari they live beyond the evaluations of ‘the white man’, or any other race or ethnic group. As Bob Marley, sometimes referred to as a prophet stated:

I don't have prejudice against myself. My father was white, and my mother black. Them call me half-caste or whatever. Well, me don't dip on nobody’s side. Me don’t dip on the black man’s side, nor the white man’s side. Me dip on God’s side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white (Bob Marley: 1975. In Stephens: 1999).
This comment encapsulates the appeal of Rastafari for those who have been made to feel ostracised as a result of having a coloured identity.

Similarly, the idea of a minority ethnic group versus an indigenous group must be analysed. The Rastafari could be seen as a member of an ethnic minority. In South Africa, specifically during the racially segregated Apartheid era where black people were relegated to homelands, coloured people were left in a ‘non-white’ limbo (van Rensburg: 1992; Erasmus: 2001). A positive self-identity of black affiliation in such a situation could be provided by the socio-cultural aspects of Rastafari: namely self-affirmation and celebration of blackness. However, the South African Rasta can make claims to an indigenous origin through African heritage. Not only do they trace a Griqua origin, but they have also adopted an ideology and healing systems, which show a closer link to the Khoi-San than to the Bantu groups (Kroll: 2000, Herbst: 2000).

Many cultural minority groups maintain their identity through the construction and maintenance of distinct ethnic markers, as a means with which to define clear parameters. However, not all minority groups are consistent in which ethnic markers they emphasise. As Eriksen (1998) points out when attempting to distinguish between ethnic groups

It may be noted that the criteria for dividing the population into ethnic categories is inconsistent: two of the categories are essentially religious ones, one of them is based on geography, and the final one is a residual category (p. 15).

The spatial, or mythical geography (Delle Donne: 2000) and religious aspects of Rastafari have already been discussed. Another clearly distinguishable and strong ethnic marker is that of language. Language can take many forms, from being used ritually, and symbolically, to being spoken. As Eriksen (ibid) explains using a Mauritian context

Language can be invoked self-consciously and as a marker of ethnicity... Mauritius has everything in this respect: community languages strengthening inter-ethnic cohesion, supra-ethnic languages bridging differences and serving as common denominators of both communication and identity symbolism, and languages that are not spoken but are evoked as ethnic symbols (p. 76).

Rastafari, as has already been seen in these introductory chapters, use their individualised, positive patois to define themselves. The specific use of terms such as ‘InI’, ‘irie’, ‘reasoning’, and ‘Nyabinghi’, coupled with a shift in grammatical structure makes it very difficult for one to follow a conversation. Thus, this is one way in which identity is reinforced and outsiders excluded. Ras David informed me that it is important to remain conscious in everything you say and do. A similar case in point is illustrated in the section on altered states of consciousness. Rasta language construction is a prime example of this. The individual is constantly reaffirming his self-esteem and positive self-image in every conversation he has. Here follows an example where I was being introduced to another Rasta brother in the course of my fieldwork.

Ras David: Greetings in the name of Selassie-I.
RD: Is InI I-rie this day?
RS: Ai\(^{22}\), and I-man?

\(^{22}\) Pronounced something like the Creole ‘o-weh’.
RD: Irie. (pause) The sister is here to learn about the control of the youths...

From this short extract, a number of observations can be made. Selassie I and his divinity is introduced in the greeting, indicating the importance of this figure. Firstly, the emphasis is on positive representation of language. Thus one does not assume that the person will not be well, which is inferred in the customary “How are you?”. Rather, an individual is Irie, which is “the good feeling”. Similarly, “me” is avoided in conversation as it “denotes subservience or objectification of the human individual whereas ‘I’ is thought to emphasise the subjective and individual character of a person” (Mulvaney, 1990). Self-esteem is thus promoted, as well as respect for fellow man. As one can see from the example “you” is not used for similar reasons, and “us” becomes InI. “She”, “he”, and “it” follow the same prescriptions.

The negative is also prevented, by focusing and affirming the positive. For example, “don’t smoke tobacco”, would be expressed as “puff ganja”; “dagga” has negative connotations, whereas “ganja” is the wisdom weed. Conversely, there is specific terminology for “the shitty”, instead of “the city”.

The following table shows a few examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘BABYLON’</th>
<th>‘RASTA’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>Over-stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciate</td>
<td>Appreci-love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppressor</td>
<td>Downpressor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vital</td>
<td>I-tal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good morning</td>
<td>Good Celebrations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3: EXAMPLES OF I-SPEAK**

Being conscious is thus a way of not subscribing to the Babylonian ideals each individual has grown up with, and thus accepts. This stems from the racist ideology that believed that the dominant white hegemony was superior to that of the slaves whose ancestors started the Rasta movement. However, as Eriksen (1998) also notes, these ethnic markers are used consciously in order to benefit the group, and are flexible.

His dilemma concerns the relationship between [ethnicity’s] instrumental and its symbolic aspects – whether the main cause of the maintenance of ethnic distinctions is their political and strategic potential or their role as a repository of meaning (p. 75).

Thus, some Rastas will speak “normally” when in certain shops, or dealing with outsiders, switching to I-Speak when speaking to fellow InI.

Harrison (1999), reminds us that “the felt similarities between ethnic groups, not just the differences, can sometimes assume an important role in ethnic conflict”. An important idea to bear in mind when considering notions of identity is that of power relations. According to Harrison (1999), identity
defines not only the group but also the self, which means that people often become very emotional regarding their perceived identity if it is ethnically threatened in any way. This can occur through people trying to assimilate or suppress their ethnic markers, in the case of Rasta - the use of ganja. As Harrison (1999) states,

...identity often depends on maintaining an exclusive association with a distinctive set of symbolic practises, and thus, crucially, on the power to prevent those defined as outsiders from reproducing those markers of identity. As inalienable possessions, these symbolic practises are experienced subjectively not as external to the self, but as defining constituents of it. (p. 243).

For him then, majority and minority groups continually exist in a tension created by a need to protect their identity (derived from symbolic capital) from appropriation. In this case, the Rastas form a minority, separatist group in that they hope to overthrow Babylon. He identifies ways in which identity, ethnicity and culture move into one another through appropriation.

The first is where “majority groups borrow from minority cultures” (p. 245), threatening the individual minorities sense of self and the ethnic group identity, and often in a deliberate attempt to thwart the ethnic minorities’ claims. Secondly, majority groups can also assimilate for example the dress, music, and other such symbols for themselves via a process of commoditisation. This can be seen in mainstream appropriation of reggae, the wearing of the symbolic red, green and yellow beads, clothing or beanies, and smoking ganja. The use of language such as “Irie”, “sister”, “brother”, are also appropriated without necessarily adopting the strict order of Rastafari. This has implications in that the socio-religious structure of Rastafari ensures that each member contributes to his community and behaves in a certain fashion for the well-being of the group as a whole. Someone not conforming to this can negatively affect the cultural perception of Rastas by the dominant group.

The dominant group can also attempt to dispossess minority groups of the afore-mentioned perceived “inalienable possessions” through persecution (p. 244). Rastas feel narcotics officers utilise this tactic, targeting Rastas because of their use of ganja and easy identification due to the distinctive dreads most males wear. A Rasta I interviewed told me of prison officers cutting off Rastas’ dreads as proof “that the faith was too strong”. Cashmore (1983) also describes reports given to him by British Rastas of police brutality, which depicts similar efforts to suppress their identity. The latest brethren who were arrested told me that their locks were not cut, which means that they, and South Africa are making progress in terms of human rights and religious freedoms.

According to Friedman (in Werbner, 1999), class plays an important and overlooked part in a group’s identity. Due to certain “diasporic intellectuals...identity is entirely abstracted from the subject, and reduced to a mere mask or role, to be taken on at will” (p. 18). Thus, it is those classes which feel downpressed that seem to be attracted to Rastafari. Ortner (1998) also picks up on class as identity, problematising a

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23 A knitted woollen hat.
24 To feel good. A way of greeting a fellow Rasta.
25 The matted hair which has been left to grow uncut and unbrushed as this is the natural way. Other than the biblical references supporting this, this practise was believed to have been prompted by pictures of Masai tribesmen with matted hair. (Ahkell, 1992, p. 30)
CH 1: ‘RAS TAFARI’ AND THE SPREAD OF RASTAFARI TO SOUTH AFRICA

Pauline Bain

The paradox: the idea of identities based on ‘natural’ characteristics is at once the most conservative and the most radical of notions on the contemporary political scene. Conservative, because this fits all too easily with American cultural assumptions; radical, because the idea of embracing stigma and turning it into the basis of political agency has in fact been truly ‘disruptive’ (p. 1).

Rastas grow dreadlocks, wear symbolic colours of red, green and yellow; and smoke marijuana as a means of reinforcing their identity fairly aggressively against dominant society. Smith (1994) explains that

The smoking of ganja was viewed as a spiritual and collective ritual... Ganja smoking symbolised deviance, criminality and perversity... this ritual was also perceived as an element in the ‘journey to Jah’, a loosening of the insidious grip of the Babylonian system on ‘I and I’ (p. 180).

Rastas’ identity is therefore constructed against protest and defiance against a predominantly white, Protestant mainstream society, and the middle to upper classes, who are viewed as being privileged at the expense of ‘the black man’.

Conclusion

Cashmore (1985) closes his text on Rastafari and resistance by stating

This [development of a “universal culture”) is the challenge of Rastafari in the next epoch. 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 (p. 234).

The twenty-first century Rasta has not become a passing phenomenon. Instead Rastafari has become the global culture anticipated by Cashmore (ibid.) when he spoke of a universal culture.

The class struggles and racial segregation experienced by Jamaicans in the 1930s were mirrored during apartheid in South Africa. Through reggae, personal networks, ganja smoking, and the shared experience of oppression, many coloureds identified with Rastafari principles, and started moving towards a Rasta identity. These Rastas have given birth to a new generation of Rastas, who have been born into a democratic system where they no longer experience apartheid. However, they still find themselves oppressed due to the struggle over the body-politic, a struggle which has passed to their children. The following chapter introduces the communities fieldwork was conducted in, and introduces the unit of analysis – the household, in order to contextualise the ethnography that follows.
photographs
CH 1: RASTAFARI AND "RAS TAFARI"

Picture 2: Brethren with Long Dreads

Picture 3: Sista Smoking a Chillum

Picture 4: Brethren Blessing a Chalice

Picture 5: Ital for Sale in a Rasta stall.
CHAPTER 2: THREE RASTA COMMUNITIES

Introduction
As with most anthropological studies, this is not a survey of all South African Rastafari, or even a statistical sample of them. I focused on families in three locations in different parts of the former Cape Province, as well as gained insights from the families I met at national gatherings. Because of the sensitivity of research among local Rastas I have given these communities (and the residents I refer to) pseudonyms.

A total of four months was spent in the field. Fieldwork was conducted from April 2001 until July 2002 both in the above communities and at important festivals and religious holidays that occurred in the research locales but were attended by Rastafari nation-wide. The detail of how this was distributed between the communities follows shortly.

It is important firstly to note what I mean by the term communities. Globalisation has resulted in the formation of global communities, communities who do not necessarily share physical space, but that of shared experience (Featherstone: 1995). Rastafari’s shared experience lies within the realm of soft facts (Hastrup: 1993c), a sense of sufferation under an oppressive system – epitomised in the concept of Babylon and a yearning for equal rights and justice, a present day Zion (Delle Donne: 2000). As Delle Donne explains, Africa, Zion and Ethiopia do not necessarily exist according to physical geography, and as Ithiopia or Zion - an image of freedom, can exist within any country (ibid). Thus, a community can be a group of Rastas who do not necessarily live in the same neighbourhood or township, but do meet, visit and share their lives with others in the same city, or even province on a regular basis. Here follows an introduction to each community.

2.1. LIVITY SQUARE, IRIETOWN AND FREELAND

Livity Square
Livity Square is a fenced off Rasta-only community situated in the middle of a township in a semi-rural area. Due to its relatively bounded structure, it has its own basic infrastructure built by the community, including a tabernacle, a meeting room - which doubles as a youth room, a permaculture garden tended by the youths, and a school building where weekly workshops are held. There are approximately 20 families living in Livity Square. Demographically, the majority of families were coloured, with a few black Rastas and two white Rastas.

Noah is a 12 year old Rasta boy living in one such family. When Noah speaks of his brothers and sisters, he is not only referring to his two brothers, and one sister who are his consanguines; he is also referring to an extended community of Rastafari brethren and sistren who may, or may not be related. Noah is lucky enough to live in a province of the Cape that has become the centre of

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1 Blood relative.
increased politicisation and mobilisation for Rastafari since this research was started in 2000. This has resulted in a growth in Rasta communities who have claimed small areas of townships exclusively for Rastas. These areas are demarcated by signs and ideological paintings; and are renamed after prominent figures such as Marcus Garvey. In some cases the entire area is fenced off, and in Livity Square there is even a boom to control vehicle access to the community when necessary.

These smaller communities in which individuals share close geographic proximity are heavily marked with identifying symbols. Entire houses are painted red, yellow and green, with large murals of Selassie I, the Lion of Judah, Star of David, Africa and other symbols painted on surrounding walls and buildings.

The benefits of this environment for Rasta children is that they grow up in a close-knit community of Rastas, with friends holding the same values and ideals, to play with. As many parents such as Sister Sara express, “Hulle moet nie doen wat Babylon mense doen. Its irie om in n' Rasta community te bly” (They mustn’t do what Babylon people do. Its irie to live in a Rasta community). In other words, they want to raise their children away from Babylon ideals, which they can control to a certain extent in these communities. Although as Chapter Six shows, these children are exposed to multimedia on a daily basis. I made three trips to Livity Square, staying for a week each time. One of these trips was to attend a religious festival.

Any new families wishing to move to Livity Square are supposed to consult the House first, who then has the opportunity to approve who joins the community. However, in practise this is not always done. Plots of land are available from approximately R200-00, from the family selling their plot. Households vary considerably in structure and building materials – a general rule of thumb being those that have been there longest are the biggest, and most well built. Materials range from zinc sheets to wood and bricks. Each family is responsible for building their own house, which is done over time, as weather and finances permit. Most households have a small boundary fence between them for privacy.

The community structures: the tabernacle, school, and meeting room are built communally out of wood. The tabernacle is decorated with fresh fruit during Nyabinghi. This does not mean that Livity Square is completely isolated from the rest of the township - or town, (which I will call Sea-Tyne), it is situated in. Children travel through the township to go to school, and the majority of families are involved in the running of fruit-stalls in one form or another. The men, as well as the women, co-own, run, or work in the stalls. Children, the boys especially, also assist here in order to make their own money. These fruit stalls can be found scattered throughout the many townships that have grown up on the outskirts of Sea-Tyne, filling a niche, as well as at the market in the centre of Sea-Tyne.
Irietown and Freeland

These communities consist of a social network of Rastas living on the outskirts of two urban cities, which I have chosen to call Irietown and Freeland, situated within two hours drive of each other. They are presented together due to their geographic proximity as well as the fact that members of each community consider themselves as one House of Rastafari. These areas were composed of low-income suburbs and townships. Rastas here live amongst others of diverse ethnicity, but maintain close social networks with each other, sometimes meeting once a week. As one mother expressed “we are not so organised here as they are in Kingstonville and Livity Square”. There is a noticeable trend for these families to live in the same suburbs, and an increasing level of communication and organisation between Houses in each province.

Within the Irietown and Freeland communities there is a greater ethnic diversity than Livity Square, as well as a greater difference in geographic environment. Thus although all the households in the Irietown community are classified as situated in townships, the economic conditions of each varies phenomenally. I noted 25 households in the Irietown and Freeland extended community, scattered amongst seven township suburbs. I know of several other Rasta communities within this same geographic location that I did not encounter.

A few clinics in the proximity of each area serviced its members. Two hospitals were within driving or taxi distance. Schools were mostly attended via taxi. A few households had vehicles, which were used for collecting and transporting fruit and vegetables; and members of the household. The households in three of these township suburbs had basic facilities such as electricity, running water and furniture, whereas those in the remaining four township suburbs were constructed from more temporary materials such as corrugated iron\(^2\), and lacked mainly water and electricity. It is interesting to note that township suburb demographics followed ethnic lines. Coloured Rastas mostly stayed in the more affluent neighbourhoods, whereas black Rastas were found in the poorer suburbs.

A possible explanation for this could be the demarcation of various areas during apartheid according to the Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950 (Boddy-Evans: 2002). Geographic space was allocated according to skin colour, and a dompas (pass) was needed to leave the area. The creation of these residential areas “led to the forced removals of people living in the ‘wrong areas’” (ibid.). One of the most well known examples is the forced removal of Coloureds in District 6, Cape Town. After apartheid was abolished, these neighbourhoods still retained their demographic make-up, with the most migration occurring in urban centres, and little change on the outskirts. Coloured and black areas have remained so, with only the identity of the Irietown community changing to incorporate Rasta. This leads to an appearance of segregation between black, and coloured Rastas. Although occasionally conflict does occur between communities, this is usually as a result of differing opinions about personal livity, not colour.

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\(^2\) Corrugated iron is a feature common to South African townships. It is often used, in conjunction with boxes and wood, to construct roofs and walls of shelters. One township is even called “Silvertown” as a result.
As the Irietown/Freeland community is situated closer to larger urban centres than Livity Square, and is made up of a loosely connected network of families from different areas, Rastafari find it more difficult to meet regularly. Livity Square Rastas perceive life in Irietown as follows: "Sister, it’s harder for them there in the city. The brothers there are heavy, AK-heavy". A Livity Square youth of twelve who was visiting Irietown reported there were lots of buffels and kaspirs (large yellow police trucks with reinforced windows and high, thick tyres) wherever he went in the township. He was quite relieved to be back in Livity Square, although he and his friends had been chased and searched by police in Livity Square a few years earlier, when he was ten.

These comments indicate that the Irietown/Freeland Rastas are seen as having to fight more against urban problems than those in Livity Square, hence the military references to being AK-heavy. And as Noah observed on his visit, Irietown exhibited a much higher and more threatening riot-police presence than he was used to encountering in Livity Square. The cities Irietown/Freeland Rastas live near are more violent places with greater populations, and a higher death rate.

The two communities, although living in different geographical areas, meet together as often as they can for Sistren meetings, Brethren meetings, and dub. For example, a sister from Freeland takes the minutes for both communities, whilst a brother from Irietown often transports groups of sistren and brethren to the meetings. These Rastas are in a process of organising and uniting ones and ones (individuals) and say they are "not as organised as the InI in Livity Square". There is a Rastafari National Council high priest in both Irietown and Freeland, who often work together.

I visited the Irietown/Freeland community the most often. I did not stay in these communities, but commuted daily from a home in the near vicinity. I spent seven weeks amongst these communities, visiting families, and attending dubs.

"Ones and Ones"
I also worked with four individual families who were not part of a specific Rasta community. The term, ones and ones is used to refer to individuals who practise a Rasta livity, but are not necessarily involved in community action, or attend Nyabinghi. Geographically, these families were scattered across the research area.

One of these families, who were a middle class white family living on a farm, had links to an informal settlement situated in a rural area, where a small camp of seven Rastafari families lives (Forest Camp). Amenities were few, and the livity was strict. This family mostly stayed away from national gatherings but visited Forest Camp as frequently as finances would permit, and even when they didn’t. The white Rastas in Forest Camp followed a stricter livity than the other locations, which was mainly noticeable in gender relations and an aversion to technology. It is important to note that although generally, one community may follow a stricter livity than others; livity differs from individual to

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3 Based on the AK-47, a Russian automatic weapon.
4 See section on “Natty Dread Or Kinky Dread? The Question Of Authenticity” in this chapter for examples.
individual, and varies over time. The other three families were black, and followed a less strict livity. Research with the individual families was ongoing over the entire research period, with one to two visits made every second week.

In addition, I also attended Nyabinghi and festivals across the research area, where I encountered dozens of families from across the country and could verify some observations within a larger sample. In total, a further four weeks was spent attending festivals, where I stayed in Rasta households near to the area where the festival was being held.

As Pamela Reynolds did in her multi-sited research in Zimbabwe (1996), I found travelling between research locations and religious festivals a useful exercise which gave me an insight to community based networks. Through these social networks, and a “bush telegraph” system, I would invariably hear of Rastas travelling between locations that needed lifts. In this way I extended my network of Rastafari contacts, as well learnt a lot in the conversations during the long drives. The demographics of each household will be given in the following section.

Greetings
Greetings varied according to gender and different communities. The most common were the raised closed fist, and a raised open palm greeting. For example, most Rastas will greet a fellow passing dreadlock with a raised fist in the air, which is reciprocated, usually with a shout of “ahoy” or “Jah Rastafari”. The left hand is used as this is hearticle, closer to the heart. Those in closer proximity usually greet by hitting the knuckles of the left, closed fist together.

Sometimes individual interpretations of gender prescriptions forbid this. For example, some men would greet me with a raised open palm as they could see from my wedding ring that I was married. I was told that in communities following a stricter livity, bodily contact such as holding hands, or greeting by touching hands, was avoided, even with couples, and noted many Rastas use the open-palm greeting when away from home. There are multiple reasons for this, differing between individuals. One reason is to avoid pollution, either through contact with a woman, or someone who eats flesh. As an individual will not always know what livity another follows, it is thus safer to greet with a raised open palm. Another reason explained to me is that no man should have contact with another man’s queen, which extends to the sharing of ganja.

The most unusual greeting was specific to the Irietown and Freeland sistren. These sistren would greet with the closed fist, then open the fist and slide palms from the heel of the hand to the tips of the fingers. The greeting finished with a raised palm in the air.
2.2. UNIT OF ANALYSIS: THE HOUSEHOLD

Within the locations already identified, the unit of analysis would be the household, as this would include the perspectives of any child in the family, his or her siblings, parents, and any other people living in the household. However, not all members of a Rasta household or Rasta family are necessarily Rastafari, and household and family structures differ markedly from each other depending on location. For the purposes of this study, a Rastafari household is one where one or more parents are active Rastafari, and have been for a period of at least two years. The main types of households were as follows:

- female-headed households: either a single mother and children; or a group of women sharing household, economic and childcare responsibilities. The head of the household was often the father’s mother – his wife and children lived in her home, whilst he lived elsewhere in a household of men. This is a pattern which is common in the Caribbean (Dreher, Nugent & Hudgins: 1994; Yawney: 1994a)

- mother-father-child: often one or more parents had children by another partner. The children usually stay with their birth mother, who can stop the child following Rasta beliefs if her family does not support this. These households usually have at least one other Rasta male youth who is not a relative living with the family.

- male households: a group of men sharing a household, usually connected to their trading stall. Their children live either with the mother, in her parents’ or her own household; or with the father’s mother

In a few cases the children lived with their grandparents, and were not being raised as Rastas.

The term “Rasta family” therefore encompasses all of these households, the household interpersonal dynamic relying on the individuals residing in that household. The amount of strict adherence to Rastafari principles, what was referred to as a strict livity, varied according to the amount of time the parents had spent following Rasta, and what proximity to and frequency of contact with other Rastas the household had. The following section details household demographics and introduces you to the main co-reasoners (Stanley: 2002) in this study. I focused on ten households within the total fifty households encountered. I have deliberately described these separately from the communities in order to increase anonymity, whilst including as much thick description (Geertz: 1973) as possible. The introduction is made through a single narrative made up of field journal extracts, and based on my own experiences and observations. This narrative (shown in italics) takes the form of a car journey, where I am returning home after a day of interviewing, and thinking about the households in the study.

Description of Main Households and Brief Life Histories

I entered the household, carefully negotiating the few wooden stairs in the growing gloom. The thought crossed my mind that I might get lost in the tangles of streets and shacks on my way home. I didn’t know this area very well, and townships have a way of turning into mazes, with no street names, landmarks or main roads to guide you.
I was greeted warmly, Rasta fist-style, by the occupants. Marcus, aged five, and Sensi, aged three, boisterously climbed over each other onto the couch to get a better look at me. They lived in a self-constructed home built of large cement blocks with their parents, Brother Samuel and Sister Miriam; their 18 year old stepbrother; and one other male Rasta. Sensi hid her face and giggled from behind her brother's back, her toes wriggling and communicating on her behalf. Marcus solemnly stared at me, hands on his belly, with the biggest brown eyes I had ever seen, almost as if he was staring right into my heart to judge just what sort of character I was.

Their mother, Sister Eileen, laughed and tousled his shoulder-length shock of dreads. Having followed Rastafari for eight years, 23 year old Sister Eileen was every inch the African Queen, clad in a long shimmering blue dress, and matching headscarf. Tiny red, yellow and green beads delicately adorned her wrists, ankle and neck, along with a metal pendant in the shape of Africa. I noted that despite the cold she was wearing sandals. She had been introduced to Rastafari through the household head - her husband and Kinman Brother Samuel, a high priest and elder of the Rastafari National Council. “It took him two years to get it into my head” she smiled, remembering her gradual entry into Rastafari.

Sensi climbed onto her mother's lap. Silhouetted against the multi-coloured Marley sarong draped over the table, it struck me that the children weren't wearing similar bright colours, usually common at festivals. She was wearing a white dress with a collar, which her little dreads almost covered, and a black tracksuit top to keep out the cold. Marcus was wearing pale blue tracksuit pants and a white shirt with red and blue racing stripes. They watched attentively as I interviewed Sister Miriam. Sister May arrived half way through, as she had heard of my arrival via the ever-efficient township “bush telegraph” where nobody sneezes without the neighbours noticing!

Sister May had a sweet smile, laughing eyes, and a quiet grace unexpected of her 18 years. She was currently living with her Iman, Brother David, who was Sister Eileen's brother5. Although she didn't want to “look too far ahead” she hoped that she would have a family of her own someday. Sister May was also wearing a long skirt, and a loose jersey, both in dark colours. Her headdress, an interesting multi-patterned print in earth colours, wasn't quite as elaborate as Sister Eileen's, and was very simply wrapped round her head. “I feel very different from the other young girls”, she told me, “because I'm a Rasta sister mos”, and had been for three years. I queried, “do you think you'll ever cut your dreads”, to which she quickly replied, vigorously shaking her head “never ever ever!”

Sister Michelle, who had been observing the proceedings silently until now, added: “Not as long as she's here with us. She'll stay in the roots”. She sagely nodded her head. I thought it appropriate that she, both family and teacher, used the term “roots”. At 36, she was a matriarchal figure who ran a home and community crèche up the hill. Her Iman, Brother Norge was related to Brother Samuel and she had been in Rastafari for three years. As she said “the sistren gave me inspiration. They set a nice example”.

5 Her blood brother.
By now it was already pitch dark outside (partly due to the waning hours on the clock, but mostly due to the lack of street lighting and electricity), so I said my farewells and left with Sister Michelle. I dropped her off at her house nearby before setting off on the long drive through townships and the city, to get to my bed. As I drove I played the day's events over in my mind, automatically following the usual precautions: don't come to a stand-still at a red light in case of a potential hi-jacking; doors locked; windows wound up; prepare for the worst; stay alert. The sistren had been touchingly concerned about my safety and I had reassured them I would sms on my safe return.

I had spent most of that day with Sister Michelle in her home. Brother Norge had briefly stuck his head in the door and said “irie” before continuing his work outside. There was a continual patter of feet in and out the kaya as children attending the crèche asked for permission to use the toilet, or shyly asked for cooldrink, knowingly staring at the fridge from whence all such bounty came. Two of the children particularly held my interest, as they were Marcus, Sister Eileen’s son, and Rose, Sister Michelle’s five year old daughter. Rose was polite and curious, with a single plait down her back. Rose and her older siblings, 14 year old Joshua and 12 year old Anesta, were being taught Rasta teachings, but as their mother explained “They are not Rasta yet – they must decide for themselves when they are older”. These three did not have dreadlocks, partially as their mother didn’t want them to experience discrimination at school.

At around two, parents started fetching their children and the yard cleared out substantially. I looked around. This Rasta home had the same trappings I had seen in many others, and was to see in Sister Eileen’s house that evening: photocopied chants and guides to Rasta principles neatly prestiked in rows on the wall, along with newspaper clippings, pictures of Selassie I, and Bob Marley. These symbols were a constant reminder, in both the richest and poorest of Rastafari homes (here I would be gently reproached that one may be poor in goods, but spiritually rich through Rastafari). And of course, forgotten only because of its continuity, the constant thump of reggae pulsing through your body, pumping out its message into every corner, spilling into the street.

I was broken out of my reggae-induced reverie by a bright graffiti covered taxi pulling out in front of me. It was called “Green Mamba”. I slammed brakes, indicated, overtook. The kwaito beat briefly swamped Joseph Hill's lyrical reasoning in my car, and I caught myself thinking about some of the brethren and sistren who had died in taxi related accidents. "Jah Guide – Jah is the driver", the lyrics proclaimed as I pulled away from the Green Mamba, thankful not to have been “bitten”, as Sister Jolie had.

Sister Jolie, aged 23, had a near miss once. I had been sitting in her lounge drinking rooibos tea during a visit as she related how she had almost lost her unborn child in a taxi accident. Joseph, her “miracle baby” came running in. This three year old had boundless energy, a halo of tiny dreads framing his cherubic face and as my husband phrased it “the naughtiest grin and eyes”. Just thinking of him made me smile, as I can honestly say I had never seen him without a huge grin and twinkling

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6 Prestik is a sticky grey substance, similar to blu-tac, used to stick posters onto walls.
eyes. Sister Jolie and her husband, Brother James had been the first Rastas I had met in this
particular community - at the time their eight year old son, Marcus, had received a lot of media
publicity, as he was not allowed to enter school with dreadlocks. Their other son, Marshall, was one
and a half, and was usually toddling around behind his brothers. Recently, the sister gave birth to a fat
and healthy baby girl, an event that Brother James had happily foreseen despite their previous
“record” for boys.

I had met most of these sistren I was thinking about at Sister Jolie’s house, during a sistren meeting.
The house was perfect for such meetings, and was one of the largest I encountered. From the outside,
it was fairly non-descript, and looked similar to all the other houses in the street of this coloured
neighbourhood - slightly weather-beaten, with an obstacle course of children playing street tennis,
and street soccer, to navigate. Marcus could usually be found here playing with friends next to his
parents’ car. There was a wooden room built off the side of the house, which was stocked with fresh
fruit, vegetables and herbs. This was where Brother James ran his informal business, supplying the
local neighbourhood and visitors with their produce. Two younger Rasta brothers, one related to him,
also worked here, learning the principles of Rastafari during the day and returning home at night to
sleep. This house was also skankin to a continual reggae beat, and the entire household, including the
two youths were co-reasoners for the study.

The interior of the house was a continual work in progress and each time I visited, I noticed a new
renovation. As seen in almost all Rasta homes, the symbols of the lion, and Selassie I were
prominent. The entry room leads into a large tiled kitchen area, which is also used as a gathering
area, overlooking the back yard, where the pets stay. A fridge, stove, and microwave line the wall. Just
off the kitchen lies the small, tiled bathroom; and two bedrooms. As with most Rasta households,
goods and services are often swapped in a barter system, rather than cash. Thus, in most
communities if a car breaks down, home improvements are needed, or there is an emergency, and
money is unavailable, barter of services or goods is used.

The sistren met in the lounge, fifteen to twenty women and their children crowded in to laugh, share
stories and reason. These sistren have been meeting since 1999 to discuss issues affecting them, all
of which has been meticulously recorded by Sister Michelle. I tried to visit as many of the sistren I met
at meetings in their own homes, but only succeeded with some, who have made up the bulk of the
research here.

One of the sistren I followed up with was Sister Nomonde, aged 28 and her Iman Brother Michael,
both Xhosa. The township they lived in was extremely poor, and conditions difficult. There was no
electricity or running water. They slept in their wooden fruit stall, with one other brother so as not to get
burgled, and kept a heavy burglar gate locked most of the time, speaking to people through the grid.
The interior mostly consisted of one room where fruit, vegetables and a range of herbs and roots were
kept under hanging Rasta banners. Empty upside-down crates were used to sit on. Another small
room was situated at the back, furthest away from the entrance, where they slept. Cooking was done
in a pot on a fire. A carefully looked after radio/tape-deck could be seen through the doorway, emanating reggae word-sound-power (Homiak) which must have been run on battery power.

Sister Nomonde’s three children, aged 13, 10 and 4 lived with her mother in a rural area, and came home for the holidays. Although they didn’t live with her permanently, the eldest wanted to become Rasta and they all “love ital” and going to dubs. She didn’t give an explanation for them living with their grandmother, but later told me about the rape of her child which I suspect contributed to this decision. The sister was at home alone with her daughter, when she was raided, and arrested for possessing eight envelopes of ganja. At the time her daughter was six weeks. As she said “they left Phumzi alone there, and they wouldn’t even let me get a jersey”. Another Rasta sister found Phumzi, and looked after her until word could be sent to Sister Nomonde’s mother. On her arrival, the grandmother found sores inside the child and took her to the clinic, who sent Phumzi to the hospital as the child had been raped. This is only one of hundreds of cases of child rape that are reported in South Africa daily, and it is a sad indictment that the police who arrested her did not make provision for the child, despite the overwhelming publicity about this threat affecting South African infants.

Sister Nomonde was charged R500-00 bail for the eight envelopes, which was dropped to R300-00. As she couldn’t afford to pay it she was imprisoned for five months, and told she will be imprisoned for a further five years if she is re-arrested. Whilst in prison she contracted what she calls “water on the lung”, which she attributes to damp, and that she did not have her jersey. Previously her Iman Brother Michael had stopped me making notes. “No, no, no. You musn’t write about the ganja”. That topic was closed for discussion and as the interviews progressed I could see it was due to the constant police raiding. Rather, he had said “You must write this - that why are they burning dead babies next door, burying them, burning stinking rubbish, but they harass us here?” He could not understand why what he categorised as illegal, and immoral behaviour: abortion, infanticide, violence and dumping, was not curtailed while his ganja puffing, meant to purify and disinfect the air, was punished.

In sharp contrast to this household is that of Sister Anjelica, 26 and Brother Simeon, 31. Both blue eyed, and fair skinned, they form a minority within Rastafari. They live with their two children, Jasmine, aged four and Jah-Rynamo, aged one, on the same smallholding as Brother Simeon’s parents. Their lounge can be seen through a homemade stain glass window in the door, which is usually unlocked. Hand drawn pictures of Selassie I, Bob Marley and leather-crafted prints of Africa adorn the walls, and thick straw mats line the floors. Herbs and reeds are hung from the rafters, along with some pots and pans - inspired by the sistren from the Forest Camp.

Part of this front room forms the kitchen. Cooking was done on a gas stove, or on the internal fire, which was built so as to also heat the geyser for hot water. The small lounge holds two couches face-to-face, some books, a black and white tv, and a hi-fi which was permanently playing reggae loudly.

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7 An envelope usually holds between 2-4 grams of ganja.
8 She had been very specific about the age of the child at the time - one month and two weeks old.
9 The perpetrator was never found - according to them the police have never followed up. Many of these incidents never get reported, as popular opinion is that the police won’t bother to anything to help them.
wooden table separated the kitchen space from the lounge space. Sweet-natured Jasmine would drag me down the short passage to her room saying “come Pixi, come see” her collection of toys, which ranged from a mini trampoline to dolls. She was one of the few children who had her own room. Across from her room was a sewing room come nursery, with the parents’ bedroom at the end of the passage, and a small adjoining bathroom. Her grandparents would often comb Jasmine’s dreadlocks out, which annoyed Jasmine’s parents and meant that she was sometimes dreadlocked, and sometimes not. Jah-Rynamo was born late in this study, an event Jasmine anticipated with some anxiety and a little jealousy.

The other white co-reasoner, Sister Miriam, lived in the township with her 14 year old son, Robert. Robert described himself as “a little bit emotional and very friendly”. With his long dreadlocks and polite manner he was every bit an “ambassador for Jah”. As a coloured youth in the township with a white mother he was well placed to observe peoples’ behaviour. He told me that “it is harder for the Rasta youths in white schools than in coloured schools” and that “some people try to take advantage of my mum because she’s a white sister”, which shows that schools and interpersonal relationships are still thought of in terms of colour. Sister Miriam had followed Rastafari for over thirty years and she and Robert had experienced Rasta in different forms in over seven countries. They lived in a wooden house with a small lounge, and a bedroom each. The entrance looked out onto a tranquil vegetable garden with a wooden bench.

The kitchen and bathroom were situated in a brightly painted brick building next door, which was slowly being developed with the intention of it becoming the main living area. Sister Miriam made the most delicious baked porridge, naturally sweetened with dates – completely ital, in a small oven. She also had a fridge, large freezer and bakkie that were essential for her home industries selling pure fruit ice cream and fruit to vendors. My time in this household, although brief, was one filled with warm feelings and good advice.

Another sister who spoke of colour was Sister Sonja. A previous Muslim, she told me that “amongst coloured people, straight hair and fair skin is better”, and that “some Muslims won’t even greet me now” due to her dreadlocks and new faith. This comment echoed what I had read of Zimitri Erasmus (2001)

> For me, growing up coloured meant knowing that I was not only not white, but less than white; not only not black but better than black (as we referred to African people). At the same time, the shape of my nose and the texture of my hair placed me in the middle on the continuum of beauty as defined by both men and women... the humiliation of being ‘less than white’ made being ‘better than black’ a very fragile position to occupy...this discomfort is among the conditions of being coloured. Being coloured often means having to choose between blackness and whiteness (p. 13).

This is pertinent when considering that the majority of Rastafari encountered identify themselves as coloured. As Sister Sonja has shown, voluntarily embracing ones’ ‘blacker’ side causes great stigma amongst coloured communities, whose strategy has been to emphasise their own ‘whiteness’ during apartheid.
Sister Sonja lived with Brother Ruben in his mother’s house with her second child, Sheba. 11 month Sheba’s intense black eyes, pointed ears, and newly cut two front teeth made her look like an inquisitive mouse. Despite the pain of teething, she also had a continual smile on her tiny, expressive face. Sheba’s dreadlocks were just starting to peep out in a soft halo around her face. Sonja’s second child, Zara, lived with her grandparents as they were paying for her schooling. This allowed them to dictate which religion the child was raised in, which was Islam. She was not allowed to dread. This house was built of brick and had a small living room, two bedrooms big enough for two beds, and a kitchen. The kitchen had a stove, fridge and tap. There was a longdrop in a wooden hut outside.

The members of each of these households played a major role as co-reasoners, and gave me the main insights into this study. I did, as outlined, also use insights derived from meetings with “ones and ones” but did not have direct experience with those households. I also received letters from families who had heard of my research through word of mouth, but could not include them in this study due to time restraints. The following section briefly outlines how I chose this sample, and why.

2.3. NATTY DREAD OR KINKY DREAD? THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY.

Here I use terms Rastas use themselves to describe “deviance”. Whereas a Rasta who is seen as upstanding and following all religious and moral prescriptions would be termed a natty dread; those Rastas who deviate from these social and religious taboos would be referred to as a kinky dread – someone who may look like a Rasta, but doesn’t act like one. I thus describe the salient characteristics that determine a Rasta for the purposes of this study, and give an example of a kinky dread.

As already mentioned, I chose multiple research locations in order to better represent the diversity of Rastafari in South Africa. The former Cape province has a large Rasta population, and as I was based in the Eastern Cape, the ‘Cape province’ was geographically easier to work in than for example, the KwaZulu-Natal province. There were many locations I could have chosen within this broad area, but only a limited time in which to conduct the research, so I chose locations that were familiar to me, and that I knew were family-based communities with at least five households in close proximity. I considered, and visited, a further five communities in addition to the three eventually included.

Due to the popularity of Rasta, it is easy to find young men who are Rastafari, but more difficult to find family groups with Rasta children. Within those communities I used the snowball method to locate co-reasoners, based on whom I could meet, and who was available at varying times. I used personal introductions most of the time, where a sister or brother who knew me would introduce me to a family. On some occasions I had specifically requested the meeting, on others, I would be introduced to a friend of the existing family.

Community meetings proved very useful, as this was a way to tell a number of the community about the study, meet several mothers at once, and answer any questions. I often obtained addresses and
set up visits at these meetings. In addition I made A4 pieces of paper explaining who I was, the aims of the study, and how to contact me, for people to take home and show other members of their family. One community, which eventually was not included for a number of reasons, would not be interviewed without first having a general meeting. This is in keeping with the theocratic principles of the movement.

Thus it was with the ones and ones that I started research, those families who lived independently of any community that I already knew. The first community location was Irietown. I had read in the newspaper about a family who were fighting a school’s decision not to accept their son due to his dreadlocks and telephoned the mother. It was only after meeting the family that I realised they had links to InI in Kingstonville, who I had a close relationship with and that I could have been introduced through them. A sistren meeting was planned, where I met the Irietown and Freeland sistren and several infants and toddlers. I contacted these sistren individually, on a fairly ad-hoc basis, and visited and interviewed a selection, and their families.

I had visited Livity Square previously, and thus had an introduction to one of the sistren living there. I spent some time meeting people and explaining the aims of my research. I then attended a sistren meeting, and was asked to present my case to the brethren during their meeting. I was blessed and welcomed to Livity Square, and over the next few days people approached me to ask questions. Some of the brethren present at the meeting then told other communities about my study, who contacted me independently. The geographic layout of Livity Square and the close proximity of the houses meant that all households were within walking distance, which facilitated me ‘popping in’ to introduce myself to those I had not met.

The main criteria for selection in the sample included one or both parents having followed Rasta for at least three years, and that at least one of their children had been born whilst they were active Rastafari. For the purposes of this study ‘authenticity’ was determined as follows: the parents identified themselves as Rastafari, they followed some of the principles of an ital livity, believed in Haile Selassie as a living god, used I-speak, and showed some recognised ‘Rasta’ symbols such as the colours, dreads or pictures of Selassie I. Individually, none of these criteria necessarily mean an individual is Rastafari and indeed, one might say that if someone defines themselves as Rastafari then they are Rastafari. However, I found that with the proliferation of Rasta symbols in both counter, and mainstream culture, it was difficult at face value to tell authenticity. This is why I felt a combination of the above ‘checks’, along with membership of a Rasta household, and community links, allowed for varying local expression of Rastafari from individual to individual, whilst still maintaining the authenticity of the sample as Rasta.

All the children and youths who were part of these families were observed closely, but not all were old enough to articulate their own opinions for example, about government. It is purely coincidental that in 

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10 Rastafari have a theocratic system where they have no individual leaders but follow Haille Selassie as their King. Decisions that affect the group as a whole are made after a community discussion.
this study, the majority of the children under five were girls, and those older, were boys. This means that more young lions’ voices can be heard in this study, as opposed to young sistren. Conversely, due to the gendered nature of relations in Rastafari, I have more of the mothers’ voices than fathers’ represented here. Some of the children were not being raised as Rastas for various reasons - these non-Rasta children were not included in the sample, except where their birth weights were concerned if the mother was Rasta at the time of the birth. Amongst themselves Rastas would refer to individuals as kinky if they commonly engaged in non-ital behaviour such as drinking. This term would also be used for individuals who had dreads but did not follow any livity.

An example of this occurred in 2002 when a Rasta was murdered in an internal dispute over money. After the funeral, I observed the consternation this caused amongst the Irietown Rastas as they felt this would tarnish the reputation they had been working to build. “That brother isn’t a Rasta - he’s no Rastaman”, one brother interjected as I was being told the story by the sistren.

In other words, he felt that they had been betrayed in a sense, by their actions, which points to the following two explanations. Firstly, as already explained (Harrison: 1999) the notion of a Rasta identity is fluid, and some of its external symbols are appropriated by others as part of their individual identity. These individuals who look Rasta without following the livity, are often referred to as rood-boys, a hip-hop, ragga term. Secondly, following Cashmore’s model (Cashmore: 1983, p. 89; Hebdige: 1979), the fluid movement from the periphery of a movement to the centre is not only internally mediated by the individual, but also by the group. Thus one is viewed a Rastaman if one’s actions follow the appropriate livity. However, if an individual deviates too far from an ital livity and one’s actions are seen as closer to Babylon, this is noted by the community and seen as a threat. These individuals are marked as such in a number of ways, as kinky dreads, rood-boys or rude boys, and as exhibiting baldhead thinking. In this way, the community is warning those members of their proximity to Babylon and regulates their own “wrong-doers” through a social excommunication of sorts.

Rastafari considers itself a theocracy, where each person has a chance to reason and contribute towards any decisions made by the community, or on behalf of Rastafari nationwide. Disputes are also settled in this manner. For example, one brother was playing his reggae so loud that it was keeping the whole of Livity Square awake. Rather than confronting him herself, an action which would be seen as socially unacceptable, one mother who felt particularly affected approached the other women with her problem. All the women in the community held a Sistren Council, where they discussed how this was keeping their children awake on school nights. The Sistren Council then made a decision to complain to the Brethren, who also reasoned the matter. As a whole, the community agreed this could not continue and the Brother was publicly asked to keep his music down, which seemed to resolve the issue.

Due to the prominent religious import children hold, it would appear that children and youths would have ample scope in which to influence decisions about their own lives. However, according to one nine year old, “they don’t ask us nothing”. This would seem to indicate that although youths are encouraged to join adult groups and greet correctly, they are still in a liminal phase of learning the
correct way to behave as a Rasta, despite being seen as already knowing the correct way to behave through Jah, or the fact of being born into Rasta. All Rasta continually stress the fact that we are all (non-Rastas included) in a process of learning, and must be suitably humble in order to absorb new knowledge and spiritual direction.

Conclusion
Although several studies point to agency on the part of actors during the time of apartheid, it nevertheless is obvious that family life was disrupted through migrant labour and families being split geographically (Reynolds: 1989). The households introduced here are South African, and are affected by the same problems that afflict other South Africans. But in addition, these people are Rastafari, an identity which helps them to cope and adapt to seemingly irresolvable problems affecting the population as a whole. South African Rasta family life can therefore be viewed on one level as a way in which to protect your family from values that affected previous generations negatively. It also provides a positive model of how to cope as an embattled minority, with spiritual reasoning provided for the suffering InI experience. As the Rastas say “Jah is the driver”. In other words, every thing that happens to us, happens because Jah wills it. On another level, the popularity of Rasta in SA can be attributed to this sense of family and national brotherhood on a larger scale, in the wake of mass disillusionment with government promises.

However, the Rasta identity also brings with it a new set of problems in that government has outlawed ganja, central to Rasta beliefs. In addition, the use of ganja is stigmatised in South Africa. There is only one family in the sample who has not been imprisoned for ganja. The State does not understand Rastafari reasoning as a cultural adaptation to cope with problems the government itself cannot solve. As Rasta principles lie diametrically opposed to those of the state, their needs have not been recognised as valid until recently, with the increase in ‘test cases’ that force the State’s hand. As with any group, Rasta is not homogenous and within the group “Rasta” can be found many class, colour, ethnic, language and religious differences.

The differences in communities do affect the ideals and behaviour of the research participants, although these appear to be mainly split according to ideology, and geographic location. Ideology defines communities – a continuum of adherence to livity. Thus individuals who follow the ideal more closely tend to gravitate together, and moves to other communities are attributed to wanting to follow a stricter or more relaxed livity. However, as Rasta draws much of its power and symbolism from the external global movement, the local movement does share common goals and members meet frequently on a national basis in order to perpetuate their goals, and motivate each other.

This thesis does not claim to speak for these three communities, or Rastas in South Africa. Rastafari have proven they can speak eloquently for themselves, and take a keen interest in analysing text on Rastafari. Similarly, the children and youths have their own voices, some of which have been presented here. Thus this is a collaborative project with these co-reasoners, where the experiences of childhood both past and present are explored against a backdrop of State legislation and power.
photographs
Picture 6: Sistren Meeting

Picture 7: A House Number showing the Symbol of the Colours, Lion of Judah, and Star of David.

Picture 8: The Interior of a Rasta Household and Stall.
PART II

TO GROW A CHILD:
BELIEFS ABOUT
CHILDBEARING & CHILDRAISING
CHAPTER 3: PREGNANCY, CHILDBIRTH & CHILD MORTALITY

Introduction
The opposition between Rastafari and the State is evident in the attitude of staff at hospitals and clinics to their Rasta patients, as will be shown in this chapter. For example, within the health services, indigenous and alternative views to the biomedical system about health-seeking behaviour are scorned as backward. Staff seem to act as though their enlightenment and training is the only valid option and use the power their job affords them to deny treatment to those they feel do not deserve it. The body of the mother, and that of the unborn child, becomes the site of a power struggle between Rasta and the allopathic system\(^1\). Rastafari express this concept in terms of sufferation at the hands of Babylon, the metaphorical oppressor. Young Rasta mothers thus experience terrible treatment and abuse in local clinics and hospitals as they are viewed as drug addicts, and dirty. In return, these Rasta women are shocked at the filth, and chaos in these places, convinced that their own, clean homes are a better health alternative.

This chapter elaborates on some of the general practises of Rastafari livity described in the previous chapters, and focuses on how they are manifested at a family level in South Africa. It looks specifically at how the ideal of Rastafari practise, influences and impacts upon the parent's behaviour when preparing for the birth of a Rasta child, in other words, the beliefs of the parents, impact on how the child is born, and raised. The mother's personal interpretation of the correct way in which to raise a child to be Rasta, (in conjunction with the views expressed by the immediate family, peer group and access to resources) influences her strategies and preparation for the new child during her term of pregnancy. Her cultural beliefs will also affect the birthing process.

Whilst the father is often involved in these decisions, the mother and her voice is highlighted in this chapter. Ideally, the mother's role is that of homemaker and she occupies the more private space of the household; whereas the father's role falls within the more public economic and political spheres. The mother's health and well-being during pregnancy also relates directly to the postnatal health of the neonate, and has been shown to influence early childhood development. The mother's experience during pregnancy and childbirth is therefore an important aspect to consider when looking at childhood in Rastafari, especially as policy dictates this should be done through primary health care services\(^2\). As the Constitution on the Rights of the Child states, children have a right to primary health care, parents could feasibly be prosecuted for not treating a child according to the biomedical system. In any event, they are still accused of ill-treating their children if the child is not taken to the clinic, doctor or hospital. In addition, a child's life starts when she is conceived, and not only after childbirth so it is useful to have an understanding of her immediate environment prior to birth.

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\(^1\) Or biomedical system.
\(^2\) Through legislation such as the Constitution on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by the SA Government.
As highlighted in Part I, the child has been targeted in governmental and international advertising as the “key to the future”. As a focal point in South Africa’s democratic reform, certain recommendations have been drafted into legislature in order to protect the child, and to work towards a future generation of strong and healthy people (Dept of Education White Paper 1995). The interim policy for Early Childhood Development (1996) states that

The White Paper (1995) defines Early Childhood Development (ECD) as “an umbrella term which applies to the processes by which children from birth to nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially” (p. 33, par. 73). The White Paper recognises that interventions need to focus not only on the child but also on the wider environment, particularly the family, community support systems and government policies. An integrated strategy for ECD will recognise the need for linkages between education and nutrition, health and welfare (own emphasis. In Dept. of Education: 1996, Interim policy for early childhood development).

However, these ideas as to what a child needs in order to develop into a “successful South African” do not necessarily mirror those of Rastafari. Points of contention are vaccinations, pressure on the parents to consult primary health care for the child, and compulsory state education. The mother’s religious beliefs and appearance are often ridiculed by staff at institutions such as clinics and hospitals and her culturally defined practices blamed for the ill-health of herself or her family. This sphere, in which Rasta and biomedical practitioners working for the State have conflicting views about how to successfully bring a child to term, highlights the mother’s resistance and adherence to her faith.

The Sample

The act of giving life can often be fraught with danger and sometimes leads to death. Almost all of the mothers interviewed mentioned a fear of death, either on the part of the child; or the mother fearing for her own life during childbirth. The pregnancy and birth experiences from 1988 to 2002 of 14 Rasta women are narrated and compared, taking into account information derived from group workshops with other Rasta mothers. During the course of this research, three mothers who were already included in the parents’ sample fell pregnant, and one youth who had been interviewed with regards to schooling experiences, fell pregnant towards the end of 2002.

One context that has been discussed in detail is what age parameters define a child, or youth? Some mother’s occupy a liminal status themselves as they were 15 years old when their children were born. These young mothers therefore are both children and adults, according to different institutionalised definitions. However, as Rasmussen (2000) describes about the Tuareg of West Africa

age groups are not defined according to biological or chronological markers, but rather in terms of one’s social and ritual position in the life course (p. 133).

These women have therefore achieved a transition to adult status through successful childbirth, rather than through marriage or reaching a certain predetermined age.

In this chapter, I look at motivations for having children, prenatal care, experiences with primary health care givers, stresses for the pregnant mother and childhood mortality. It also examines how the expectant mother has to continually negotiate her course of action through 3 main influences: family; her religion; and primary health care stipulations.
3.1. THE CULTURAL MEANINGS ASCRIBED TO PREGNANCY, PARENTHOOD AND
CHILDHOOD

The term childhood in Rasta shares multiple meanings (as discussed in the introduction), these
terms dependent upon the context in which they’re used, and the subject to which they’re
referring. All the Rasta parents of the children in the sample originally came from an alternative
cultural background, and accompanying religion, the demographics of which can be seen in the table/
bar graph below.

Table 4: Parents’ Previous Religion/Culture before Rasta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELIGION</th>
<th>Ancestor based</th>
<th>Islamic</th>
<th>Congregational</th>
<th>Apostolic</th>
<th>Non-Denominatio</th>
<th>Roman Catholic</th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>NGK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Red</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Red</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Red</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY:**

- **Christian** Blues (incl. Grad graphic)
- **Other** Hot colours (incl. Grad graphic)

As can be seen in shades of blue, most of the parents’ prior religions were predominantly Christian
based, including the following denominations: United Congregational Church, Roman Catholic,
Apostolic, Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), and Protestant. Other religions included South African
ancestor based traditions, and Islam. These initial choices thus followed on from their parents’ belief
systems. In other words, this table also gives an indication of the Rasta children’s grandparents’
religion. This is significant as it gives an indication as to the Rasta parents’ personal experiences of
growing up within for example, Islam, and to what advice young mothers are given from their parents.

I asked the parents the following questions with regards to childhood, and raising children:

- what does childhood mean to you?
- Is there anything you are going to do differently raising your children from how your parents
  raised you?

Here follows a selection of some of the answers, and a discussion. I have included the previous
religion, and age of the narrator in brackets as it relates to the differences in child raising from the
previous generation.

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3 This is an indication only, as this was not true for all families. However, it did concur in the majority of cases.
Some of the main themes appearing in the narratives above are that children are holy, and special. Freedom was also equated with childhood, in that “children must be free”. All the Rasta parents said they would raise their child differently to the way they were raised. The following examples were most common. Firstly, several parents came from a background of domestic violence, and emphasised they would not repeat this behaviour and would give the children lots of love and attention. Secondly, several expressed they wanted their children to have more freedom than they had; and that they would make it easier for their children to communicate with them. In addition, they mentioned eliminating meat from their diet; allowing the child to dread naturally instead of combing the hair, and...
the fact that they did not smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol. It is notable that the differences expressed
are not moral value systems, but rather changes in behaviour in accordance with Ital principles.

When asked about childhood, the majority of Rastas felt it was their role, or duty to have children. The
two main reasons given were Biblical in origin: firstly, “to raise up an army of Jah-people”, and
secondly, it was natural. Out of these women, only two used contraceptives. As Sister Rachael
explained, “I don’t believe in it. Babylon things. I only use natural things. The father [Jah] says go out
and make children so I don’t use these things.” Sister Divan doesn’t use them as “the I-man said I
mustn’t use these injections,” and Sister Jolie simply states “it’s not Ital. If I fall pregnant, Jah
guide... and if I don’t, Jah always guides”.

In most of the women’s cases, the realities of time and financial constraints put the practicality of
contraception above its tabooed status as a new reproductive technology and their religious feelings
about it. When asked why she used contraceptives despite telling me she didn’t believe in pills, Sister
Sara answered

Because I want my children to be planned. I’m still young and I don’t have my own place. When I
have my own place I’ll get pregnant. I get pregnant quickly. Maybe it’s because I’m using herbs and
that. My Kingman knows [about the contraceptives]. He’s not happy actually, but he respects my
reasoning.

Men usually expressed an abhorrence for contraception as a man-made, unnatural substance more
strongly. Both women who used contraceptives, and those who didn’t, told me that their partners did
not approve of contraceptive use. This indicates that despite the patriarchal structure of Rastafari,
women do exercise agency even if their partners do not necessarily approve of their actions and have
their own sense of power and responsibility within the sphere of the home and immediate community.

Children’s significance is therefore described in terms of being spiritually important and a gift from
God. Childlessness is greeted with regret, but expressed in terms of hopefulness and of Jah providing.
A woman is expected to want to have children, although a desire to wait until the afore-mentioned
finances or practical situations such as a home are understood. However, not wanting any children is
seen as abnormal. When asked what children meant to them, all the answers were similar.

Sister Rachael feels children “mean a lot”, Sister Jolie describes “children are Jah”, and Sister Michelle
said “children mean everything to me”. Many of these women came from violent homes where alcohol
abuse was a problem, and had experienced either physical or sexual abuse. Rastafari and its
subsequent principles are one way in which these women seek to protect their children from the harsh
realities they themselves have experienced.

These Rasta women see Rastafari as providing a better model of behaviour for children to emulate
than the alcohol abuse, violence and death prevalent in the townships of South Africa. The expression
of desire for freedom for children thus means freedom for children from pain and abuse, in other
words, “children must be protected at all costs” (Sister Jolie).
3.2. PRENATAL CARE

As early childhood is always a liminal stage carrying the threat of infant death\(^4\), care of the foetus during pregnancy is emphasised. The Rasta mothers in the previous section have made a choice to follow Rastafari principles, both during pregnancy and after her child has been born. That is only one of many choices to be made before a child can be successfully brought to term, and is tempered by external influences beyond her control. Biomedical practitioners at clinics and hospitals base their model of prenatal care on an allopathic system\(^5\), and they in turn are advised by The Department of Health, which in principle follows international standards and guidelines.

Lia-Hoaberg, B; Rode, P; Skovholt, C; Oberg, C; Berg, C; Mullett, S & Choi, T. (1990) state that prenatal care is a major factor in preventing low birth-weight and other adverse pregnancy outcomes. Women with no prenatal care are three times more likely to have low birth-weight babies (<2500g) than mothers with early and continuous prenatal care. Low birth weight accounts for two-thirds of infant deaths in the first month of life and half of all infant deaths in the first year of life (p. 487).

In 41 percent of the pregnancies the mothers went to a clinic for prenatal care and advice. In seven percent of pregnancies a hospital gave prenatal care, another ten percent received care from a private doctor and in seven percent no prenatal care was received. Out of these pregnancies seven percent had a mixture of clinic and hospital prenatal care, and three percent also consulted with a midwife. The level of extra prenatal care thus ranged from none to good.

Attitudes towards prenatal care appeared to be ambivalent. Sister Sonya only visited the hospital twice with her first pregnancy, once to confirm her pregnancy and once for an ultrasound. She didn’t take any supplements. With her second pregnancy she only went to the clinic for the first time at seven months. At this stage she was given iron, vitamin tablets, folic acid and an injection. She does not know what the injection was for and reports she only took a few of the folic acid pills. Others in the sample reported similar activity, which seems to indicate resistance to biomedical prenatal care through ambivalence in regularly taking the supplements.

Even when prenatal care is given, agency on the part of the women affects how the medication is taken. Thus, many of the women did not finish their course of pills or reported a reluctance to take them. Sister Rachael said that she took the iron pills she was given whenever she felt she needed them, rather than regularly. She explained that she was anaemic, and had low blood pressure, a complaint echoed by other women in the sample. This could possibly be attributed in part to the cultural avoidance of red meat, as well as being a common phenomenon in pregnancy. Sister Rachael felt that the pills were needed to balance her blood pressure and were only required if she felt dizzy. She didn’t like the fact that they gave her a big appetite\(^6\), but did try to eat more fish and soya products to compensate for the lack of protein in her diet.

\(^4\) According to Stats SA, in 1996, infant deaths made up 7.5 percent of the total deaths recorded in South Africa (p. 24).
\(^5\) Allopathic is another term for the western biomedical system.
\(^6\) Hunger is also a common symptom of pregnancy due to the extra demands made on the body’s nutrients by the foetus.
Childcare and childbirth is mostly the domain and responsibility of the women. They therefore have a lot of influence in health seeking behaviour for the infant. The visits to the clinics and the decision to give birth in a clinic or hospital was driven out of concern for the infant's needs, despite the mother’s or father’s personal wishes to give birth at home, or in nature. The ambivalence in subscribing fully to prenatal care seems to derive largely from conflicting religious, cultural and medical influences. According to their Rasta belief system as outlined in Chapter One, many stay away from “chemicals” or “non-ital” substances, and avoid even eggs. Naturalness is valued highly as is not eating flesh. Tablets, and supplements fall into the same category as contraceptives in that they are “chemical”.

This sample therefore did not represent “mothers with early and continuous prenatal care” as suggested by Lia-Hoaberg et al. (1990). In addition, Ware (1984) looks at the effects of maternal education on child mortality and women’s roles and finds that in patriarchal societies where women traditionally have a low status, and low educational level, child mortality rates are high. Almost 20 years later Yassin (2000) made similar findings looking at socio-demographic indicators of child mortality in Egypt as did Brittain (1992), who looks at the impact of maternal age and birth order on early childhood mortality. Finally, Lia-Hoaberg et al. assert that “Low income and minority women are at greatest risk from for delivery of a low birth-weight infant” (1990, p. 487). Thus according to the literature on the subject, the risk of high mortality is increased if the mother is young, has little formal education, many children, a low income or is a member of a marginalized group.

The following table looks at the mother’s maternal age at the birth of her first child, her level of education, how many children she has, and her home language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ed. complete</th>
<th>No. boys</th>
<th>No. girls</th>
<th>Maternal age (1st)</th>
<th>Home Lang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23*</td>
<td>Std 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28*</td>
<td>Std 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Xhosa/Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Matric</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Std 8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Std 7 deceased</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1st yr BA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Afrik/eng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Std 9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26*</td>
<td>2nd yr BA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>eng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Std 9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Age 15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>eng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Afrik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Eng</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 16 total | 11 total | Avg: 21 |

Table 5: Detail Showing Mother’s Details in Relation to Births
From the table above\(^7\), one can see that all the women (with the exception of two) gave birth to their first child before the age of 24. Seven of these were under the age of 20\(^8\). Most of the pregnancies were unplanned, and all interrupted education. Education was expressed as “the key to success” and as “something no one can take away from you”. Some of the women actively wanted to further their education, while others wanted to, but thought it was too late. 16 boys were born as opposed to 11 girls. None of the parents wanted to know the gender of the child before it was born. The reason for this was expressed as “\(\text{Jah is the driver}\)” or “\(\text{Jah Guide}\)”, in other words, the child they are meant to have will be born according to the will of \(\text{Jah}\), however they try to intervene.

All these women displayed a great deal of biomedical knowledge about their pregnancies, any complications that occurred and the causes for this. Although some of this information was gained from doctors or clinics, in the majority of cases it was actively researched either through books or queries.

I attribute this to two main factors, one cultural and the other practical. Rastafari promotes self-education and self-reliance from Babylon, which is fostered through the technique of reasoning. Thus, although limited resources are available, information derived from these resources is disseminated orally, through reasoning at Sister’s Meetings, festivals and informal visits. Due to the cultural importance of children in Rastafari, it thus stands to reason that these mothers would have researched the topic thoroughly. Practically, financial restraints mean that the ideal cannot always be followed. The more these women know about childcare from all perspectives, the better equipped they are to handle childcare emergencies with the resources available to them. These women were intelligent and knowledgeable, despite their lack of formal educational qualifications. The majority could converse easily in English and Afrikaans and some spoke Xhosa. Almost all spoke of education as a valuable resource that would benefit their children. Education will be covered at length in a later chapter.

From the information presented thus far, it would appear that Rasta women would have a high child mortality, and low birth weight rate. Regular prenatal care is not followed, maternal age is young, birth spacing fairly close, and they fall into the category of a low-income, minority group. In addition, most mothers had not completed secondary school.

However, this has not proved to be the case. The following section examines some of the data showing healthy birth weights, and the few cases of child mortality that have occurred. A description of the cultural practises which has led to this pattern then follows.

\(^7\) These results are not necessarily representative for all Rastafari in the former Cape Province, however do represent a sample of families throughout the area.

\(^8\) It would appear from this table that coloured Afrikaans speakers have children under the age of 20, however, there was a majority of coloured Rastas within the sample which could account for this. Similar young maternal ages have been observed amongst other ethnic groups throughout South Africa.
3.3. STRESSES AND CHILDHOOD MORTALITY

According to Agha (2000), "high infant mortality also has implications for rapid population growth: parents who fear that their children are not going to survive to older ages are likely to have more children" (p.199). However, amongst this sample, Rasta children have a relatively high survival rate, despite the mother’s coming from low-income, minority groups; and despite the general ambivalence to prenatal care. Children are still however, greatly desired even when a mother already has three children. One could therefore attribute both the survival rate of infants and the desire for more children to cultural reasons.

A low birth weight is usually noted as under 2500g (Lia-Hoaberg, B. et al.). From the data I could get from clinic cards, none of the children were under 2500g, with the exception of one premature child. As the narratives will illustrate, this was due to a car accident. However, more quantitative data could change this pattern.

Table 6: Birth Weights and Child Mortality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Child 1</th>
<th>Child 2</th>
<th>Child 3</th>
<th>Child 4</th>
<th>Child 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3100g, 54cm</td>
<td>Mis (3mths)</td>
<td>2200g (prem)</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Curr. Preg Complications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3200g</td>
<td>3250g</td>
<td>1 miscarria (6wks)</td>
<td>&lt;3,2kg ‘Not as big as others’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2900g, 49cm</td>
<td>2515g, 53cm</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2700g</td>
<td>2900g</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3660g</td>
<td>3500g</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3400g, 52cm</td>
<td>3500g, 50cm</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4100g</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td>Baby died in childbirth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>No data</td>
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<tr>
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<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the 33 pregnancies, 30 healthy babies were born, only two miscarried, and one child died during childbirth due to hospital staff negligence. The relative success rate of childbirth would therefore need to be attributed to variables other than maternal age, formal education, birth spacing, income or marginality.

The Mosley-Chen framework claims “socio-economic factors at the community, household, or individual levels operate through five proximate determinants of health to influence the level of infant and child mortality in society” (Agha: 2000, p 200; Stegeman: 1997, p 11). Although not an
anthropological measure, this model is used extensively in longitudinal studies dealing with child mortality and as such has relevance in this study.

Both Stegeman (1997) and Mynnti (1993. In Stegeman: 1997, p12) note that the addition of more quantitative data, a core anthropological tool, enhances the usefulness of the Mosley-Chen framework. In Stegeman’s case, the detail of why mothers use certain health care facilities and the productivity and functionality of those facilities can be used to facilitate recommendation to government on how to improve child health (1997, p.12). Mynnti (1993) is concerned with the role of “care factors” in increasing child survival. If one were to use this model one could explain the relative high birthing success rate amongst these Rasta women.

Firstly, on a community level, these women do have access to health care through clinics which are relatively close, although modes of transport such as taxis did lead to complications in one pregnancy. On a household level, the number of people sharing a single household ranged from four to seven. There was running water in all these households, and toilet facilities in half. All the households had a fridge, and most had cooking facilities. Many of these were powered by a system of extension cords running from one house to another. The fridges and cooking facilities were often necessary for making goods for informal trading. Despite the relative poverty of the participants, environmental contaminants were at a minimum, partly due to running water and food storage facilities but also due to the belief that “cleanliness is next to godliness”.

At an individual level, women were very informed about matters relating to pregnancy and child-rearing, despite their youthfulness and the range of educational qualifications obtained. Education, and the attainment of wisdom and knowledge are valued highly amongst Rastafari. Women are proactive about child health. They independently consult each other and books about pregnancy. This could be attributed to childbirth experience, as well as the symbolic value children have in Rasta. As the larger community saw the mothers as being responsible for the children, they could implement their knowledge practically.

Those still in contact with their families are also advised by mothers and grandmothers; and all are influenced by school lessons (health education); prenatal classes at clinics; and government-sponsored educational literature in their areas. The desire to live ‘naturally’ therefore conflicts with the advice to take supplements, have regular check-ups, and give birth in a supervised clinical environment. Women seem to negotiate this by seeking prenatal care, but sporadically, and following their own judgement about when to take supplements.

In addition, many of the women reported using herbs, and ganja as part of their personal prenatal programme. For example, Sister Anjelica took Naturoforce tincture of raspberry throughout her pregnancy to facilitate an easy birth, she also recommended Blue Lily (Agapanthus Africanus) for this purpose. Sister Anjelica found about the use of both remedies from photocopied pages a Rasta mother in Freeland mailed her. The well-known ‘Medicinal Plants of South Africa’ describes Blue Lily
as being “mildly purgative... [and] may also be used to ease a difficult labour and to ensure that the placenta is expelled” (Van Wyck, Van Oudtshoorn, and Gericke, 1997:32).

Smoking, or drinking an infusion of ganja is a common folk remedy for pregnancy associated complaints (Benet: 1975, p45-46, Dreher, Nugent, & Hudgins: 1994). According to the mothers interviewed, ganja is supposed to ease morning sickness, increase the appetite, aid relaxation and meditation; and if smoked just before, and during childbirth, eases labour and birth pains during contractions. Similar findings were made by Dreher et al. in a study on prenatal marijuana exposure in Jamaica. Some of their sample were Rastafari.

Women use it [ganja] as a vehicle for dealing with the difficult circumstances surrounding pregnancy. For instance, nineteen... reported that it increased their appetite throughout the prenatal period and/or relieved the nausea of pregnancy. Fifteen reported using it to relieve fatigue and provide rest during pregnancy. All the mothers considered the effects of marijuana on nausea and fatigue to be good for themselves and their infants (1994, p3).

Finally, as has been described as part of their religious tenets, Rastafari eat a mainly ital diet composed of fresh fruit and vegetables, staples such as samp and rice, and do not generally smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol. The fruit and vegetables are generally freshly available from the women’s own partners, who operate ital trading stalls, or from the immediate community at an affordable cost. As is commonly known, fresh fruit and vegetables provide a wide range of essential amino acids, vitamins and mineral essential for the healthy growth of a foetus. In addition, many women reported having some supplements from the clinic “when they felt they needed it”. They did however, still experience stresses that resulted in complications during pregnancy and in two cases, miscarriage. Amongst these were public transport systems; negligence by health care workers; violence and raids by the police.

The most common mode of public transport in all locations, as in much of South Africa, is in taxis. They are affordable, regular and fast but have a reputation of being over-crowded, with speeding reckless drivers. Other modes of transport include lifts from other Rastas and family members. Sister Sonya spoke of one lift with a young Rasta youth, “Sister, I thought I was going to die. He was going all over the road and had bad eyesight, so we were going really slowly”.

Sister Jolie was on her way to the hospital for a check-up when the taxi she was in was involved in an accident. She started haemorrhaging and was taken to St David’s, where she was diagnosed with placenta abruptio. Her son was born one month premature. Both mother and child almost died due to staff negligence (see narrative in 3.4.). Stresses other than public transport and accessibility to health care are police related intimidation and the threat of arrest or imprisonment because of using marijuana. These will be described in greater detail from Chapter Four onwards.

The death of a child is expressed in terms of sadness and loss, no matter how early on in the pregnancy. Sister May, at 15, hid her pregnancy for the first six months as she was scared of the people she was living with, who would beat her regularly. Her alcoholic mother provided little
protection. Eventually she went to the nearby clinic and was given iron pills as she was experiencing black-outs and dizziness. The father of the child found out about the pregnancy and wanted her to abort at seven months. Despite the fact that her pregnancy was the result of rape, Sister May still desperately wanted her child. After her experience at St. David’s, when the infant died during childbirth (see narrative in 3.4.) she left her family to join a Rasta household, where she says “bad things won’t happen to I anymore” (personal comm.).

Thus, within this sample, the few incidents of child mortality were related to external sources, rather than the factors usually associated with child mortality. Although all factors which usually contribute to a high child mortality rate, and low birth weight were present; predominately healthy birth weights and a low mortality rate were evident. I attribute this to the ital diet the mothers followed, their proactive search for information on pregnancy and child health, use of some public health prenatal care, and their personal prenatal care in the form of herbal supplements and the use of ganja.

These strategies on the part of the mother are not negotiated easily and she often encounters resistance to these culturally motivated or folk strategies from staff at prenatal clinics and hospitals. The following section narrates three women’s actual experiences of childbirth, as compared to the ideal; the problems they encounter with staff and how these relationships have developed historically. Finally, the women give recommendations as to what they expect from public health care.

3.4. CHILDBIRTH EXPERIENCES AND INTERACTIONS WITH HEALTH CARE WORKERS

The experiences of childbirth itself differed only with regard to those who gave birth in a public hospital or clinic; and those who had home births, or gave birth outdoors, the latter forming a minority. Only one woman in my sample gave birth outdoors. Many of the women expressed the opinion that as Rasta women, they should have a home birth, and drink only herbs as part of prenatal care, not relying on Babylon. In a confidential discussion, Sister Anjelica was telling me about a Rasta woman, Sister Kelly, in Forest Camp who had just given birth to her fourth child outside in the back of a bakkie. Sister Anjelica was ambivalent about this. She herself had given birth to one child in a hospital and was planning to give birth to the second in the same hospital. She both felt Sister Kelly was “a strong sister” and admired her for the suffering and “humbleness” she espoused. However, at the same time she criticised Sister Kelly’s husband saying “that brother is heavy, making the sister go outside during winter”.

Different families follow Rasta at different levels of “strictness”. Fundamental Rastas are usually described as “AK-heavy”, or “strict”, and usually admired for their ability to do so. In this case Sister Kelly’s husband strongly followed taboos against female menstruation and birth inside the house, believing this to be polluting. The other family didn’t practise this.

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9 Her immediate family were not Rasta, although she practised Rastafari.
Case Studies and Narratives

Sister Jolie lives in Irietown with her husband, their three sons and two Rasta youths. She was pregnant at the time this research was conducted, and gave birth to a baby girl. In the following box, she relates her childbirth experiences for each of her pregnancies.

BOX 5 - NARRATIVE: Sister Jolie

Child 1: 1994
I gave birth to Benny at St. David’s. It wasn’t nice. Those people don’t care if your baby dies. The doctors are alright but the nurses are racist. They’re Africans and help other Africans first. I was only 15 and I was screaming. I didn’t know what was happening. I asked “please, come help me”. She said, “I’ll only help you next week”. So the nurse, she rolled up some toilet paper, and she shoved it in my mouth. I spat it back at her. And then the baby came immediately.

Child 2: 1999
With Ranton, I had been in a taxi accident. I arrived at the hospital and was bleeding blood and water. It felt like something dropped in my stomach. The nurse told me I’d made a mess I must clean it up. Another sister who was there said “you can’t make her do that” but the nurse said I must. I said okay, and I knelt and I cleaned it up. Then a doctor came and checked me. He said “oh shit no” and suddenly the nurses were running with me and put a mask on my face. I was out. They didn’t explain anything. The one doctor, she was a very nice doctor. But I heard someone say “the 8 month baby is dead and then... oh, no, the baby’s fine”.

Child 3: 2001
I didn’t want to go back to St. David’s for Graham. But I was told I must go there. They were nice that time. I was famous at that time because of Benny. It’s your relationship, African people together mos.

The above narrative shows a progression in the relationship between Sister Jolie and hospital staff based on her actions at a community level. With her first two children, she was humiliated. She reported having toilet paper shoved in her mouth, and was forced to clean the hospital floor of her “mess” whilst in a critical condition. However, by her fourth pregnancy (Child 3) she had been in the local newspapers as she had challenged a local school to allow her son to attend with dreadlocks based on their rights to religious freedom as Rastafari. As a result she was recognised as a Rasta by people in the area. She says this time the predominantly black nursing staff greeted her as “an African sister” and treated her far better.

When I arrived at her house for a Sistren Council one afternoon during the research period, Sister Jolie showed me an ultrasound scan she had received from a Dr. Meya. Apparently, she had gone to St. David’s Hospital as she was experiencing severe complications with her pregnancy. As she told me afterwards, “the bed was wet” with blood. On her arrival they started processing her for an abortion as soon as she told them she was pregnant, which infuriated her because of her beliefs and the fact

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10 This will be detailed in Chapter Five on education.
that she had already lost one child. She told them she already had four pregnancies and wanted to keep this child as she had experienced complications in a previous pregnancy. They then referred her to the afore-mentioned gynaecologist, Dr Meya, who she says “was very nice”. The ultrasound read as follows:

**BOX 6 - ULTRASOUND: Sister Jolie**

“A singleton intra-uterine foetus +11.5 gestational age is demonstrated, EDD 28/11/2002. (+ 6 days). Normal foetal heart beat and satisfactory foetal movement demonstrated. A large inhomogenous pseudo-mass is noted between the amniotic sac and anterior margin of the endometrial lining, the appearances are compatible with a threatened viable pregnancy. I suspect this will progress to an inevitable abortion, as the haematoma is fairly large (see enclosed pictures).”

She was then referred back to St. David’s Hospital, without being told why, or what was wrong with her. When she arrived, the doctor shouted at her – “what are you doing back here” and wouldn’t look in the envelope where Dr Meya’s referral (above) was. She eventually asked them to discharge her as they were admitting her for bed rest, again without consulting her. Her reasoning for staying at home, rather than the hospital was that they didn’t have proper food (ital), or clean bed sheets. She felt she could only get proper bed rest at home, and she didn’t want to lose the child or have an abortion. She also consulted a midwife after that as she had done previously, who gave her herbs to staunch the haemorrhaging.

From the above case study, it seems that very few medical staff these women see explain their diagnosis in their patient’s mother tongue, or listen to the patient’s explanation of their symptoms. In addition, her medical history was not consulted. The medical experience can then become a frightening process for these women, as they are unsure of the severity of their complaint and who to turn to for assistance. As Sister Jolie complained to another woman during the meeting, “hulle praat in hierdie hoë engels wat ek nie verstaan nie”, in other words “they speak in this high English that I don’t understand”. In her case, the main thing that could be distinguished in the ultrasound was the sentence “I suspect this will progress to an inevitable abortion” (own emphasis), the rest of the diagnosis difficult to understand without some biomedical background.

Sister Rachael is a petite woman who only weighs about 45 kilograms. She gave birth to her first son three weeks overdue at Georgestone Hospital and in the following box accounts how she and her child almost died during the experience. Whilst she was giving birth, she reports how a nurse tried to steal out of her bag when she thought she was deurmekaar\textsuperscript{11} from the pain. This case study also highlights physical and verbal abuse on the part of staff.

\textsuperscript{11} Confused. Disoriented.
During her second pregnancy Sister Rachael gave birth at a nearby clinic but started experiencing complications. The staff wanted to send her back to Georgestone but she asked them if she could have five minutes to pray. She was desperate not to go back to Georgestone. When the nurses returned she says they were amazed her levels had returned to normal and she was allowed to stay. She attributes this to Jah’s intervention. The child was born after a new shift arrived. However he was choking as the cord was around his neck when he was born. His colour returned to normal after thirty minutes. The nurse told her not to make his hair ugly like her’s [dreadlocked], as he was born with hair.

Similarly, Sister May also reports the nurse taking a decision not to call the doctor. The following narrative clearly highlights her feelings that incompetence on the part of the nurse caused the death of her child.

**BOX 7 - NARRATIVE: Sister Rachael**

**Child 1:** I thought I was dying, I was getting visions. I fainted a lot and I was weak, weak, weak. The private doctor was too much [money]. I was in labour from 11am Monday. I gave birth the next morning at 3.15am. They [the nurses] hit me and pinched me. I had bruises on the inside of my thighs. They hit me when I fainted and pinched me because they said I was lazy, I wasn’t pushing hard enough.

The nurses called the doctor too late for a caesarean sector. I was too weak and the baby’s heartbeat was slower. His shoulders [the unborn child] were too big [3 weeks overdue] so the doctor put me on a machine to contract me, then they had to use vacuum extraction to get the baby out. They put a vacuum on his head and sucked. They had to cut me inside to get him out. After birth, I needed stitches inside me.

The nurse stitching me was talking to a friend and not paying attention. I told her to watch what she was doing but she ignored me. She sewed wrong and so ripped the stitches out and redid it. It burned. Then I got a fever, I thought I would die. The doctors were running around. They tried new antibiotics every 4 hours for fever and infection, they had a drip in me. Another male nurse, with 3 stripes, told me not to complain about what the nurse did as she could lose her job and he likes her. He told me he would help me. He came everyday, four times a day with Milton (bottle steriliser) and washed me with it. I went home after 15 days in the hospital.

**Child 2:** At 5.00 they wanted to send me to Georgestone. My iron levels were down, the protein was high and the child’s heart beat slower. I didn’t want to go back there so I prayed. Ek bid. Ek bid. (I prayed). I prayed that even if I didn’t survive that at least the child must and that I’d stay on the path if Jah bless me.

During her second pregnancy Sister Rachael gave birth at a nearby clinic but started experiencing complications. The staff wanted to send her back to Georgestone but she asked them if she could have five minutes to pray. She was desperate not to go back to Georgestone. When the nurses returned she says they were amazed her levels had returned to normal and she was allowed to stay. She attributes this to Jah’s intervention. The child was born after a new shift arrived. However he was choking as the cord was around his neck when he was born. His colour returned to normal after thirty minutes. The nurse told her not to make his hair ugly like her’s [dreadlocked], as he was born with hair.
Thus in all the case studies above, similar abuse and incompetence was reported. These experiences concurred with other mother’s narratives and indicate both the general condition of public health care in South Africa characterised by understaffing and funding\(^{12}\); as well as a more specific prejudice against Rastafari mothers.

As described earlier, Rasta women use ganja to assist in pregnancy, labour and childbirth following both cultural and religious prescriptions that ganja is a holy sacrament, and a multi-purpose medication. Dreher et al. report:

> Although marijuana use during pregnancy is discouraged in prenatal clinics and through government-sponsored programs, the consumption of marijuana during pregnancy by Jamaican women is not necessarily indicative of a mother’s lack of concern about the health and development of her infant (p. 2).

Similarly, in South Africa, Rasta women are criticised for using ganja to the extent that whatever reason they visit the clinic or hospital they are invariably verbally told the reason for their illness is because of dagga and that they must stop smoking. This diagnosis is not recorded on the clinic card. Many of the mothers also expressed wanting the freedom to smoke ganja during labour and childbirth to ease the pain and hasten the delivery as can be seen in the following narrative.

**BOX 8 - NARRATIVE: Sister May**

I have big issues with that hospital [St. David’s]. Because of that sister [the nurse], I’ve lost my baby. There wasn’t even a doctor, only that nurse. When she saw the cord wrapped around his neck she should have called a doctor. But she didn’t. When the labour finished I saw the way she took the baby and I knew it was dead. She tried to wake it. She didn’t even tell me. After half an hour she called the doctor. The next morning the doctor was confused. He said “how can it be? Its heartbeat was normal”. It was 9 months and 10 days on the 23 April. I was 15. On the 29 April I turned 16. I left after that for Freeland. That’s when I became serious about Rasta, strictly.

The majority of mothers reported the same problems about state healthcare. Long queues and delays, understaffing, doctors absent, staff rudeness, unhygienic environment, racial bias and lack of communication about one’s ailments. Every single case had received terrible treatment from one

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\(^{12}\) Professionalism and training have deteriorated; and union militancy has shifted power from the professionals to the workers.
hospital in particular, St. David’s, and most women preferred to give birth in a clinic if possible. Some of the recommendations for public healthcare was that staff should change their attitude, “they mustn’t shout at us for nothing” and that “they should clean their toilets. The hygiene of the place is terrible”. Many mothers also reported being incorrectly medicated or diagnosed due to inattentiveness on the part of the doctor. For example, Sister Rachael has a severe allergic reaction to Doxycline but had to argue with staff at Georgestone as they insisted she must take it.

Conclusion
In South Africa, the process of bringing a child to term and successfully giving birth is one fraught with difficulty and danger. However, despite the experiences described by these women there is a much higher percentage of successful births than is commonly recorded for low-income minority groups. According to most theories on child mortality and low birth weight, the following all contribute to a high infant mortality rate: low maternal age, low income, lack of prenatal care, low formal education. These mothers all shared these factors yet they demonstrated a low mortality rate and healthy birth weight. This is attributed to cultural practises such as ital, use of herbs, self-education, good household hygiene, and the level of importance placed on children by Rasta families. Mothers’ early strategies for infant survival are therefore successful, despite stressors such as public transport, police intimidation and staff negligence; allowing the infant to grow and learn, which is the basis for the next chapter.

As their cultural ideal with regards to giving birth at home, or in nature is not currently possible due to legislature, the dangers of giving birth, and the environment; Rastafari are now making use of health care facilities when needed, and are demanding equal treatment as South African citizens with a constitutional right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion. The problems and experiences highlighted at public hospitals have been consistent in each participant, with clinics always preferred due to their cleanliness and staff’s attitude. The complaints about St. David’s and Georgestone are unfortunately common in most South African public hospitals and not restricted to Rasta. However, mothers were targeted for their dreadlocks, and ganja use, the latter being assumed without verification.

This chapter therefore highlights two main points. Firstly, Rastafari practises with regards to pregnancy and childbirth differs phenomenally from biomedical state-approved practise. As the biomedical model is promoted as the “correct” method, prospective mothers are criticised as following “bad” practises when they use ganja or don’t want to take medication during pregnancy by non-Rasta community members and public healthcare staff.

Secondly, the low mortality rate indicates that the Rastafari practises, far from being “bad’ have positive benefits for the unborn child, whilst all the reports of attending state sanctioned clinic and hospital for prenatal care and health mention unsanitary conditions, negligence, abuse and discrimination. The pressure to follow a biomedical system of prenatal care and childbirth supposedly for the health of the foetus and eventual neonate, has been shown to cause death and stress.

13 Name has been changed.
The question that needs to be asked is "who is ultimately responsible for the life of the child, and who should have the right to decide what should happen to that child - the parents; the state; or the child herself?". In this case, the parents are not encouraged to make their own cultural choices with regards to herbs rather than pills; ganja rather than painkillers; or where to give birth; the legislation permitting this protects the future health of the South African child (as defined in government discourse), rather than the individual Rasta child.
PHOTOGRAPHS
The Father also plays a role, especially with boys.
CHAPTER 4: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Introduction
Sister Sarah, a mother of four, was telling me about an incident where her home was raided by the police in search for ganja. Whilst the interview was being conducted outside her house, several children from the community (including her own youths) played around us, while she peeled vegetables for supper.

Sister, we had such an irie garden here. I gathered all the [ganja] seeds and saved it. They took all the plants [ganja] ...such beautiful plants. I fetched them water and made the garden irie. It made me very heartsore. Even my youths, they love all the trees. Ganja trees are sacred to them. The youth is a bit like the ganja, sacred. Care for them, and feed them and look after them, its important. They are going to get confused maybe in the Babylon school, but maybe they'll be strong.

Hence the title of Part II, To Grow a Child.

This chapter explores the social fabric of Rastafari community structures, and how the newborn child is incorporated into this religious and culturally determined space. It is these religious and cultural factors that determine a child's early nutrition; health-seeking behaviour on the part of the mother; and the child's early education. Rasta children grow up in an environment saturated with Rastafari ideology and religious imagery, and are formally incorporated into the religious life of the community through ritual. They are seen as a first generation of true Rastas in South Africa, as they have been born into what their parents found. However, as Brother Norge told me “we believe all people are born Rasta...they must just find Jah “ and as such their children are free to choose their own religion at a suitable age.

Rasta Family Life
The day in the average Rastafari household starts early, before dawn. Mothers wake up at this time to prepare food for the family, iron school clothes, and get ready for work. Fathers need to load bakkies full of fruit and vegetables for their informal trading stalls, or get to the taxi rank to wait for a taxi to their job, which is usually laborious. The children have to eat, get dressed and walk to the taxi rank. Once they have caught a taxi, they then usually walk about three kilometres before reaching school. Conditions are often difficult, with poorly insulated houses\(^1\), and few modern amenities.

However, despite the fact that the majority of the households involved in this study lived from hand to mouth, they should not be seen as victims of a ruthless system. Rastafari religion and culture colours and guides all aspects of a family's behaviour and beliefs, and the rejection of Babylon as a symbol of oppression counteracts their environment as they are spiritually free in their own yard. To live a positive livity according to specific principles is of utmost importance to a Rasta family, which negates a victimised attitude. Part of this livity, as outlined by Kitzinger (1966) prioritises conception.

\(^1\) Winters in South Africa can be extremely cold, sometimes even going below 0 degrees Celsius in 2001 and 2002. Some of the more rudimentary houses were thus as cold inside as outside.
But what is a Rasta family, and does the above picture constitute every Rasta household or family? As discussed, Rastafari is a travelling culture (Clifford: 1992), a global religion (Yawney: 1995, 1999) with fluid boundaries, which can be found in most countries throughout the world. It has an appeal for people sharing feelings of oppression from a majority; and seeking for a better existence within their present social and economic conditions. As such it has spread rapidly through former colonies. Thus, whilst one Rasta could have been born into a South African Rastafari family and community; another Rasta could bring the experience of having been for example, a Jamaican born Catholic who has repatriated to Africa, to his current identity as a South African Rasta. This makes defining Rastafari at a population level problematic. However, there are several markers and sets of symbols that are shared at an individual or household level which can be analysed to ensure all members of the group fit the definition “Rastafari”.

Despite the variability in environment, all the children who were in Rasta families had their introduction to Rasta values in infancy through their mother, who actively taught them aspects of Rasta she viewed as important; namely the psalms, about Rasta and Jah, correct behaviour and taboos, and how to communicate correctly with fellow Rastas through the use of greetings and symbols such as “sevens”. Although the father, grandparents and other community members had a role to play in this early induction to Rasta, the mother was viewed by most people as having the most responsibility in teaching and guiding the child, until the age of about three, when the boys usually joined their fathers or male members of the community in their daily practise. It must be stressed however that the majority of mothers would not allow their children to stay at another non-Rasta relative’s house unattended due to fears of abuse. Many of the mothers interviewed reported being abused as children, and as feeling neglected. Rastafari and its accompanying principles are seen as a sanctuary from what happened in the past.

Each person varied slightly in the way in which they taught their children. Some, for example, Sister Rachael, managed to obtain Rasta themed colouring-in books via a friend, and gave these to her children to use. Others teach informally via repetition of their actions and speech, rather than imparting specific lessons. The Bible is a common tool for teaching Rasta philosophy, morals, reading, and the psalms. Sister Anjelica was teaching her daughter to read through the use of home made keycards. These were in primary colours, and each had a word written on it. Jasmine was taught to recognise a few words everyday, until she could read. The idea behind this was to make it a fun as well as educational activity. Sister Anjelica had learnt about the technique herself from a sister in Forest Camp, who had been having difficulties obtaining permission from the Education Department to home school her child.

4.1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMING

Rasta children grow up with the Rasta ideals their parents try to instil in them; however, they are one minority group making up the multicultural face of South Africa and will be exposed to multiple identity influences throughout their lives. One strategy parents use to ensure the child will remember his

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2 A detailed analysis of the viability of home schooling is presented in Chapter Five.
culture of origin is by naming them according to Rasta principles. The remaining children were named after family members, including a mixture of their parents’ names. All parents were asked if they already had a name chosen before the birth; how, and with whom this name was chosen; the significance of, or meaning attached to the name, and if the birth was celebrated in any special way. Some examples of children’s names and the meanings assigned to them by their parents are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>BOY’S NAMES</th>
<th>GIRL’S NAMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biblical origin/historical</td>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>Lion of Judah (Selassie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Menelik</td>
<td>The greatest, like a prophet. He was second after Selassie I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rastafario</td>
<td>Born in the name of Jah-Rastafari.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solomon</td>
<td>Biblical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruben</td>
<td>One of the 12 tribes of Israel (biblical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selassie</td>
<td>Haile Selassie: Ethiopian president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Issascar</td>
<td>unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Biblical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kabir</td>
<td>Prophet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganja</td>
<td>Sensi</td>
<td>Sensimillia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred places</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zion</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sheba</td>
<td>Sheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Char models (family, pop, pol)</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shikasi</td>
<td>Family member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ammoston</td>
<td>Rasta brother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table certain themes can be detected, namely: figures from biblical origin (Solomon, Ruben, Menelik), marijuana (Mary-juana, Sensimillia), sacred or spiritual places (Judah, Israel, Sheba), and important historical figures in Rasta, namely Haile Selassie, Marcus Garvey, Kabir, Makida (the Queen of Sheba) and Bob Marley. Secondary themes detected in those names which weren’t based on ideology were naming after family members, close Rasta friends who were strong

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3 The mother was usually the source of most of the information about the children’s early childhood.
4 This is in the exact words of the parent, wherever possible.
community examples, and character traits (Justice). In those cases, a combination of primary and secondary themes were used for first and second names. Naming is therefore a way of ensuring the child has Rasta qualities from the start of his life, and is a form of protection against Westernised values.

Through naming, children are taught the significance of values important to Rasta culture. Noah, and his five year old sister, Sheba know the biblical stories about Noah, and who Makida, the Queen of Sheba was. Their brother, Marcus has taught them the history of black consciousness and why Marcus Garvey is seen as an important figure in Rasta.

4.2. THE MOTHER AS TEACHER - BE HUMBLE, SING PSALMS, LIVE AN ITAL LIVITY

Mother’s Role

Maher (1992) in a review of current literature on breast-feeding and nutrition states

The mother appears as the only or main caretaker in the child’s infancy. The father is not mentioned. Men, as fathers are never held responsible for their children’s welfare by men as doctors or nutritionists’ (p. 154).

This pattern is also replicated within the state health care most Rasta women use, as well as within communities. Most Rasta fathers told me that the mother is seen as responsible for the infant’s early health and education. However, it is interesting to note that despite the mother being the principal caretaker, multiple people within the household took the role of secondary caretakers, when a mother was ill or occupied.

All elders are seen as being responsible for teaching and guiding those younger than them. I once watched Sister Tahni reprimand her son when another younger youth had an accident, saying to him “I blame you Samuel. You’re the elder here and you should have guided the other youths better.” Children are thus taught from a young age to take responsibility for their actions. They are taught that they are Rasta children and as such have a responsibility to always act according to specific principles, especially when in Babylon.

One mother, Sister Anjelica spent a long time praising Sister Karyn’s four year old son to me, as he is clean, well-mannered, quiet and responsible. She highlighted her three year old daughter’s appearance after playing in the garden, saying, “Look at that [dirt]. And she’s supposed to be an ambassador for Jah! I’m glad she’s playing with Simon, hopefully she’ll learn from him.” The key here is that the child, as with any Rasta, is spoken of in terms of being an ambassador, a privileged position of representation, which has far-reaching responsibilities greater than at an individual level.

As previously mentioned, the mother is mostly responsible for young children until the age of about three or four, sometimes older, at which point male children usually start spending their days with their father and other adult men. The role of Rasta women in South Africa can be ambiguous, with many

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5 It is interesting to note that at a recent course on Child Health and Well-being at the University of Amsterdam (2001) this phenomenon of relegating early childcare to women is still quite prevalent.
factors influencing the interpretation of this role. The women obviously exercise their own agency. To
what extent the women subscribes to or manipulates social taboos depends on her own background
(previous religion, ethnicity); her husband’s background; the community they currently live in; and
which denomination, or Order of Rastafari they practise.

For instance, Sister Lotta is married to a Bobo Shanti Rasta. Bobo’s, as they are colloquially referred
to, is a denomination of Rasta which is referred to as a strict livity. In an exclusively Bobo community,
women and men live separately from each other. The men live communally or in tents, whereas the
women and their children either share households, or live in their own house. The husband joins his
wife for a period of seven days every month. Although Bobo’s share many of the same beliefs as
Nyabinghi Order Rastas, and Twelve Tribes Rastas, there are cultural differences which can cause
conflict between the Orders. One of the main differences is that Bobo men keep their head covered
with a white turban at all times, especially in Tabernacle (also known as Nyabinghi, or Binghi). However,
men in the Nyabinghi Order see this as disrespectful and always uncover their locks in Nyabinghi.

A Rasta child is taught such distinctions and subtleties through observing and practising Rasta livity
and discipline, but this is a learning process these children are going through as well as daily play.
Whilst I interviewed parents, I would keenly observe what the children did during the interview. Most
infants and toddlers accompany their mother’s everywhere. Whilst I was talking to Sister Sarah (who
was introduced at the beginning of this chapter) her children, two boys aged three and four were
playing in the yard. Her friend, Sister Nettie, was tidying the house, whilst Sister Sarah prepared a
communal supper. Sister Nettie’s daughters, aged two and four were playing next to us.

In between climbing in and out of a blue plastic washing tub next to us, the girls would shyly sit next to
me and watch me taking notes. Before long, with a disarming grin, one would start holding my hand as
if she was “helping me to write”. Then she would gently uncurl my fingers from the pen and happily
start drawing on my interview booklets until I needed the pen again, or took out another. The whole
exchange took place without any verbal communication. They took turns trading pens back and forth
with me in this joint “interview game” for the rest of the afternoon, with the girls taking intermittent
“play breaks” to roll around, giggle and hide.

The boys mostly played within eyesight of their mother, chasing each other around the yard. There
was a tent close to the house, with a fire that was positioned both in front of the tent and between the
house. Several brethren were seated around the fire reasoning, and it was here that the boys mostly
played. A pole fence ran across the front of the plot, separating the road from the house and tent. In
order to enter the yard, or household one had to pass the brethren. Thus as people arrived on various
errands, I could observe the children’s behaviour. Each new arrival was greeted with a tiny fist, even
though some did miss their mark due to shyness. The children were mimicking the adults who greeted
each new arrival with a fist, or open palm and learning customs whilst playing.
Early Lessons
Wisdom is valued more highly in Rastafari than knowledge, as the following comment by a father of two illustrates.

**BOX 10 - COMMENTS ON EDUCATION: BROTHER JOHN**

...Its your experience and the institutionalised education. It’s not bad, it can’t be bad. The point I-man wants to express is that it is brainwash education, not 1+1=2 [education]. That education what they try to teach us, is who God is. That is what we rebel against. We were civilised people in Africa. We were educated in our way. Education is God I scheme. In today’s world we need it to survive. Education at school and university aren’t the same as wisdom.

Brother John does not have an issue with skills-based education, what he refers to as 1+1=2 education. Rather it is brainwash education - the colonialist perspective perceived in state school teachings. Some examples he gave of this form of education were as follows: history, which emphasises white, rather than black heroes; health education, which promotes primary health care and contraception; and religious education, Christians being referred to as “death-worshippers” for their belief in Heaven after life, and “vampires” for re-enacting the Last Supper. Children are therefore encouraged to think for themselves through the process of reasoning, and to remain self-disciplined. I asked each parent “what are the main things you try to teach your children”? This was deliberately left open-ended so that it could be interpreted according to which “lessons” held the most value. Here follows a selection of some of the answers.

**BOX 11 - NARRATIVES: MAIN LESSONS TAUGHT TO CHILDREN**

| Sister Mary | Selassie-I is God. We believe in him.  
|            | To have respect.  
|            | Teach them one thing when it come to it, Rasta. |
| Sister Rachael | Respect for their elders.  
|             | Discipline. When they are in another kaya (house), there must be an order.  
|             | No fighting.  
|             | To be in school everyday (encourage them, except when sick). |
| Sister Sara | His Majesty.  
|             | To love and respect one another.  
|             | Discipline. |
| Brother Mark | To be upright, to be humble, to be righteous. |
| Sister Jolie | Righteousness, must teach the youth righteousness.  
|             | Teach the youth about Rastafari and righteousness, what's right you know. |
| Sister Anjelica | Give them the teaching of Haile Selassie-I, to respect each other 
|               | and love one another, and of course, don't eat meat. |

6 Religious education in South African schools is usually Christian in origin.
The emphasis falls on two broad categories, black history, and self-discipline. The first covers Haile Selassie I, his place in Rastafari, as well as his place in history as the Emperor of Ethiopia and a powerful black figure and role model. Selassie was referred to as Selassie-I, God, and His Majesty. Rastafari can be interpreted as both Ras Tafari, the man, as well as the tenets of Rastafari livity which the child learns by example. The second category relates to self-control in relation to others. The two most common traits taught were respect, and discipline. Included in this was no fighting, and order. Another common trait described as desirable was humbleness, in this context meaning self-control of the ego, and exhibitionist behaviour. Righteousness and uprightness were also included. These mostly value-orientated teachings are seen as the primary lessons a child is taught, as this will further the attainment of wisdom rather than knowledge.

This is not to say that more orthodox lessons are ignored. Many mothers help their children with learning to read and write, and go to considerable lengths to obtain Rastafari modelled colouring-in books, storybooks and other teaching aids.

Box 12 - Narrative: “Teaching the brothers”, Sister Sara

Yes [I do teach them at home]. By reading to them sometimes the psalms, and singing with them. We go through the teachings of the Majesty. There is a colouring-in book and even teachings of Marcus Garvey and Haile Selassie. Paul has a reading problem so I must find time to sit with him. I want to take him to the library. He’s wise but I think he has a problem concentrating. He knows what the sentence is but two minutes later I ask him again and he can’t remember what it is. I think it’s a problem called dyslexia. I must try get him some help. His writing is coming right now cause last year I sat with him every afternoon and night.

Judah [the younger son], he is einlik wise (he is very wise). He gets it quickly. The other night we were watching Dark Angel and he knew who Joshua was from watching for only 5 minutes. Geld is a probleem (Money is a problem). As ek werk kry… Ek wil begin hom leer nou (If I get work, I can start to teach him now). The alphabet and reading and writing. Maar hulle is spielerig nou (But they are playful now).

Teaching through the psalms was mentioned by all families, and was an intrinsic part of education in the home, as well as in the workshop (see Chapter Five), with most children able to recite psalms by heart. Education through the Bible was an introduction to many lessons, echoing the tradition of the parable. Children were however, given the opportunity to be spielerig (playful). Sister Sara’s husband confirmed her, and the children’s roles as

The sister teaches them about the history of Rasta things. Right now they are in play, they are still young. Are certain colouring-in books and things for children to learn but the Sister can tell you more about that.

7 Eating the bread to signify the body of Christ and drinking wine to signify his blood.
The mother then has an acknowledged and privileged role from the start to raise a conscious child, to teach him “the way of the lamb”, in other words scriptures and self-discipline, before he knows “the way of the lion”, where he experiences Jah for himself. This was expressed more simply by Sister Jolie who said “I teach him Rastafari. Even his father teaches him Rastafari. It’s still up to him to make up his mind so long as we teach him our ways” (own emphasis).

Learning by Example

Many of the ways implied by Sister Jolie are taught through example. Chapter One explained the place of women in the private sphere, and how as “the African queen” they have a duty to raise and care for children and the home. These gendered roles are also carried into children’s roles, as the following comments illustrate. In addition to observation, I had asked if boys and girls were taught different lessons from each other and received the following answers.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>BOX 13 - NARRATIVES: LITTLE KINGS AND QUEENS</th>
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When we go to binghi I cover her hair as she is a queen. This is usually from the age of 7, especially in the bigger school. They talk a lot about dreads hanging. (Sister Sara)

Miriam is covered from birth, all over, in and out the house. She is the example for every other parent. Our youths must grow like that from youth time. When you call to give Ises (praises) she must be ready already. Our women must be covered at all times. At any time must be ready. (Ras Ruben, Elder)

The boys are the I-mans responsibility, the girl is mine. I cannot teach him boy things so the father must teach him boy things. (Sister Lauren)

I teach them from age four. She’s only two, but she’s conscious in the seven signs etc. I teach them all these things until he’s bigger. Then he takes over the boys, I take the girl everywhere – to the sisters meetings,... everywhere. (Sister Jolie)

He helps in the house and helps the king-man. Girls are taught to set the example and follow the example. At the moment I’m not teaching the sisters Rastafari teachings. The basics are enough for the moment. (Sister Rachael)

Not actually. Sister must know Rastafari be a patriarchal movement. But we do see the women as equal so the teachings will basically be the same. Use scripture as a guide, not as a weapon. Their mother teaches most as they live with her. Sometimes I speak with them [when they’re badly behaved] as they are more scared of me. I don’t have the patience to teach the youth. (Brother Samuel)

Most girls have their heads covered when they are out in public, especially when attending Rasta ceremonies like Nyabinghi, festivals or tabernacle. As Ras Ruben, an elder and priest expressed, girls
must always be ready to pray, and praying can only be done with the crown covered. Generally, boys and girls are taught the same basic principles of Rastafari and good behaviour. The boys will accompany their fathers periodically from an early age, whilst the girls are always with their mothers. In this way, they learn to operate socially in the public and private spheres, following the examples of their parents to learn their gendered roles.

Both boys and girls are taught the fundamentals of sewing, cooking and cleaning, so as to be as self-sufficient as possible. This also applies to skills as diverse as building one’s own house out of odd materials. The apparent contradiction in these seemingly opposing gender stereotypes are only such if looked at through the Western lens. For Rastafari, attributes desirable for a queen are humbleness, wisdom, and some knowledge of Rastafari and black culture in order to teach the youths. Modest dress is also important. My experience in South Africa thus far has shown two approaches. The first and most common is where Western dress is held up as yet a further indication of the loose morals and problems in Babylon. Both men and women view modest behaviour and dress as an extension and public indication of their spirituality. The second, less common approach is where husbands are increasingly questioning why they want their Queens to cover their hair or wear specific clothing.

Humbleness of spirit does not equate with inability, and skills are vital for both genders to master. Thus whilst woman must act according to certain modest principles which are gendered, tasks are not similarly gendered, with several women having built their own houses in the township at some stage in their lives. The private sphere most mothers occupy in the home leads to a division of labour that at cursory glance appears to be a gendered role. However the skills acquisition encouraged in all children indicate this is not always the case. Many Rasta men also take pride in cooking ital, or firefood. Generally, men followed a stricter livity than women, forgoing even fish and salt, and children eat what their mothers eat until secondary school. This however, was not always the case and households differed in strictness or heaviness according to its members and varying pressures over time.

For example, when I asked Michael, age eight, if there was any food he didn’t eat, he answered with the expected list of flesh, cigarettes and other taboos. However, whilst he didn’t eat grapes, he concluded by saying “I don’t eat raisins - except when my father is eating them outside the house, then I’ll have some”. Similarly, many children admitted to eating sweets, and most drank cooldrink like Sparletta, Coke and Fanta although some said their parents don’t like them to. Sister Rachael also said she occasionally liked raisins, and fish. The ideal then, is to live a completely ital livity, but this is not always possible due to external and human pressures. Children especially will take the opportunity to try alternative dishes if they are offered, and one boy told me how his mother’s friend, a non-Rasta, had given him some milk tart but sworn him to secrecy.

Most people had an example of how they were “still learning” a good livity. One girl of 17 who had become Rasta in her early teens told me that when she was very stressed she occasionally “stood on the stoep (verandah) and had a puff of a cigarette”. I was always asked not to tell others in the
community\(^8\), of these few observed “lapses” amongst members. I thus observed a pattern, which can be articulated as a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts. Within these communities humbleness, wisdom and righteousness are all valued qualities. Thus members try to strive to maintain this appearance, whilst acknowledging that all are fallible, and human. Mistakes or “lapses” are seen as part of the process of obtaining wisdom. By holding up those members who follow a stricter livity, the rest of the community is encouraged to follow suit. As no one is perfect, there will always be a shift between the identities of these role models, allowing for a balanced form of leadership by example.

Children were often allowed to make their own decisions as the following account demonstrates.

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**BOX 14 - NARRATIVES: NOAH AND STRICT ITAL LIVITY**

As a 12 year old, Robert occupies an ambiguous place within his community. Although children are spiritually important, they are lower in social hierarchy as they have not reached adulthood. However, Robert has followed Rasta livity from birth and is therefore spiritually strong. In an interview where he was asked what he avoided due to religious or cultural beliefs, Noah described his diet and prescriptions as follows:

“I’ve never drunk alcohol. I probably never will. We don’t eat fish or meat; we’re still strict. I can eat chips at friends, and soyas... I haven’t smoked cigarettes, but I did try a beadie when I was seven. I don’t really eat salt, and I don’t have cooldrinks or dairy. We used to eat soyas and all things, but now we don’t use oil”.

“When we were going to live with Matthew, he said if we wanted to stay we must be strict ital. I was too young so I said yes. I went out and bought chips, and sweets because else it was only firefood and fruit. I got into trouble (I had a really sore stomach) and I said I wouldn’t do that anymore. That’s why we came here. The livity in that camp is heavy”.

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This extract highlights the child’s agency, his own belief in Rasta, and hints at some of the cultural goals child care is geared at. Previously, Robert and his mother, Sister Miriam, had lived with Brother Michael in another camp. As both Sister Miriam and Robert described, they lived a very strict livity in Irietown, fetching water from a mountain stream every day, eating strictly ital food that had only been cooked in an open fire, and having no physical contact with anyone, not even in greeting. Eventually Sister Miriam and Robert moved to a community which was more youth orientated.

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\(^8\) I have not given enough detail in these examples for these people to be identified.
4.3 THE CHILD AS RELIGIOUS ICON

The Body-Politic: Dreadlocks and Appearance
The child becomes a symbol of Rastafari. As Sister May told me “if you don’t act according to Rasta, people will see, they will see it in your children”. In other words, both through appearance and actions the child will demonstrate what she has observed, which puts pressure on parents to be good role models. Children’s dress and appearance is therefore a good symbolic marker to observe.

Picture 15 shows four females of varying ages. A mother is sitting on the left. The three girls next to her are dressed in long skirts, with long sleeves. They have all covered their heads. The bottom of the skirts of the two older girls (with the teddy bear jerseys) is embroidered with the colours, red, green and yellow. The youngest girl is also wearing a hand-embroidered loose dress. All have been dreading since birth. The boy’s dreadlocks are more noticeable as they are usually loose. Most parents and youths said they felt fortunate that they had the freedom to dread from birth.

One father, Brother Samuel explained this as follows

Yes. Dreaded since birth. Let it dread natural. I am a Rasta and so are they. I just let it to grow natural. Cause I know Rastas that don’t have dreads even. But to have a dreadlock is feeling a small part of what Christ went through because people look down on you. But he conquered that and rose. There is no power over a righteous man.

Many of these children grow up in the Vow of the Nazarite, having never cut or combed their hair.

Yes. We want them to grow. Ons wil hulle groot maak in Rasta tog hulle 18 of 19 is. (We want to raise them in Rasta until they’re 18 or 19 years old). Then they’re free to do what they want.

Some parents complain that the grandparents of the child, who are not Rasta, insist on combing the child’s hair when they visit. As one mother explained “They come back having learnt different ways. They even know meat”!

Only one mother didn’t allow her children to dread from birth, stating “No. I want the children to have their own choice. His school is strict. When they’re older, they’ll realise it’s a way of life”. In this case, she did not want her children to view dreadlocks as a fun fashion accessory; neither did she want them to experience sufferation too early from discrimination.

Ganja: the “Vulnerable” vs. the “Symbolically Pure” Body
The body of the child, as had been explained, is a social construct (Prout: 2000). The State constructs the South African child’s body as “vulnerable” (Christensen: 2000), needing protection and guidance to become a “useful” and productive citizen. Policy related to primary healthcare, education and child rights has been designed to facilitate this. In contrast, Rastafari constructs the child’s body as “symbolically pure”, and strives to keep it pure from Babylonian influences such as “chemicals” in pharmaceuticals and vaccinations, and “brain-wash” education. Both negotiate power through trying to control the body of the Rasta child, who ultimately makes use of her own agency. A primary cause of conflict is the use of ganja as a sacrament in Rastafari.
Children are surrounded by ganja from birth. Some families had a ritual of giving thanks whereby they would bless the child by smoking a chalice when the child was brought home from the hospital. As ganja is traditionally under the “control of the I-man” - the man\textsuperscript{10}, boys and girls learn about ganja in different ways. I observed an informal reasoning session, which took place in Livity Square which included some youths. A group of brethren were sitting around a fire outside one household, trying to get warm in the icy grey morning. The fire had been ingeniously built in an old washing machine drum, so that it could be turned easily with a stick to keep it going, as well as evenly distribute heat. The few women, myself included, sat together on one side. Sister Rachael was passed a spliff “for the sistren”.

Four boys, ranging in age from seven to twelve, joined the group as the one wanted to speak to his father. The youths solemnly greeted everyone then sat watching every move the brethren made, as they reasoned, drank rooibaas and sipped a chalice. The sistren conversed amongst themselves. Later, when I interviewed one of the boys, he told me that he would often reason with other youths and his brothers about what they had heard in these adult sessions. Reasoning then, was the ability these boys were trying to perfect and understand for themselves. The act of reasoning and achieving consciousness was a goal, not the ganja.

The religious use of ganja is obviously a huge point of contestation between the State and the communities, which usually revolves around the body of the Rasta child. Most parents do not allow their children to smoke until they are of a suitable age, this age being determined more according to the individual youth, than a pre-determined age (usually after leaving school). Some young children do mimic the rituals surrounding the use of ganja. For example, a four year old might start praising Selassie I when he detected ganja. On one occasion three year old Jasmine insisted that the chalice at least be passed to her so she could pray and be included in the circle. It must be stressed that although children like to involve themselves in religious ritual with adults, most of them do not actually smoke ganja themselves on a regular basis. They will usually only drink it in hot water when sick, as herbs - a catch-all term for a herbal hot toddy\textsuperscript{11}, consisting of boiling water, a variety of herbs such as perepis, wild garlic or buchu, and some ganja.

According to legislature, ganja is classified as a narcotic, along with a host of other narcotics ranging from mandrax, heroin and cocaine to ecstasy and acid. As discussed in the introduction to the concept of the “welfare child”, the child is represented as a body with adults cast in the role of “responsible providers and carers for the child” (Christensen;2000, p. 41). In the eyes of the State, an adult who has been arrested for “drugs” is not seen as responsible. In this scenario cannabis sativa is referred to as dagga, taking on a negative, criminalized connotation. When phrased in this context, children’s “vulnerable” bodies are seen as under threat from a “dangerous substance”, the “drug” having the ability to pollute that purity.

\textsuperscript{10} Although increasingly women are also taking a more active role in the religious use of ganja. These are usually referred to as roots dawtas.

\textsuperscript{11} Non-alcoholic.
In contrast, Rastas construct the body of the child as “symbolically pure”, as they have dreaded since birth; and eaten mostly ital. For Rastafari, ganja is a holy herb central to meditation. Children grow up learning to respect ganja, and the difference between what they refer to as “drunk” behaviour and “holy” behaviour. Due to the reverence with which ganja is viewed, children are prevented from careless handling of ganja. Their “symbolically pure” bodies place them in a spiritual space closer to Jah, negating the need for ganja. Due to this, one sister expressed that “I don’t want him [her son] to smoke – he’s already too wise”! As she explained further, ganja is seen as facilitating consciousness. In this case the “symbolically pure” are protected from attainment of consciousness too soon, as this brings an additional burden of sufferation.

This dichotomy between the “vulnerable” and “symbolically pure” body is extended to the rights of the child to health. Part of the afore-mentioned Vow of the Nazarite is the promise not to cut any part of one’s hair or flesh, which in essence restricts invasive procedures such as operations; and innoculations. Sister Angelica and Ras Simeon also added that the blood is sacred, a gift from Jah, and as such should not be spilled or given away. In addition, some Rastas interviewed felt that one should not “put disease” in your body. Rather, Jah and a healthy lifestyle act as a prophylactic, with indigenous remedies used by preference in the event of illness. Ras Gary mentioned that as his Queen has studied nursing, she wants their children to have innoculations. Ras Dave has had a similar experience with his Queen. In contrast other family men interviewed report that at least one child has had his first few innoculations, but most of them have not completed them, and later children have not had any.

Ras Ruben explained this aversion to vaccinations as follows:

[Rose] has had injections one time. I refuse to immunise the child. In my time [apartheid] immunisation was very dangerous. At that time the rulers of the time were using poisoning at the end of the day. These injections weren’t to cure us. Put a kind of chemicals in our people. I deny immunisation. First lot, it is written at the clinic. I was not present at the time. It disturbs and destroys the spirituality. The child is growing very slow.

Brother Saul inoculated his two sons despite their Vow, as “you have to, when the child goes to school. They check, and they won’t let him in if he hasn’t had any [vaccinations], or they’ll just give it to him anyway”.

**Festivals & Sanctification**

Religious festivals, based on significant events in Haile Selassie’s life and Ethiopian holidays, are held throughout the year. This is an opportunity for brethren and sistren nationally to unite (unity) and reason, and important decisions affecting the national community are made here by those who attend. It is also an opportunity for a holiday, and social networking. Children in particular love the festivals, especially those from urban areas where they do not have much contact with other Rastafari children. Festivals, lasting seven days, are an opportunity to wear carefully embroidered religious clothes, and many Rastas make new outfits for the annual July and November Haile Selassie celebrations.

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12 Depo-provera.
The festival is also an opportunity to sanctify children as many elders and priests attend the festivals and facilitate Nyabinghi. Sanctification is a ceremony that is similar to baptism, whereby the child is anointed and blessed by a priest, as well as by the community. This is the child's formal entrance into Rastafari. Ras Ruben has sanctified over thirty children all over South Africa. He describes the process as follows:

Although children can be sanctified from three months old, in reality this often only occurs when a child is four or older. Attending festivals can be costly in terms of travel expenses and loss of income; so some families can only attend every few years. They then wait until attending a festival, or until an elder is visiting their community to sanctify their children. Older children are asked if they are willing to take on the Vow and if they will ever cut their dreads before being sanctified. Sanctification can therefore be seen as an initiation into the wider community of Rastafari, and marks a passage from the private sphere of the household to the larger religious community. It is here that self-discipline is most visible and children are tested.

**Conclusion**

Thus, early childhood development in Rastafari is focused around teaching the child as much self-discipline, righteousness, and order as possible in order to prepare the child for contact with the corrupting influence of Babylon. The child is assisted in this by being shielded with symbolic talismans such as her name; and items such as Rasta lions, and Ethiopian colours on her person. In addition,
the child is blessed by fire, and sanctified as a child of Jah. The child is then watched closely for signs of attaining wisdom and consciousness by both the household and greater community. Ultimately, it is known that only the youth will eventually find Jah for herself. Part III explores which influences confront a Rasta child once she enters Babylon through compulsory state education, and through close interviews with school-going youths, assesses to what extent these Rasta teaching influences their identity formation and worldview. The Rasta child is therefore presented with two conceptual maps, that of Rastafari, and that of Babylon through often enforced interaction with the greater South African society. She must then choose for herself which aspects of the maps to reject or accept into a cognitive map which will develop over the rest of her life.
PHOTOGRAPHS

Picture: A Young Queen wearing an Ethiopian coloured, ganja leaf bandanna.

Picture: Rasta girls and a mother.

Picture: Group of Boys Praying whilst holding Sevens.
Picture 13: A Young Queen wearing an Ethiopian coloured, ganja leaf bandanna.

Picture 14: A Youth Relaxing

Picture 15: A Rasta Mother and Young Queens

Picture 16: A Sackcloth Youth

Picture 17: Playtime
MULTIPLE IDENTITIES
AND MEANING

EDUCATION, THE MEDIA & POLICY
CHAPTER 5: THE CHANGING FACES OF “BABYLON” EDUCATION

We must recognise that schools are still terribly important sites for the production of knowledge and symbolic value, and we must acknowledge, describe, and theorize their continuing power in contemporary ethnographic sites. Yet schools are not the only place where education occurs, and we must continually broaden our vision of education to extend our analytic tools well beyond the schools (Levinson: 1999, p. 595).

Introduction

The Rasta child leaves the teachings and influence of his home environment for that of “1+1” education in Babylon. In the South African climate, education is viewed as a route out of poverty. Every adult interviewed made reference to the now infamous Bantu Education System, and the hardships they have encountered in their lifetimes. Although most would prefer schools that have “[Rasta] conscious teachings” the general prevailing attitude is one of “rather any education than none”, and “know the Babylon system to fight the Babylon system”\(^1\). There are however dissenting voices within Rastafari that actively debate the content in the government school curriculum. Having changed their livity to that of Rastafari, they do not want their children to grow up with Babylon teachings. However, they do want their children to grow up educated, with choices in life, which leaves Rasta parents little option but to send their children to government schools or to keep them at home for home schooling.

Thus state education plays an ambiguous role for Rasta parents. They want it for their children, as they were denied it; yet they are concerned that their children will be taught the very values and principles they reject. As Levinson (1999) notes, “Western-style schooling” has become a model which is exported all over the world, in some cases lacking infrastructure it becomes “a mere caricature of Western systems, serving largely symbolic and integrative purposes\(^2\) (p. 598), in other cases “local diversity is challenged ... by models of schooling...divorced from...culture-specific moral discourses and styles of learning” (p. 598). Education is hailed as the key to combating a range of social ills from poverty to HIV/AIDS, but the particular model of education implied is always state sanctioned, and not indigenous knowledge systems. It is also well documented that schools have been used as a convenient vehicle for political purposes; both gathering and disseminating information.

Schools therefore have power, as Bourgeois (1996:251) states:

> As the “most important state institution” children will typically encounter, schools privilege certain forms of symbolic capital. Schools are given the mandate to culturally produce an “educated person” according to power-laden criteria of knowledge and comportment (in Levinson: 1999, p. 595).

Levinson (ibid.) further cautions not to lose the sense of school as “a pervasive product of modernity - as powerful sites of intentional cultural transmission within and against which identities are constantly

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\(^1\) Personal Communication: June 2001

\(^2\) Western is an acknowledged ambiguous term. In this case Levinson is referring to the first world educational model. Other terms used in academic discourse are developed, and the North. These are all problematic terms in that they can be read as classist, and said to embody a colonialist rhetoric. This has been covered at great length in texts on globalisation (Featherstone: 1995) so is not covered here.
being constructed” (p. 596). However, different forces contribute to cultural production and identity formation, each having a different kind of power, and as the opening extract from Levinson acknowledges, only one of these is school, and the term education is not exclusive to formal schooling.

Part III marks a point where the youth can be queried about his school experiences and consumption of multi-media. This chapter gives a brief historical background to schooling in South Africa, in order to provide an overview of the challenges facing the schooling system and education departments in South Africa today. It also gives an indication as to why and how schools have become extremely politicised sites. The education system in South Africa has a violent history of inequality, and is struggling in the New South Africa, with allegations of corruption, abuse and inefficiency which is necessary to briefly highlight in order to understand the ambiguities of Rasta education within the national education system.

5.1 SCHOOLING IN SOUTH AFRICA: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

According to Statistics SA (2001)

In South Africa, the official compulsory age for school attendance is from seven years to fifteen years. Children who are in the last two years of compulsory education, i.e. fourteen and fifteen years, fall within the category of youth. Children of this age should have completed primary school, which comprises seven years of education (p. 21).

As school attendance is compulsory, according to law, Rasta parents have no choice but to send their children to school, or to attempt home schooling. There is a long history in South Africa of children themselves taking on the education system and Cross (1993), in his analysis of “conflict-model” literature, states it “stresses the need to recognise the power of children in determining or conditioning the course of state policy and social process in South Africa” (p. 3). While Cross is specifically referring to studies involving children and political conflict, I maintain that agency should always be a crucial and central component of any analysis involving children; especially in the case of South Africa where student revolts and resistance have been well documented.

Chisholm (1999) traces the impact of policy through the changing face of South African Education. She quotes Tyack and Cuban, who

Point out that three features are central in analysing the impact of policy: the time lag between policy and implementation; the uneven penetration of reforms in the different sectors of education, and the different impact of reforms on various social groups... [therefore] the peaks and nadirs of educational reform for blacks was quite different for those of whites (1996: pg 55, 56 in Chisholm: 1999, p.88).

As she concludes “Thus, for example, the impact of the Bantu Education can be seen as being felt most deeply a decade after its implementation, when students began to rise in revolt” (ibid:p.88).

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 was implemented by the South African National Government on 25 April 1955 as an extension of apartheid policy. As Verwoerd, the government minister of Native or Bantu Affairs stated at the time:

I will reform it [black education] so that Natives will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them (1953, In Parsons: 1982, p. 291).
Through this Act, pupils were segregated on the basis of race and later administered as white, Indian, coloured, and African schools; the conditions of these schools varying proportionally. The schools were run-down, with little infrastructure, and few qualified teaching staff. The rationale behind this was that children “of colour” only required a certain low level of education. Parsons (1982) describes Verwoerd’s motivations as follows:

Verwoerd attacked the liberalism of missionary education, which gave black children ideas of growing up to live in a world of equal rights between black and white. He later explained to the Senate that there was “no place” for blacks outside the reserves “above the level of certain forms of labour”. So, “What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when he cannot use it in practice?” He added: “Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life” (Parsons, 1982).

It is therefore hardly surprising that children eventually took matters into their own hands as they were directly, and deeply affected by this legislation, which is shocking to read about today, never mind experience as a child. The only surprise is the length of time it took for apartheid to be abolished and sadly, the effects of the Bantu Education System can still be felt today. Some of the more well-known revolts initiated and conducted by children were the Sharpeville massacre and the Langaville uprising in Uitenhage. It is interesting to note that Hektor Peterson, his friends, and the youth who led the uprising in Uitenhage (Thornton: 1990), are thought to have been Rasta.

Studies of youth resistance culture and gangs in South Africa during the 1980s attribute the formation and development of young street gangs to the educational system. Cross (1993) states:

there were also other important factors in the development of the new wave of gangs. Schard identifies 3 converging sets of factors: the education crisis in the schools, the lack of alternative education, and thorough political conscientization in a context where youth had little hope of employment; the politicisation of sport; and militaristic populism associated with the rise of youth soldiers, or Young Lions (p. 10).

Education in South Africa is still extremely politicised on the part of the students themselves who boycott, destroy school property and toyi-toyi if they feel discontent (DDR:2002, p.7).

Since 1994, education in South Africa has been undergoing a restructuring process, which it is still struggling to mediate. Part of the challenge is to enable children who were disadvantaged by the legacy of the apartheid education system, to still take up employment and become full members of society without discrimination. Education must be available for all South Africans, and non-exclusive. However a high standard of education must still be maintained. In the past three years especially, under the helm of Kader Asmal, education has been the subject of hot debate, both in Parliament and in newspaper headlines. Streek (2002) reports “the reality is that after nearly eight years of democratic rule, gross inequality, largely racially and poverty-based, remains in the schooling system” (p. 7).

One of the most controversial changes has been the proposed Curriculum 2005, described by Cooke (2002) as follows:

The national education policy, summarised in Curriculum 2005, requires all schools to teach so that students are learning skills that will equip them to cope with modern society, as opposed to simply memorising facts.

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3 Information regarding the Uitenhage uprising I obtained through personal communication with Prof. Carole Yawney. Hektor Peterson’s status as a Rasta has become part of ‘urban legend’, which I have not corroborated through documentation.
This includes General Education and Training (GET) for Grades R-9, and further education and training (FET) for Grades 10, 11 and 12. In theory, all grade 9s write an external common exit exam, called the Common Task Assessment (CTA). However, critics have expressed concern that proper planning and audits have not been designed to prevent logistical problems, for example the lack of trained teachers in the subjects they are implementing, and the fact that teachers in redundant subjects will have to be re-trained (Macfarlane: 2002c). In addition, as Cooke (2002) reports, the Eastern Cape’s attempt to implement CTA has failed, mainly due to little guidance and guidelines being changed frequently.

Some of the problems currently affecting schools are corruption (Macfarlane: 2002b), which prevents funding from reaching schools; departmental underspending (Macfarlane: 2002a); lack of textbooks and learning materials; basic amenities and infrastructure such as sanitation, electricity, furniture, teaching aids and telephones severely lacking (Streek: 2002); inadequate feeding scheme programmes (Macfarlane: 2002d); rape and sexual abuse within schools (Killinger: 2002); HIV/AIDS resulting in child-headed households – the members of which do not attend school (Giese & Meintjes: 2002, Pollecute & Goldstein: 2002), under qualified teachers, staff shortages, staff not receiving salaries, pensions or benefits (Feni, Z: 2002); rent for both the education department and other buildings not being paid (Salayedwa: 2002b); no transport for students, and children having to travel great distances (usually by foot) to reach school (Macfarlane: 2002d).

These problems are reported most frequently, and in the greatest numbers in the Eastern Cape (Salayedwa: 2002a; Zuzile: 2002), with the superintendent general appointed to investigate corruption, Mannya, resigning after multiple death threats, and internal conflict with Sizani, the MEC for Education (Macfarlane: 2002b). In addition, Stone Sizani, the Eastern Cape MED for Education resigned at the end of November 2002 in the middle of school exams, stating his resignation “would not change much”, despite him being appointed MEC to be “an evangelist for the renewal of education in 1999” (Kindra: 2002; Grocotts: 2002a). This then, presents a shortlist of the current educational climate in South Africa, and part of the research locale.

Thus, the lags between the policy change and policy impact Chisholm (1999) describes are quite visible, and the education system has a long way to go before it is on a par with international standards. One strategy Rastas use in order to speed up the recognition of policy change at grassroots level is through resistance. There has been a move away from “gang” or tsotsi” culture (Cross: 1993), and violent resistance. Rather, they are taking issues to the constitutional court, making use of humans rights organisations, publicly holding peaceful “puffing” protests when fellow Rastas are arrested, and ensuring media coverage so their case and any subsequent state sanctioned injustices are publicised. A few examples of cases involving school children follow.
5.2. DISCRIMINATION CHALLENGED - NARRATIVES OF POWER:

As has been shown, school plays a big role in identity construction and power distribution, both intentionally, and unintentionally and this power can have repercussions on minority identities. However, this does not leave the child powerless, as she is still able to use agency to manipulate situations to her advantage. This section looks at youths’ narratives of power - how they combated the hold schools had on them with a bigger power, that of the Constitution. One of the ways in which schools use their power to exclude “unsuitable” scholars is to prevent the child or youth from entering a particular school if she does not agree to follow certain rules and stipulations. Although there are regulations against this, with the administrative and economic problems plaguing the education department, enforcement of rules is negligible. One such regulation is Article 28 from the UNCRC, which states that:

State Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:


This article, as well as South African law (Schools Act: 1996) clearly states that all South African children have the right to education without discrimination. Rastafari children were being denied this right due to their appearance and dress as recently as 2002. I will present three of these case studies which demonstrate how Rasta children have already challenged discrimination by several schools; and have caused change and reform on a national level. The first involves Marcus, who was not permitted to enter school in Irietown at age six because of his dreadlocks. The second is that of Robert, age 13, from Livity Square, who, in addition to his dreadlocks, was discriminated against as he had been home schooled. The third is that of Lily, from Freetown, who was suspended for covering her head at school when she was 15 years old.

BOX 17 - BROTHER MARCUS, Age 8. (Irietown)

Marcus is an eight year old Rastafari boy, with 2 younger brothers. In 1999 his parents unsuccessfully tried to enrol him in the local pre-primary school. His application was rejected as the school’s code of conduct stated that boy’s hair must be kept short, and the headmaster of the school would not admit him without a haircut. Marcus has not cut his dreadlocks since birth. As a child born into Rastafari, his parents have vowed never to cut his hair or flesh in a pact with Jah (God). Sister Mary and Brother Mark tried again in 2000, only to be rejected. Marcus was very upset as all his friends from the local community were already a year ahead of him. His parents could not afford to send him to a school further away and wanted Marcus close to home so they approached the Human Rights Commission, as well as the media to publicise their case. During negotiations with the school Sister Jolie offered to sew a cap in the school colours to ‘tidy up his appearance’ but the school still refused to admit him, stating that “we did not refuse him admission because he is a Rastafarian. His dreadlocks are in breach of the code of conduct for learners (boys)...[we] are acutely aware of the constitutional laws of South Africa”. Finally in 2002, after threatening court action the school allowed Marcus to enrol. He is now happily attending school, achieving well academically and playing sport. His teachers speak exceptionally highly of him and think he sets a good example for his peers.
This case study shows a distinct power play between the school, its interpretations of an eligible pupil; and the Rasta family. On one hand the stipulations laid down by the school board follow a British model, whereby children are prepared to become good citizens in a capitalist society. Attending school between set times, wearing school uniforms and ties, and short “neat and tidy” hair is supposed to instil order and discipline, ensuring productivity. This is what James (2000) refers to as the “school(ed) child: ... a body tamed, ordered and controlled” (p. 19).

According to the Rasta family, this appearance is one of Babylon, a controlled facade. Discipline and consciousness are inner traits to be acquired, and part of the Rasta lifestyle - with Jah being hyper-aware of every indiscretion made. Children are taught this self-discipline from birth, along with the fact that learning and the attainment of consciousness through independent thought and reasoning is a lifelong goal, and does not start or end with state education. School is a supplement which enables the child to survive in Babylon but is also a place where narrow thinking and suspect value systems are taught. In addition, as described in the chapter on Rastafari beliefs, the Vow of the Nazarite is the symbolic representation of being a child of Jah and as such the dreadlocks are seldom cut.

Thus, Marcus wears dreadlocks as a symbolic and spiritual link to Jah. Severing his hair symbolically severs a physical and visual link to Jah, and impinges upon his religious freedom. The school then, is denying him the right to obey the principles of his religion based on their conception of which religious behaviour is acceptable and tolerated. To them, long, dreadlocked hair symbolises disorder, and disobedience, whereas for Marcus, his hair holds symbolic and spiritual meaning and his actions are the measure to judge by.

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**BOX 18 - BROTHER ROBERT, Age 13. (Livity Square)**

Robert was home schooled until the end of Std Four. At this stage he decided he wanted to go to school mainly for sport and friends. There were Rasta children at schools in the next town but as this was too far, his mother took him to a school in the area. At the preliminary meeting, Sister Miriam said that the principal was extremely rude. He expressed dismay at the fact Robert had been home schooled to such an advanced age and didn’t think he would be able to cope. He also disparagingly remarked, “you people never pay your school fees”. Sister Miriam took offence at this and told him that she would be responsible for the fees and would ensure they were paid. Some potential issues that were discussed were also his hair and ganja. The agreement reached was that she would sew him a cap in the school colours for him to wear at all times. With regards to him smoking ganja, she said that there wouldn’t be a problem as Robert “knows how to handle himself” amongst other children, and wouldn’t smoke on school premises. They were told Robert would have to complete a test so that they could assess his level of academic ability. Sister Miriam took all of Robert’s home schooling books with her for this. She says the principal didn’t actually look at them, but gave the test anyway. Apparently Robert did well on his English but not on Maths. It was only after the meeting that she realised he had been tested at a Std Five, rather than a Std Four level. She is convinced that Mr P., the principal deliberately did this in order to have a reason to exclude Robert.

Continued overleaf...
Robert has therefore experienced similar problems trying to attend school as Marcus in the previous case study, related mostly to a culturally biased understanding of what constitutes a good and capable pupil on the part of the school principal, and board. Regulations relating to serious misconduct of students was published as Provincial notice 372 of 1997 on 1 October 1997. Section 2(1), states:

Subject to the provisions of [the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996], a learner at school who ...(e) conducts himself or herself, in the opinion of the governing body in a disgraceful, improper or unbecoming manner, shall be guilty of serious misconduct (In Van Zyl & Van Reenen, p. 739).

This enables decisions regarding a child's education to be made completely subjectively, and superficially. Dreadlocked and dagga-smoking pupils, especially boys, are viewed as a potential threat to order, and a bad influence on peers. The influence of cultural belief systems, despite teaching multicultural pupils, was not taken into account, which indicates that more mainstream beliefs are tolerated than minority beliefs which are still branded with the stigma of being backward, or inferior.

However, after both parties forced the schools with a greater power, that of constitutional rights, the children were allowed to attend school. It is interesting to note that after having taught Rasta pupils, and experiencing Rasta culture firsthand, staff had high praise for the Rasta youths, based this time on observation, not stereotyping. It was not necessary for either families to take the schools to court, although both were forced to contact well-established organisations like the Human Rights Commission and Black Sash to take up the case on their behalf.

The following excerpt from an interview with Brother Robert illustrates how he felt about attending school for the first time, after all the trouble with Mr. P.
These excerpts show that Robert feels self-pride in his academic and personal achievements. Despite the principal’s foreboding that he would be a trouble-causer, and not cope academically; his actions have forced that principal to change his opinion, which he finds “inspirational”.

The following case, that of Sister Lily, did reach the courts.

**BOX 20 - SISTER LILY, Age 17. (Freeland)**

Sister Lily turned 17 this year. Although she was not born into Rasta, she had been following Rasta since the age of 14. When she was 15 she made the decision to start dreadlocking her hair and covering her head. With the support of her mother, she approached the principal of the High School she attended for permission to do so. However, according to him, this was breaching the school’s code of conduct. She then crocheted herself a cap in the school colours and wore this to school. She was suspended for five days as she was found “guilty of serious misconduct as she had acted in an unbecoming manner” by the school’s governing body. She contacted the organisation Lawyers for Human Rights, as she felt this was an undeserved blemish on her school record which she wanted removed. She also felt it was her constitutional and religious right to be able to dreadlock and cover her head. She eventually won the court case in February 2002, and is currently three months pregnant. She and her husband plan to raise their child according to Rastafari teachings.
Veiling, or the covering of women’s heads is not a practise restricted to Rastafari alone, and internationally, Muslim girls have had similar experiences with schools – the most publicised of cases appearing in France. Freeman (1997) criticises actions such as these in England on the basis of Article 14 of the UNCRC, stating that schools which deny Muslim children the opportunity to pray on Fridays or insist upon Jewish children attending school on Saturday clearly breach the UN Convention...The imposition by the Education Reform Act of 1988 of collective worship “of a broadly based Christian character” may result in breaches of Article 29 for it can hardly be said to inculcate respect for the child’s cultural identity and values, where the child comes from a minority group (p. 119).

In the case studies mentioned, it is obvious that Article 29:1 of UNCRC is not adhered to. The principle of this article promotes:

- respect for the child’s parents, his...own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own (Article 29:1c).

However these children were told their religion wasn’t a real religion; that their religious beliefs and sense of agency, which prompted their decisions regarding their hair, were not as valid as school rules. In light of this it is difficult to see how any child could develop either respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations (Article 29:1b) or grow up prepared for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship amongst all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin (Article 29:1d).

These families thus found it was necessary to enlist the aid of larger organisations with power over the state in order to ensure their rights were upheld. The fact that they were determined to go to the Constitutional Court if necessary, is an indication of their strong sense of self as Rasta, despite the schools’ interpretations that their appearance was unbecoming. The personal risks in taking court action are varied. Court cases are laborious and time-consuming, resulting in possible loss of income, travel expenses, and further discrimination as “trouble-causers”. Towards the end of the writing up period, I noted that fewer families I encountered reported problems enrolling their children with dreadlocks. They attributed this to the fact that due to extensive media coverage following the court cases, the schools now realised that they had no choice but to allow Rasta children to enrol with dreadlocks.

Essentially, what this section has shown is that within the relatively short research period, many South African Rasta children have challenged local schools to uphold their constitutional and children’s rights to education, freedom of religion, and non-discrimination. This has been done through organisations such as Black Sash, and Lawyers for Human Rights and has resulted in the following judgement that

*Where the code of conduct of a particular school contains a prohibition pertaining to the appearance of learners (in casu, hypothetically, a prohibition against the growing of dreadlocks and the wearing of headgear by girls), the failure to comply with the prohibition ought not to be assessed in a rigid manner (Van Zyl & Van Reenen, p. 739).*

But what do the children themselves think about education, and their experiences at school?

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4 From the popular press, as well as a screening of ‘Islam Today’ in 1999.
5 The freedom of thought, conscience and religion. See section II for more detail.
5.3. CHILDREN’S DISCUSSIONS ABOUT STATE SCHOOL:

Sister May is 18 years old, and although she was not born into Rasta has followed Rasta since 1995, when she was still in school. She left school three years ago as she fell pregnant. Unfortunately, as described in Chapter Three, she lost the child due to negligence on the part of the nurse assisting in the delivery. Here follows her account of education, and its importance to her.

BOX 21 - SISTER MAY, Age 18. (Irietown)

My best memories of childhood was when I was in school because I always think of it now. Because I didn’t deserve it that time. Now I feel it now. There wasn’t a lot of attention on me [at home]. When I took a letter home from school there was no-one there for me.

1. What does education mean to you?
It means a lot. Education can bring you somewhere you didn’t think of sister.

2. How are you currently being taught?

3. What did you like most about school?
I like school really. But I wasn’t too clever. If I didn’t wash dishes they’d [her extended family] hurt me so I wanted to go to school every day. School was the only place to express my feelings cause home didn’t listen.

4. What do you like least about school?
Sometimes the sports. I didn’t have a birth certificate so I couldn’t compete. I played netball at school but never away as I didn’t have an id document. They wouldn’t accept me.

5. If you could improve schools for other Rasta youths, what would you suggest?
I want a better environment – the hygiene of the place is not good. The ablutions must be clean. The teachers must treat the children with respect. Sometimes they are very rude, shouting and swearing at the children. But then are nice with other children. Must treat all children equally!

6. How do you get on with your teachers?
Alright. No, only Mr M. He wasn’t nice. He treated us with disrespect. Sometimes I have a beautiful hairstyle and he asks a question. Before I could answer he’d say ‘I like the hairstyle but answer my question Fudge Kop’.

7. How do you get on with your peers?
Perfect. When I was in Std 6 and 7 I was Rasta. The children knew. Only the English teacher Mr W. knew. They told him I smoke heavy, and eat all the food, and I’m lazy, so he always told me to stop smoking. But it was irie. He’d ask questions about Rasta and I’d answer.

Sister May expressed a deep desire to go back to school, but didn’t think it was possible at this stage. However, this does not mean the end of her education. Rather, as she puts it, she is still actively learning through Rasta, seeing perhaps commonplace lessons through a new lens. Although she has been actively practising Rasta for a number of years, it was only when she lost her child that she...
“became serious about Rasta, strictly⁶. It is a normal pattern for Rasta youths to have an epiphany of sorts, where they themselves felt they were worthy to be Rastafari. This is similar to Cashmore’s (1983) description of the movement into Rastafari, whereby there is a continual state of flux - towards the centre of Rasta, and back towards the periphery (p. 89). Thus many Rasta youths, even those born into Rasta, had to prove to themselves they were true Nazarites, usually during adolescence. This was expressed by one youth as

> No man can make another man a Rasta. [For me it] Was like Jah knocking at the door. Inspiration comes from within. Many people think its just dreads and ganja. I know this is just a small part.

For Sister May, school was a refuge, a safe place where she could be free to explore her own feelings and needs. However, she still criticises the environment as being unhygienic, with few facilities, and general discrimination and bias on the part of the teaching staff. At the time, she did not wear dreadlocks, and only one staff member knew of her religious beliefs. Other children still at school reported similar problems, with boys still experiencing corporal punishment as the following account will show. In addition, the Rasta child’s school experience seems to largely be taken up with dispelling stereotypes about Rasta. Every child reported being asked about ganja at school: teachers and principals expressed concern and threatened them about smoking at school; and peers would ask if they smoked.

Thus the religious complexity of Rastafari that the child had grown up with, was reduced to the use of ganja almost exclusively, and with it the Rasta child gained power. Power firstly, as the expert on her religion, which became incorporated into lessons and formed the basis of class debates, orals and religious education discussion. Secondly, due to the revised constitution and the Rasta determination to ensure their rights are upheld, schools were forced to take Rastafari seriously as a religion, and treat Rasta children in accordance. And finally, the illegal status of ganja gave the child ambiguous status amongst peers. While the message from school is that drugs are bad, dagga being a drug, the Rasta child has experienced a completely different model of understanding about ganja as a holy sacrament.

> They know here [at home] and at school not to. Not that they discriminate against ganja. They drink it but I-man knows the law. Don’t want to make more problems.

So, although both examples the child receives are talking about the same plant - marijuana, the language and meaning of ganja versus dagga are poles apart, just as communion wine representing the blood of Christ in a Christian ceremony is completely different from a vat of wine drunk for an all-night party. The meaning attributed to the substance therefore defines it, determining its use and ultimate effect. This variation of behaviour according to the manner in which the ganja is consumed has been reported by Furst (1972) and Ruben (1975).

Thus the narrative of the school experience is closely bound up with representation as the Rasta child is “taught how to handle himself in Babylon” (pers. commun. Sister Michelle). The pressure is thus to “be an ambassador of Jah” (pers. Commun. Sister Anjelica) whilst engaging in Babylon. One father expressed this concept as follows:

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⁶ Direct quote. Sister May. This was covered in some detail in Chapter Three.
It is easy to be Hindu amongst Hindus, Christian amongst Christians, Rasta amongst Rastas. For me, being Rasta is to accept His Majesty and follow his teachings. It is only when I is baptised in fire, can I stand strong in Babylon. One love and I-mans concept of one love is Christ, Hindu, everyone all together. His Majesty... no religion on Earth teaches destruction. If each person is true to his own god this world would be a better place. Rastas must clean out their own houses. No-one teaches hatred but we, the peoples of the world, fight in the name of God.

This sense of representation and responsibility can be clearly seen in the following interview about school with a nine year old boy who was born into a large Rasta family.

**BOX 22 - BROTHER NOAH, Age 9. (Livity Square)**

They see me at school. I'm a Rasta. They always ask me, do you smoke? They tell my teacher and I tell them - who is Rastafari? I am Rastafari! I tell them why we smoke... its like you don't smoke ganja for nothing. If you're a Rasta you must praise Jah. You mustn't be like a drunk person.

I like learning and education because its very nice and I like to write about things.

**What things?** Like I must now do a poem - I love writing. I also like playing outside and learning and I like my teacher also. She's a nice teacher. All so nice. They also teach psalms at school. Its also Rasta the psalms, they just pray in a different way.

**Do you have to cover your dreadlocks?**

No. Irie. Even my teacher say nothing. I don’t have to cover my hair. Why must I cover my hair? No! Brother Robert (who had joined us and was currently attending a ‘white’ school): In coloured schools they are used to it, but in white schools, it's harder for the Rastas.

**Is there anything you don’t like about school?** (Brother Michael, 10 joined us)

If we play, then they hit us.

**How many times have you been hit? Less than 10? More than 10?**

I think less than 10.

Br. Noah: No brother, its more than that.

Br. Michael: Much more, what about that time with Mevrou P.?

Br. Noah: When I was 7, I didn’t want to go to school, in Sub A. with Mevrou P. I left the school and my mother took me back. I left again, so she bring me back again. Then Mebrou P. hit me, the same day or the next day, I can’t remember.

Jevrou H. also. She did want to beat me cause we did play around. More than 10 times, about 8. Juvrou S. She beat me every term. I was playing in the class and I wanted to go home. She let the other children catch me, and another boy hit me. My brother came to the class and beat him.

**Have you told your parents about this?** No. I didn’t tell my parents.

As this excerpt shows, Rasta children have a sense of pride in who they are, which they carry throughout school. When challenged by the teacher Samuel defiantly said “who is Rastafari? I am Rastafari!” and observes the school psalms are “also Rasta – they just pray in a different way”. The child’s sense
of being Rastafari, and a part of a global community\(^7\) is therefore the measure against which school, and Babylon is judged, rather than the child feeling inferior for being in the minority.

Simpson (2000), explains schools’ power in relation to the child’s body, stating

\[
\text{A school is a locus of discipline, control and power, some manifestations of which are more obvious and clear-cut than others. In the everyday life of the school, the most overt display of power is that of teaching staff in relation to pupils, but beneath the surface of school life, many other power relationships are apparent (p. 60).}
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Boys especially, experienced corporal punishment on a regular basis. Girls reported verbal abuse and insults more frequently, although the extremely timid Sister Timi did whisper that “die mense het ons te veel geslaan by die skool, slaan and geskreeu”. This general discrimination is experienced by most children at the school and not only by Rasta children.

Generally, most Rasta youths reported enjoying the experience of learning, and of being at school to learn, play sport and also socialise but did not seem to be adversely affected by external Babylon influences. Their Rasta identity is the lens through which they view their encounters with the outside world and take pride in their strength against adversity. They therefore enjoyed being able to teach their teachers and peers about Rastafari, although the physical environment was criticised as being unsanitary, and teachers for being discriminatory. An often repeated request by the children was that children should be treated equally and fairly, suggesting that this was not currently the case. However, not all parents and children interviewed wanted state education. They preferred an education grounded in their own cultural values and felt that this was a constitutional right. Although legislature appears to support options such as home schooling, in practise, the families that tried this route found insurmountable obstacles.

**6.4. FUTURE ALTERNATIVES? RASTA COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND HOME SCHOOL:**

**Home Schooling**

The problems affecting South African schools in general were apparent in the schools the Rasta children were enrolled in, and there are not many alternatives to state education that are affordable. Although many Rastas express a desire for community schools to teach children, not many options exist that are legal. Home schooling was illegal before the National Schools Act of 1996, which included Section 51\(^8\) allowing home schooling only if permission was granted by the provincial head of department according to a set of predetermined criteria, including “the parent will comply with any other reasonable conditions set by the Head of Department” (Section 51, c) before permission is granted. These reasonable conditions are obviously subject to the individual’s own set of predetermined conceptions about what is required for the “good of the child”.

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\(^7\) Some children have communicated with other Rastas in England via correspondence, and established networks exist between South Africa and the following countries: Jamaica, the United Kingdom, America, Canada, and Panama (Yawney: 2002).

\(^8\) See Appendix 2.
According to one mother who eventually illegally home schooled her child\(^9\) for seven years,

it is no use asking for permission. They lose your papers, pretend they never heard from you, or
just say no!

The case study presented at the beginning of this chapter also involved a home schooled Rasta child,
and as Sister Miriam commented,

Mr S. did not want Robert at the school because he was Rasta, and because he had been home
schooled. He tried everything to keep him out, even after Black Sash got involved.

Mothers in all of the research locations who were considering home schooling stated the bureaucratic
process was an intentional obstacle on the part of government. Sister Lyn explained further that
the schools need enrolment so they get more teachers and money. They don’t want InI to educate
our own youths so they try force us [to enrol our children].

The tremendous commitment these women make to their children’s education in a safe environment is
therefore trivialised and the child stigmatised by school staff as uneducated. Alternative education is
thus deemed as not being up to par with state education, despite the obvious problems with the
current educational system that have already been outlined.

**Community Education**

In addition to the daily education Rasta youths receive from their families, two Rasta women have
been involved in education in their communities. Sister Michelle has been running a crèche in
Freeland since 1999. She completed a course in Early Childhood at the request of local community
members, many of whom are not Rasta, in order to supply an affordable and safe space for child care.
The crèche currently cares for 25 children, of which only two are Rasta\(^{10}\). All the children are treated
the same and taught general prayers and songs. Although this is not an exclusively Rasta crèche, the
mothers who send their children here recognise Rasta not as a threat, but as a safe haven for their
children due to the example presented by Sister Michelle and her husband. Sister Sara, who sends
her child here, motivated her reasons as “the teacher is a Rasta woman, and I trust her”.

Unfortunately, despite the community’s faith in Sister Michelle, and the fact that they do not use ganja
when any children are present, or keep any on the property, they have experienced harassment from
narcotics officials as the following narrative shows.

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\(^9\) When this child did eventually attend formal education in high school he performed exceptionally well academically.

\(^{10}\) This is as the few Rasta families in Freetown are scattered amongst families of varying ethnicity and religions.
It is noteworthy that all of the parents, non-Rastafari included, complained about the behaviour of the officers, indicating that due procedure was not followed as well as blatant harassment. In this case, despite the fact that Sister Michelle is providing a valuable service for the local community without state subsidy or support, her and her family are targeted as potential law-breakers as they are Rastafari, and by association, probably in possession of ganja. As a result the children attending crèche were traumatised by their experience with the police.

Sister Miriam has been running a weekly Sunday workshop in Livity Square since 1997. The Rasta community has built a workshop where the children meet. Here they learn chants, psalms, basic Amharic, black history and permaculture. At one stage, the children corresponded with children at a Rasta community school in London, until that was closed down. Usually, the lessons start at ten in the morning, and run for about two hours. The children start with reciting psalms, and the children are then usually given a choice of which lessons they would like to continue with. Here follows a detailed description from fieldnotes of a workshop I attended after a seven-day religious festival celebrating Haile Selassie’s birthday.

**BOX 23 - NARRATIVE: Sister Michelle**

The first time they came was in December 2001. The whole police and the army blocked off the road. No-one was allowed in or out no matter whether you lived here or not. They didn’t have a warrant. They said they didn’t need one, it was a routine search but they only searched our house. They took the I-man by force, and kept him the whole day. They questioned him, didn’t give him food, didn’t give him water. I was so worried.

The second time was the 19 January 2002. Were 10 or 12 policemen. Some inside, and some outside. One had a dog and a copy of a warrant, not the original. He didn’t identify himself so I asked him his name. (This specific police officer seems to target Rastas. He has been identified by name by Rastas through the entire former Cape Province). He was looking for illegal drugs. We let him search. The dogs searched the children’s bags. (Sister Michelle runs a community crèche for children of all faiths). They turned my bed upside down. They took the Kingman to the police station for a while then let him go. They were swearing in front of the children. The children had to drink sugar water afterwards. They are so afraid of police now.

I’ve started hating the police. All the years I didn’t mind them, I thought they were just doing their job. Now I hate them. They have no respect. The way they come into your kaya is not irie. The parents got together and complained. A Captain was supposed to come, but he never did.
The above observation highlights the competence of the children musically, as well as their inclusion in the planning of the lesson structure. Although Sister Miriam is the ultimate order in the room, the children were given the space to choose which lessons would be most beneficial. As it was the end of a holiday which had seen lots of friends come and go, they were extremely excited. Thus they asked to perform rather than work on permaculture. Whilst this may be seen as fun, it is also valuable. They are remembering lyrics, beat, and intonation and drawing these together, often in harmony with others to entertain their peers. The projects and pictures on the wall show pride and diligence in their lessons, which are designed to enrich their state education with history important to Rastafari, which enforces a strong Rasta identity.

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**BOX 24 - Weekly Rasta Community Workshop**

I kept seeing children peeping around Sister Rachael’s door, ranging in age from 2 to about 13. They were waiting for the workshop to start. Those too small to come down by themselves piggy-backed a ride with an older sibling. Although not compulsory, I was told the children are encouraged to attend. Eventually, we moved to the workshop next door and the room filled up.

About 17 children, most dreadlocked and dressed in colourful clothes, attended that day, sitting on an assortment of wooden benches, chairs and upside down crates. They all stood at the beginning of the workshop, and holding the sign of sevens, prayed, and recited psalms following a prompt, for example ‘Psalm 17’. They then sat down, and after some discussion facilitated by the teacher, Sister Miriam, decided to chant prayers. This was an incredibly moving experience. Using the distinctive reggae heart drumbeat, and shakers made from calabashes, they sang their prayers, some using photocopied books if they were unsure of the words. For a group of such young children, the music was very sophisticated, and more reminiscent of Bob Marley or Culture than the mournful church music I was exposed to as a child.

Whilst they were singing I noted the wall decorations. A large poster on the wall - a collation of pictures of significant black leaders in history, with a paragraph on each. This was compiled by the youths as a long term project which taught them about black history. There were also several Rasta-themed pictures which had been coloured-in by the children. These were ganja leaves, lions and a Rasta drumming. There were also photographs of significant events occurring in Livity Square. After singing, the children were asked if they wanted to work on their permaculture project. They didn’t and motivated this with the fact it was a holiday. Lila and Noah asked if they could perform instead. Noah and Lila started. While the other children clapped the beat, they sang a duet to the popular remix “Turn Your Light Down Low” as sung by artists Lauren Hill and Ziggy Marley. When they were finished, after a slight jostle, several other children performed and sang popular songs, usually incredibly accurately in terms of lyrics and tune, but with the swear words removed from the hip-hop numbers.

The workshop ended shortly after this, and some of the children took me to their garden and showed me the vegetables they were growing.
In addition, this community tries to ensure that the youths are taken on field trips, for example to the beach, or camping, and that they develop practical skills such as sewing. This highlights the fact that although this single-handed initiative serves its purpose of instructing Rasta children in Rastafari religious beliefs, morality and values, whilst reinforcing daily school lessons, it is nevertheless dependent on one woman’s continued stamina with this project, and the maintenance of the community, without any state aid or support. The workshops are extremely popular with the youth of Livity Square and most Rastas in other locations have heard of the workshop via grassroots communication.

The criteria for the continuing success of this project would therefore be a stable economic income, a continued safe environment for the children to meet, and the well-being and health of Sister Miriam. However, in a country such as South Africa, these are not always guaranteed and as the above case studies have shown, Rastafari children are not necessarily guaranteed against discrimination on the basis of religion, despite the specifications of the Constitution or the UNCRC. As a result, Rastafari are increasingly calling for their own schools, where children can be taught in an understanding and accepting environment. The Livity Square workshops are unique in that this is one of the few communities which is exclusively Rasta and as such has built a tabernacle, workshop and has fenced the area. This facilitates community activities such as the workshops. As communities in other locations live in more fluid areas, this is more difficult to organise and protect from theft.

**Conclusion**

Some of the most frequently heard observations on education from the Rastas I have worked with have been that “the I-man is systemised in school”, that one of Haile Selassie’s greatest achievements in Ethiopia was the education system, and that education is an important tool in the fight against discrimination. However, there is also the desire to promote a more practically skills based education. These observations are far from radical. Schools, especially during the apartheid era, have a history of promoting government propaganda of the time so it is not surprising that suspicion of a system diametrically opposed to their own would occur. There is also a growing trend for schools and higher education to promote more practical and therefore more employable subjects.

This chapter has explored the power the department of education wields, both in the filter down effect of policy in state schools, as well as the legislature protecting these policies. Essentially, although the constitution protects the rights of children to attend school without discrimination, in practise this is not the case unless the parents and children are willing to seek legal assistance to aid them. The case studies highlighted demonstrate that these families, and in particular, the youths feel so strongly about their identity as Rastafarian, that they are willing to make substantial personal sacrifices to ensure their religious rights are accorded to them. This has resulted in change at a national level, in that schools are now more tolerant of Rasta belief systems and appearance.

The workshop and crèche currently operating show that not only have these communities taken the initiative in providing an alternative perspective on the value systems taught in schools, they have also
done so successfully as seen by the popularity and larger non-Rasta community support of both teaching groups. It is however, still apparent that the operations do not receive state support, economically, or in terms of legislation as shown by the raids and other forms of harassment the members experience.

The cultural grounding these children receive from their families, as well as the hypocrisy they experience in their personal encounters with agents of the state such as principals and policemen result in enforcing the impression they have of Babylon as immoral and unjust, and their role as Jah Children in society. Thus the more problems they encounter with state education, the more entrenched their belief systems become. Thus they challenge the power of the state education system in two ways, firstly, legally, in the courts, forcing the state to either enforce its own constitution and prove that it is truly representative of multiculturalism in civil society; or to enforce mainstream hegemony.

Secondly, Rastas ensure that they symbolically challenge this power through assigning greater importance to an ongoing spiritual education, based on the principles of livity. How a child “handles herself in Babylon” and “is a good ambassador for Jah” therefore has greater import than tests, marks and systems as state education is a temporary process whereas living an ital livity is a lifelong undertaking with greater rewards. When viewed from this perspective, Babylon is being tested according to ital principles and found to have little substance. Therefore children are provided with choices and are shown that both in the Babylon system due to their court successes, as well as Rasta terms, that their way of life has validity in the broader social context as a South African.

The following chapter explores the child/youth’s experience of Babylon through the media machine. It also examines how mainstream society perceives Rastafari through a reading of political cartoons, newspaper articles and television that appeared in abundance during the Gareth Prince case.
Picture 18: Singing Psalms in the Rasta Workshop

Picture 19: Feeling Irie

Picture 20: Youths Praying whilst Holding Sevens

Picture 21: A Young Queen and Two Children at Home

Picture 22: Soccer Action
CHAPTER 6

15 MINUTES OF FAME: THE MEDIA MACHINE

Introduction:
Whereas education is an institutionalised setting, where Rasta children are taught specific messages and lessons, multi-media, or the “media machine” appears in a multiple of forms and influences. Rasta children grow up surrounded by multi-media. They listen to kwato and hip-hop in taxis and watch music videos on Simunye (TV1). They see adverts whilst watching their favourite shows on television; play video games on Playstation; and are filmed, photographed and interviewed. Much as their families reject Babylon thinking, globalisation and the flow of information reaches them in their daily lives, and it is how this information is understood and articulated that has importance. In addition, an image of Rastafari is appearing as a packaged form through this media. Magazine-style programmes feature the occasional “Rasta” show, music programmes have Rasta-themed shows, and magazine and newspaper reports abound where messages and “themes” about Rasta are presented.

One such theme that recurs, links Rasta in South Africa with ganja. There has been a lot of debate in South Africa about the legalisation of cannabis for economic, religious and medicinal purposes, which has been reported on extensively by the media. Rastafari has similarly gathered a lot of attention in the popular press, mostly for their use of ganja, as well as the exotic photo opportunity of Rastas with their brightly coloured red, yellow and green garments and masses of dreads. As with many communities, the relationship between the media and Rastafari is in a state of flux and has been ever since it began. Minority groups in South Africa and around the world have long realised that globalisation is a double-edged sword.

One edge of the blade brings perceived destruction of local culture with influences such as MacDonalds, Wonderbras, Nike and Coca-Cola (Featherstone: 1995, p. 7-8) – the so-called demons of “sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll”. The other edge can be used as a powerful weapon and mirror, reflecting the injustices done to relatively small and powerless communities into the global arena; and giving the opportunity to strike back with global allies (Conklin & Graham: 1995). One of the main ways in which ideas and news is spread is through different types of media. Newspapers, books, television, magazines, movies, and the internet are just a few ways in which ideas and culture is disseminated throughout the world. Together, I refer to these as “the media machine”, churning out information which becomes incorporated into the daily lives of humanity.

However, realistically, this does not mean that these are wholeheartedly assimilated by a passive society halfway around the world. Much has been written about “glocalisation”, the local interpretation of the Western capitalist orientated value-system which is accused of exporting its values to poorer, third-world countries. As Wilk; Das; and Abu-Lughod successfully argue (In Miller:1995), the global is always seen and interpreted through the local gaze, and gains value and a meaning through its interaction locally, not globally. Thus the way in which South African Rasta youths perceive and
present Rastafari, is a continually developing process, influenced by both international as well as local understandings of livity, Babylon, Zion and other key themes.

Rastafari, is undeniably, a global community in terms of its popularity as a lifestyle choice all over the world. As Featherstone (1995) suggests

It may well be better to consider a global culture in the first sense to be a form, a space or a field, made possible through improved means of communication in which different cultures clash and meet... (p. 6).

He continues to identify these improved means of communication as technological developments, for example transportation; and secondly, mass media and new communications technology which are attributed with having a “dialogical and interactive capacity” enabling (p. 7) long-distance interaction with others. As much as media is perceived as iconic of Babylon with the values portrayed through mass media, it is also a tool in exposing corruption and social ills. It is thus the dialogue between Rasta and Babylon, and their impact on youth identity, as portrayed by mass media which is the focus of this chapter. As much as Rasta parents fear the influence of Babylon values on their children, so too does Babylon fear the influence of Rasta on their youths.

Firstly, I explore the topic of Rastafari as social commentary, making use of secondary sources in the form of newspaper clippings, political cartoons, magazine television shows, and documentaries to identify and analyse what is being said about Rasta in the media. This gives an indication of popular South African stereotypes about Rastafari. I then examine the use of this stereotypical Rastafari identity as social capital in South Africa and how advertising uses it as a marketing tool to appeal to a mostly youth-orientated market. This also takes the form of a mostly textual analysis of adverts. Using case studies and examples from fieldwork, I then explore how Rasta has taken ownership of this commodification and uses mass media interest in Rastafari as a tool in which to further their aims and objectives. Finally, I outline the consumption of media and branding by children and youths. The dialogue between Rasta and Babylon is thus interpreted and mediated through the media machine during the course of social commentary, deriving increasing social and symbolic capital, and sent back in a changed state from its origin.

6.1. SOCIAL COMMENTARY

The Catalyst to Rasta Appearing in the Public Gaze

Interest in Rastafari waxes and wanes depending on what actions are seen as newsworthy, and popular interest can be judged according to how much social commentary is afforded to the topic. A notable growth in public interest in Rasta started in 2000, when the afore-mentioned Rasta lawyer, Gareth Prince, applied to the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein for permission to practise as an attorney, whilst still observing his religious beliefs, which included the use of ganja (Rickard: 2000). His application was denied, and he was ordered to pay all costs, at which point he decided to take the matter to the Constitutional Court twice.
The case seemed to capture the imagination of all South Africans and created a flurry of media interest, letters to the editor and speculation for three years (Streek: 2000; Ep Herald: 2000; Sapa: 2000; Sapa: 2001; Magardie: 2001; Green: 2001; and Sapa: 2001b). By the time judgement was eventually handed down in January 2002, although the judgement was reported (Rickard: 2002) it was not accompanied by as much commentary in the form of letters, or public debate. The public appeared bored with the topic in the wake of the previous sensationalist coverage.

The latest surge of interest in Rasta, therefore seemed to start with the publicity of Gareth’s case in 2000 (although this had been ongoing since 1998), and end with the Constitutional Court’s judgement. This was very much a test case for the country between upholding an individual’s constitutional right to religious freedom and tolerance versus “the threat to society posed by drug abuse and the difficulty of policing any exception” (Rickard: 2000). One of the judgements handed down from the Appeal Court read as follows:

Judge Mthiyana said that anyone who wanted to become an attorney had to promise loyalty to the laws of the country – which would necessarily include the anti-drug laws. “If [Prince] declares that he will defy any of the laws of the republic it is difficult to see how he can be considered a fit and proper person. His conduct seems to me to amount to a repudiation of the oath of allegiance even before he takes it” (Rickard: 2000).

This statement highlights the state’s influence on “normalised” identity and value systems. As in the education system, the state has a mandate to produce “fit and proper persons” to fulfil valuable roles in society. However, the state view of what constitutes “fit and proper” can be highly subjective and unrepresentative of minority value systems, restricting “undesirable elements” from certain sectors of society. In this case Gareth Prince was being judged as unfit to act as a lawyer, not on the basis of his academic results or legal expertise, but his religious practices as a Rasta. This implies Rastafari is not “fit or proper”.

Thus, the possibility of sudden policy change led to Rasta taking a central position in the debate. This case study is extremely relevant for Rasta youth identity, as not only was a public Rasta identity debated in the popular press, but the furore also stimulated community interest in Rasta culture, enabling Rastas to present their own sense of Rasta identity in response to local questions by neighbours, and peers. In addition, Rasta youths were presented with a positive Rasta role model in both Gareth Prince, as well as a recently deceased Rasta lawyer who was often highly praised by Rastas in all research locations for his influence and work on behalf of Rastas.

Analysis of Print Media

During the course of the court case, newspapers and news bulletins reported protests; court action against schools for not admitting Rasta youths with dreadlocks; and members of the South African cricket team were fined R10 000 each for smoking ganja on tour. Debate surrounding these events usually made reference to Prince’s court case, and argued the moral, economic and ethical views of legalisation. This social commentary, which can also be referred to as discourse affects the lives of those it discusses as it is creating a public image of Rasta which affects how they are viewed. In other words
Discourses involve naming and classifying. This is a political activity. As such, it is not merely symbolic, but it has material outcomes that impinges on people’s lives (Seidel & Vidal: 1997, p. 59).

In South Africa, cartoons are inevitably political, satirising daily events. As a mass communication device their targets are inevitably stereotyped and caricatured so that they can be instantly recognised by the readership. Political cartoons are thus a good barometer of the prevailing readership’s attitude toward the subject matter. The language used in most newspaper headlines and articles clearly showed that Rastafari was not considered a serious religion, as did cartoons such as that of “Rasta Bob” shown at the beginning of Part III, and the following political cartoon depicting Helen Suzman with all the symbolic trappings of Rastafari.

Whilst both cartoons are amusing, they nonetheless are making a derogatory statement about Rastafari. Helen Suzman, a South African ex-politician renowned for her anti-apartheid stance and advocacy of decriminalisation of marijuana is referred to here as “Skankin’ Suzman”, skankin’ usually meaning dancing to reggae music. She is wearing the stereotypical external symbols of Rasta, namely beads at the end of dreads, and a ganja leaf; and she is carrying a personal stereo playing reggae. The comment, “want a hit? Fffft ffft...It’s good stuff!” trivialises the religious use of ganja by Rastas,
and is an expression derived from popular subculture. As this question is directed at the holder of the scales of justice whilst smoking a spliff labelled decriminalisation, it implies Rastas are seeking approval to “have a party”, rather than overcome discrimination and police harassment that affect their lives on a daily basis. Similarly, Rasta Bob in the Madam and Eve cartoon (Francis & Rico: 2002), clearly caricatures Gareth Prince as he states “I am studying for my law degree so that I can lead the fight to decriminalise dagga”. The learned cultural response of the public is humorously demonstrated when Madam and Eve respond “You smoke dagga in church!”...followed by “take our advice, stay away from drugs”. In other words, the public is drawn as extremely conservative – unable to conceive of a church in anything other than orthodox Christian terms (the more conventional pews and hallowed altar), and marijuana as anything but a drug. The final frame of the cartoon where Rasta Bob sighs, “I can see this is going to be an uphill battle”, however, promotes the stereotypical gaze of Rastas as stoners, or junkies, as it is implying that members of Rastafari are too high to note that their “Decriminalise Marijuana” sign is upside down.

The etic view of Rasta identity is therefore bounded in the extensive use of marijuana, although the religious aspects of its use are mostly portrayed as an excuse to be lazy, have a good time, and “be irie”. Similarly, dreadlocks, reggae and the colours of red, yellow and green are related to Rasta. The religious tenets of Rasta, food prescriptions or lifestyle choices are not mentioned. Here follows a selection of headlines appearing over the past few years:

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**BOX 25 - NEWSPAPER HEADLINES:**

1. Rasta’s aspirations go up in smoke - Court finds that an exception to drug ban could not be policed (Sunday Times. Rickard: 2000, p. 6).


In these headlines ganja was referred to as dagga, dope, and drugs (Headlines 5, 6 and 7), and Gareth Prince as the “dagga smoking would-be lawyer” (Rickard: 2000). The use of the Afrikaans word dagga rather than a more clinical sounding cannabis sativa, or marijuana has a specific connotation and meaning within South Africa, usually negative and indicative of criminal behaviour. As one newspaper journalist related:

Dagga is such a lovely South African word, which people use with glee and the rough intonation it demands every time anyone is found transgressing the law...none of the other names such as marijuana, dope, pot or "holy herb", as the Rastafarians call it, has the same ability to make the culprits feel that they have committed a heinous crime for which society demands full retribution (Green: 2001, p. 26).

Thus the message portrayed in the media, although relaying both sides of the debate quite fairly, nevertheless trivialised the Rasta argument through the language used, for example, “the most important part of the debate, however, is the...uhm...err, what were we talking about” (Mail & Guardian: May 18-24, 2001, p. 22) - clearly implying short-term memory loss, and as Rastafari place such importance on positivity, or I-ance, indicates a further insensitivity to their beliefs.

In addition, with regards to headlines 9, and 10 (Meintjies: 2001a & b), anyone with dreadlocks, or wearing the colours was considered Rasta. In this case, when interviewed in prison, the so-called “Rasta rapist” did not follow a Rasta belief system. The dreadlocks were a hairstyle, and he wore the colours because he liked them. The journalist assumed he was Rastafari because of the symbolic trappings and thus labelled him “the Rasta rapist”, without considering the impact on local marginalized Rasta communities who were already experiencing discrimination.

**Reflections on State Policy**

The interest in Rasta in the press therefore followed on directly from a debate about the legalisation of ganja for medicinal and religious reasons prompted in part by Gareth Prince’s appeal, but also by simultaneous debate occurring in Britain (Allison: 2001), Canada, the United States and France (Magardie: 2001). In South Africa, the question that inevitably was asked was “what about the children?”, immediately referring to the multi-levelled discourse which places children as entities removed from social process and needed to be protected, rather than agents in their own right with the potential to affect their own environments. In other words, although a frequent comment was “responsible adults should be left alone to make such decisions for themselves” (Mail & Guardian: May 18-24, 2001, p. 22) the state does not feel those same responsible adults can protect their own children, or know what is right for their children within their own cultural context. The child herself is similarly attributed with not having sufficient knowledge to make her own decisions. The Rasta parent is thus tarred with the same stigmatising brush as the “drug-parent”, giving the state full impunity to remove that child from the perceived harmful setting. The social commentary prompted by the processes of mass media therefore reflects state policy.

As Shore and Wright (1997) articulate,

A basic problem confronted by all political systems...is how to consolidate the legitimacy and authority of the party in office. More successful regimes engineer conditions so that, seemingly, consent of the public comes “naturally”. That is, by extending hegemony over a population and “naturalising” a particular ideology as common sense, it becomes incontestable, inviolable and beyond political debate (p. 24).
The social commentary previously described shows this majority, moral ideology at threat as the Constitution was being tested in the public arena by Rastafari. This has stimulated great political debate which has been given a somewhat sensationalised space by the media. However, once the status quo had been established and the “norms” stabilised, this social commentary waned with a final minority judgement stating:

The majority had “put a thumb on the scales in favour of ease of law enforcement” at the expense of the rights of a vulnerable, unpopular minority group. He wrote that the real difference between the two main judgements was “how much trouble” they felt it was appropriate to expect the state to go to in order to accommodate the religious convictions of Rastafarians (Judge Sachs & Judge Mokgoro in Rickard: 2002, p. 4).

Thus, in order to maintain order in governance, and control over the body-politic, policy is introduced which is upheld through policing. “Deviant” behaviour is discouraged or punished, and often laws linger long after civil society feels they are necessary. Government therefore holds a vast amount of power over cultural identities, and value systems. I would take Foucault’s observation that “the family comes to be considered as an instrument of the government” (1991, In Shore & Wright: 1997, p. 30) a step further in that government takes it upon themselves to have power over the unity of a family, and can control parents though the threat of removing their children, or imprisoning them if they stray too far from the accepted norm of childcare and parenting. This flies in the face of a Constitution that aims to protect the rights of all minorities in South Africa, as it is the agents of the state and bureaucratic process that enables this to happen.

As was shown clearly in Chapter Five, policy has dictated the norms of the formal education system. Rasta used the rhetoric of multi-cultural policy in order to ensure their rights were maintained, but at great risk to themselves. Other arenas in which Rasta beliefs are contested are that of health, as was shown through the ethnography of pregnant mothers; the manner in which they worship, and the use of ganja. According to legislature, the parents’ and child’s religious rights and freedoms are secondary to the mandate to protect the child.

Freeman (1997) highlights the contradictions in legislature, criticising the Children’s Act of 1959 as the Act not only strengthens the position of parents (by getting the state and local state off their backs), it also strengthens the powers of local authorities to intervene. For example, the “trigger” for care includes for the first time prognosis by social workers that the child is “likely” to suffer “significant harm”. The new child assessment order, allowing removal of a child for investigative purposes, where there is suspicion, but no hard evidence, is a further example (p. 310).

In other words, the State has the power and authority to remove a child from his parents based on a social worker’s etic moral judgement, with little to no understanding of the families’ true belief system. In all of the case studies presented thus far, children face the threat of being removed from a loving and caring home and placed with strangers in an alienating foster care or institution with the stigma of having “drug” parents. Thus, despite Article 14:1 of the UNCRC clearly stating “State parties shall

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1 Although the threat is there, in terms of legislation, Rastafari have turned to the Constitution itself to claim their right to religious freedom, which balances the power.

2 Fortunately, this did not occur to anyone in my sample, however this did occur to an Irietown couple in 2000. I did not get to interview them, as they were already ‘on the run’.

respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion", Article 14:3 effectively nullifies this with the clause that

Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

The problem with this is that what is deemed right in terms of these public moralities is all based on a Western paradigm, and although the current majority in power in South Africa is African, they nevertheless subscribe to an internationally based Western frame of law. And as Article 9.1 reminds us “competent authorities” are perfectly within their rights to remove a child from its parents if deemed “in the best interests of the child”.

One way in which Rastas have started protecting themselves as demonstrated in the previous chapter is by “using Babylon to fight Babylon”, in other words, using the media, Internet and modern communications devices to ensure their case is not swept under the bureaucratic carpet. And it is in this way, if we were to return to the metaphor introduced in Part One of the State as a rock, that it is forced to do more than pay lip service to policy and becomes weathered, forming a more realistic shape reflective of civil society rather than the unstable ideal of good governance which hides the threat of a potential rockslide under the surface skree. However, the media machine, as indicated by the term used, follows Cartesian principles in that it is fairly automated and run according to the principle of sales, and “the scoop” in order to survive in a competitive market. Humanitarian and ethical issues are often not the motivating force behind journalism, and as such inviting media exposure can have an ambivalent feedback effect following the fifteen minutes of fame, which is sometimes negative, and sometimes positive.

### 6.2. TAMING THE BEAST

Nando’s, a Portuguese franchise selling takeaway chicken dishes, also aired several television adverts during prime time showing two elderly ladies expressing concern that “the boys are getting stoned in J o’burg” (SABC 2, 3, e-tv). The camera then pans to a small house where a group of dreadlocked actors wearing symbolic red, green and yellow are sitting in a smoke-filled room. Similarly, Musica also ran several adverts at the same time featuring a Rasta, ganja associations, and reggae playing in the background. Neither ad was directly related to the product it was selling but each had a trendy, tongue-in-cheek feel to them, which basically capitalised on Rasta as being cool or fashionable. Both Nando’s and Musica’s target audience is predominantly youth orientated. Although theoretically both cater for all people, a large proportion of their sales are marketed towards a younger, more liquid cash flow.

Similarly, the Post Office’s Postbank used the image of a Rastaman to construct itself as ‘everyman’s bank’. The advert (SABC 3) opened with the familiar beat of Bob Marley, before panning into a smoky room where a Rasta wearing a tall multi-coloured tam is counting his money. When he is finished, he carefully stashes the notes under his tam. At that moment, the rotorblade fan above him cuts his tam

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4 Loose surface gravel.
in half, and the money flutters round the room onto the floor. The text “Postbank”, followed by “People Like You” appears on the screen. Other than the music’s lyrics, there is no other voice or sound. The message the Post Office is giving is “trust us with your money” - we represent all South Africans.

Why now? What has led to Rasta being a marketing tool, and what influences have shaped this? And how has this influenced local communities? One factor, due to the timing of these adverts, would have to be the appeal for Rastas to use ganja for religious purposes in the constitutional court. The second factor would be the globalisation of Rastafari itself internationally. As discussed in the introductory chapters, Rastafari has spread all over the world and as Yawney (1994b) states, this has been due to diaspora movement by Jamaicans to Africa, as well as a media phenomenon, borne along a on a wave of enthusiasm for reggae as it is heard worldwide in broadcasts, recordings, and live concerts (p. 76).

Amongst the Rasta youths interviewed, those who were not born into Rastafari learnt about its principles through reggae, usually Bob Marley; and smoking ganja. With each of these youths there was a specific revelatory experience which made them want to follow Rastafari, however, this did not automatically make them Rasta. Rather it was only after a prolonged period of attaining consciousness and practising the disciplined livity of Rastafari that they felt ready to grow dreadlocks, symbolising the Vow of the Nazarite.

The popularity of reggae in South Africa, as well as the spread of what Yawney (1994b) calls The vision of Rastafari as a constellation of ambiguous symbols, which today has the power to focalize and even mediate certain socio-cultural tensions that have developed on a global scale (p. 76) has ensured a widespread grassroots recognition of and understanding of Rastafari amongst youth subculture, resulting in the incorporation of Rasta symbolism into mainstream markets. It is common for mainstream youths to speak of feeling irie, greet each other with a closed fist and Ahoy, or to grow dreadlocks. Whereas previously the Rasta youth was largely marginalized as a minority, he now holds status amongst certain groups as he is the original the market is deriving inspiration from. Some of the symbolism attractive to youth counterculture is the image of rebelliousness associated with dreadlocks. Similarly, reggae lyrics have an anti-system message highlighting the pursuit of justice that appeals to a frustrated adolescent who is raging against the injustices he perceives in the capitalist world. Thus the advertiser is trying to use Rasta’s counterculture image to appeal to a market which relates to Rasta symbolism.

Suddenly, Rasta and its symbols holds social capital, not only for Rastafari but for other subcultures which find meaning in its “symbolic ambiguity” (Yawney: 1994b). Some concerns have been raised about non-Rasta groups and individuals that use Rasta imagery, without living the livity, which then misrepresents the deep commitment many Rastafari have to their chosen lifestyle. This concern also applies to journalists, photographers and researchers whose actions can have similar negative repercussions for Rastafari, who are trying to improve their public profile.
The Influence of Rasta Agency on Media Interventions

Some Rastas still choose to avoid encounters with journalists, but many, as demonstrated through the education chapter have chosen to not only allow such encounters, but to use them to further their cause. This is often planned in conjunction with protests so that there is media coverage to witness their case. With the technological advances available, it is easier than ever to spread information and garner support for political undertakings.

This fact has been realised by many minorities around the world who have joined forces in a political space. Conklin & Graham (1995) report about the Xavante in the Brazilian Amazon

Today a new kind of middle ground is developing between some fourth-world and first-world citizens. This contemporary middle ground is neither a geographic terrain nor a social space where neighbours meet face-to-face. It is instead a political space, an arena of intercultural communication, exchange, and joint political action (p. 695-696).

Although Rastafari is not an indigenous minority, it nevertheless shares many similarities with the above example as it exists globally within a symbolically political space similar to that of the indigenous minority above (ibid). Rastafari can be found all over the world, regardless of language, ethnicity, or race. It is the symbolic capital they share that enables them to find a common ground, erasing ethnic boundaries in times of need. It is this global community that local Rastas can draw on for support in the mediation of their local identity, and close links and communication exist between Houses across the globe.

Much as the Xavante in Brazil used a mix of modern technology and their symbolic capital to expose corrupt government officials (p. 699), so Rastafari are ensuring their rights are upheld. The image of the dreadlocked, rainbow coloured Rasta family is exotic, and invokes associations with black consciousness, freedom, and rebelliousness against the system, which usually ensures media coverage and public interest. This is especially appealing to mainstream youth. Rastafari have realised this and use the media to speed up the process so that government is more reflective of civil society. In addition, they are actively making use of video cameras, cameras and the internet to “mek a trod” in other words, Rastafari is engaging in spreading the word of Ras Tafari all over the globe. The more information available about Rastafari as seen through their lens means greater empathy and tolerance for their way of life, as well as many individuals who feel such an affinity to Rastafari that they convert.

One community, Livity Square, currently allows international visitors to visit at R10-00 a head as part of a “township tours” group. Here they learn about Rastafari firsthand. This money is then used towards the youth’s educational workshops. Film crews and documentary makers frequently visit this location as well. Brother Noah appeared on an investigative journalism programme with his older brothers. His comments were brief, “I was put on the TV. People came, it was Binghi and I smoked and they put us on the TV. Yes, it was nice”. 
Another family called the media when they experienced constant harassment from police, resulting in the father being arrested on several occasions. Although his cases were thrown out of court five times, and he has won an appeal, the police kept raiding his house and arresting him for ganja possession.

**BOX 26 - BROTHER JOSEPH & SISTER REBEKKA**

Brother Joseph is a Rasta elder, who often appears in court on behalf of other Rastas. Both he and his wife are soft-spoken, but firm in their beliefs. In April 2002 Brother Joseph went on a hunger strike to protest at his treatment by the police and courts. The local community supported him by having a peaceful protest outside the courthouse. According to this family, the local chief prosecutor, Mrs van W. has a personal grudge against him and doesn’t like them because they “answer back”. The last time he was arrested he was refused bail, and given a 6 month sentence for contempt of court. Instead of summoning him she apparently phoned the local police personally and told them “This Rasta is always on tv. Don’t even give him time to explain himself”. The other brethren he was arrested with were released after two months, whilst the same procedure was not followed with him. They related their experiences with the police and the effect it has had on their family.

**Brother Joseph:** They were really strong [his family]. They came to visit I every weekend when they [prison officials] would let them. I was on a hunger strike so they wouldn’t let I see my children, or watch TV. It was a punishment, see? I was on hunger strike for 14 days. Officially they made it 8 days. The 1st 6 days the doctor refused to check I. I used water as a medicine but didn’t drink it as normal.

**Sister Rebekka:** They are cruel to the Rastas. They make sure they put InI far away where he cannot see his family. I went to Mrs van W. with the children and I pleaded with her. I said ‘please, these youths need their father. This one is very sick, he could die and not see his father ’. She looked at me and said, “take these children away. Its not my problem”.

When the Iman was in prison, everytime he saw a policeman Menelik would say “here comes the rascals again. Did the rascals take my father?” Then I would say ”Ja, but he’ll be home soon.”

He’s not really scared his attitude... he sights them and says to me, “are they going to catch me now?”

In this example, the family used the media to let the nation know they are targeted for their religious beliefs and that they are not going to sit back passively while it happens. They knew that prison officials would ignore his hunger strike unless it was publicised, and the insensitivity of the court prosecutor towards Sister Rebekka and Menelik’s health when she wanted her children to see their father is unmistakable. The newspaper ran this as a human interest story, with a large picture of Menelik, age five with his family in the background. It is obvious from Menelik’s statements about “the rascals” that he sees police as a threat, not as someone to assist him. In this instance, the media were involved at the specific request of the family. However, the media machine can be fickle, creating problems for Rastafari through the selective imagery it uses. Whilst communities may trust crews to have ethical motivations, often the sensational sells, and footage will be manipulated in order to increase sales.
I was present when Carte Blanche filmed a documentary where Gareth Prince and Dan Woolf, a psychologist; tried to convince each other of the validity of their argument. The show was entitled Face to Face with the Enemy, and was billed as follows:

We brought a dagga-smoking Rastafarian and a reformed addict, turned drug counsellor, together to argue their views and experience each other's contrasting worlds. Will these two opposites find a common ground?

Here follows an extract from a transcript of the programme.

**BOX 24 - “FACE TO FACE WITH THE ENEMY”**

**Narrator:** Gareth estimates that the Rastafari community in South Africa is 12 000 to 15 000 strong. This festival is held every Easter, where Rasta art, crafts and wares are on display - including cannabis, which they believe is a holy herb used for centuries in African tradition. But as a family man, one of Dan's chief concerns is the exposure of children to cannabis. Outside the tent, Rastafari gather around Dan, eager to express their views.

The camera pans to the inside of a large, white tent, where the festival is under way.

**Dan:** How old is this child?

**Researcher:** I don’t know, why don’t you ask him?

**Dan:** How old are you?

**Rasta Boy:** holds up his fingers to show 7

**Dan:** (in an baby voice) Do you smoke marijuana? Do you smoke ganja?

**Rasta Boy:** Nods shyly. He is looking very confused.

**Gareth:** I don’t think it is proper you ask this youth. He doesn’t even speak English! Me, I don’t know his parents.

**Dan:** Do you think he has a choice?

**Gareth:** You are approaching this from the wrong perspective! He’s a youth, and you find the majority of Rastafarians do not allow their kids from a small age to puff ganja. And even if they do it takes place within a confined setting.

**Dan** (accusingly): You encourage all these young people here to smoke ganja!

**Gareth:** The issue is not about smoking, Rasta is not just a religion, Rasta is a lifestyle, a total way of life, and smoking fits into that way of life.

(Carte Blanche. M-Net, South Africa. 13 May 2001)

Aside from the language used, this documentary was extremely relevant as the open-ended question asked was “what about the children?” Following this, the crew and Dan left the festival and joined a group of Rastas in the mountain. Here they had a long reasoning about ganja and its cultural use, and made several compelling points about the difference between the use of the plant for religious purposes, and the abuse of it, usually in conjunction with nicotine and other substances. None of this was included in the programme. The Rastas involved never heard from Carte Blanche again.
In this programme Dan Woolf was “the expert” as implied by his academic training (a trained psychologist) and the fact that he runs a drug rehabilitation centre. Gareth Prince was “the dagga-smoking would-be lawyer”, and the child was the potential victim of a “cult with an addiction”. Although it appeared as though an argument was being fairly presented, the way in which the actors were portrayed through editing process gave a certain biased impression. The child’s affirmation of a question in a second language is enough to convince audiences that “the children” must be protected, a blanket concept of children as seen though their lens of personal experience which excludes the religio-cultural use of ganja. Dan cannot see beyond his lens which colours marijuana as a dangerous, habit-forming drug and Rasta as a cult which leaves children with no choices; whereas the Rastas he encounters see his previous “dependency” as evidence of a weak will and addiction to the nicotine he smoked with his ganja. Once again, the media draw a relationship between ganja and Rastafari, to the exclusion of the multiple aspects making up Rasta.

So, although the media has been tamed to a certain extent, with Rastafari actively including them in political activities and strategies; the beast still turns and can often present a subjective and inaccurate picture of Rastafari. This however, does not stop the use of multi-media by Rastafari, especially by the youths. As Sister Rachael said “some things [they do] I don’t like but because they are youths I accept this. I grow them up as Rastas, but they are confused because outside Babylon is swearing, meat-eating, and these things and things”.

### 6.3. NIKE, PLAYSTATION AND M-TV: CONSUMPTION OF MEDIA BY YOUTHS

I asked the youths what their favourite television programmes were. The children were avid consumers of mass media, and would watch television in the afternoon after school, and in the evenings before bedtime. Those who didn’t have television would go to a friend’s house and watch there. Afternoons especially were a time when half a dozen small Rastafari would be sprawled, belly down in front of Takalane Sesame. Borrowed videos were shared with other youths so more than one youth would see it, videos of choice being action movies: Jackie Chan, Steven Segal, Chuck Norris and other martial arts experts doing battle against evil. As the children got older they had less time to watch TV as they had to slave, a Rasta term for employment.

Here follows a selection of narratives from four youths of varying ages describing their consumption of multimedia.
I noted that young children of both genders enjoyed cartoons, and puppet shows such as Takelane Sesame, a South African version of Sesame Street. I had asked Noah if he could understand it, as it was in Sotho and he was a first language Afrikaans speaker, who also spoke English. Although he couldn’t, Robert spoke some Xhosa in addition to his mother tongue, English; and Afrikaans.

Boys especially liked the Japanese inspired DragonBallZ and Pokeman, where central characters took on superpowers to combat evil. Martial arts and action movies were popular amongst all male youths. I have noticed from previous encounters photographing children in townships and rural locations across the country that they will invariably strike “karate chop” poses, without exception, although I am unsure why. The fascination with martial arts is thus not restricted to Rasta youths. Other action series such as Relic Hunter and Dark Angel were also popular amongst boys from three upwards. The lead characters in both these series were women. Dark Angel’s plot revolved around a group of genetically modified teenagers fighting the system in a post-apocalyptic America. One of the characters which
was replaced early in the series was a shaven headed Rasta called ‘Erbal who continually advised other characters according to Rasta ideology.

Queens preferred South African soaps like Isidingo, and Generations rather than the American Bold and the Beautiful and Days of Our Lives. Sister May felt these gave an example for the “married woman” - not how to act, but rather, to watch out for the “other woman” who might take her husband away. The only restrictions to TV viewing in my sample seemed to come from not owning a TV rather than any taboos, and this was often overcome through the youths’ own networks of friends.

Two of the households in the sample owned Playstations, a popular home video game consul played with a thumb-controlled touchpad or joystick. Robert, as described above, bought his own Playstation with money he had saved specifically for the purpose. His favourite game is Soccer King, which I saw him playing with friends. The other Playstation belonged to Brother James and had become a central social medium. I usually saw car-racing games being played on it by Marcus, his seven year old son and watched by groups of up to ten Rasta men as they reasoned together. Occasionally the men would also take turns with the game. The sistren usually congregated in the kitchen to reason.

This avid consumption of mass media does not seem to adversely affect the Rasta identity of these youths, whose opinions about their own identity, their dreadlocks and their school experiences have appeared throughout this study. As the new generation of Rastafari, they have internalised their identity as Rasta, and seem to subscribe to less of the external symbolism their parents use. Thus the body of the Rasta parent is different to that of both the Rasta child and the Rasta youth. Whereas the child was dressed and groomed by the parents, the youths developed their own style whose only major symbol is that of dreadlocks. The youths who don’t have dreadlocks for varying reasons - from work to school, emphasise that being Rasta is an internal feeling and spirituality.

This correlates again with Delle Donne (2000), moving the concept of Babylon away into a more abstract space. As certain Babylon tools, technologies and strategies can be used to further Rastafari, they can be re-constituted as closer to Zion, as they represent a freedom of information. Thus TV, the internet and even hip-hop can be reinterpreted in this light, as youths show their parents how hip-hop lyrics (with the swearwords removed), and multimedia can promote similar ideals to Rasta livity.

6.4. RASTAFARI ONLINE: IN THE REALMS OF BABYLON OR ZION?

A secondary part of this study that came about as a result of the advocacy work I did with Rastafari, was the implementation of the website “One Love - Rasta SA” (http://www.rasta.co.za). The aim of this website is to provide a community forum which South African Rastafari can use to communicate with other Rastas globally, as well as each other, and use as a marketplace. It also profiles newspaper articles and other media that report on Rastafari. The introduction states: One Love is set up with the following goals in mind:

1. A positive, informed centre of information about Rasta for anyone with questions about the religion and culture, and an archive for Rasta related information.
2. A central point where both Rastas and non-Rastas can read what is being written and said about Rastafari in the SA media, by academics, politicians and others. You are then given the opportunity to add your comments.

3. An online community and magazine where Rastas from South Africa and all over the world can meet and share information, letters, music and reasonings.

Due to technical difficulties the site was only uploaded towards the end of 2002. However, in the short space of time it has existed, there has been a phenomenal surge of interest from both adults and youths interested in posting messages of welcome, and art and crafts for sale. Although many of the communities do not have immediate access to the internet, e-mail or even computers, their social networks enable information to be forwarded via post and e-mail, usually after lengthy reasoning sessions, which ensures community consensus.

The advent of the Internet has led to a free flow of information which has proved extremely difficult to police, and it is this form of multi-media which is attributed with the most rapid spread of globalisation (Featherstone: 1995; Herzfeld: 2001). A lot of information about Rastafari can be sourced on the net, a fact I discovered when doing preliminary research. Googling (using the directory ‘Google’ to search the internet) resulted in 190,000 hits on the keyword search Rasta, Rastafari, Rastafarian.

I have a personal interest in the merge between the internet and culture, due to the fact that I have been involved with designing and uploading websites since the start of 2000; and surfing since 1995. I also communicate with a wide network of people on a weekly basis via instant messaging systems. My husband and I started a small information technology company in 2000 that is run via skills-based telecommuting, specialising in academic and municipal software; and websites. I became intensely interested in the ‘global communities’ I was finding on the web, and as Lozada (1998) did, I discovered people can be extraordinarily candid with e-mail communication due to the relatively anonymity of the communication. Although there are pitfalls to avoid, such as false data due to a person identifying herself for example, as a 35 year old woman when ‘she’ is actually a 15 year old male, and other such pranks; online communities are an extremely valuable source of information.

Whilst surfing the Rasta cyber communities and web rings, I found that there weren’t any catering specifically for the local South African community and their needs. I also found it intriguing that there was such a vast number of sites dedicated to Rasta despite the technology, and to my mind Babylonian equipment and permissions needed to upload a site. Brother Simeon was one brother who subscribed to this idea, stating the computer was Babylon and Satan, however I was surprised to discover that this was not the case with the majority of Rastas I encountered. In fact, there appeared to be a direct correlation between economic need and interest in the internet as a means of bringing the dollar into the ghetto.

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5 See section “Rastafari Online: In the Realms of Babylon or Zion” for further details.
After discussing the idea of a South African community website with various communities, I obtained the url\(^6\) www.rasta.co.za and organised free hosting. The website, “One Love” was eventually uploaded in August 2002. Since then, it has attracted traffic\(^7\) very rapidly, with 893 hits, 233 visitors to the guestbook, 17 guestbook messages and 47 e-mails. It is also slowly developing as more of a community than archival based site - two local Rasta artists have a portfolio of their work for sale, links to the site appear on popular Yfm dj “The Admiral”’s website, and varying South African Houses are in the process of compiling greetings for the site. In addition I have received e-mail correspondence about Rasta events across the country that are profiled on the site, and various South African Rastas are actively involved in linking www.rasta.co.za to popular websites on Rastafari. The site also receives enquiries about Rasta livity and the youths at Livity Square are currently in the process of compiling their own page to attract international Rasta pen pals their own age.

Visitors to the site who have left messages are from a range of countries including the United States of America, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Botswana, Ghana, Great Britain, and South Africa. Many South African Rastas do not have home computers, and sometimes no electricity, but they have managed to access the site through social networks, and paper prints. They have also posted photographs to my post office box, where they are collected, scanned and uploaded.

Thus even without computer access, South African Rastas are using multiple strategies to harness the power of technology for their own use. The next phase will ideally involve travelling to a number of communities with a laptop and projector, in order to reason how the site will develop to become more of a community initiative. These workshops should result in a site more indicative of South African Rastafari needs. I would love to conduct computer literacy and webdesign tutorials with youths wanting to use the site however, this next phase would require a great deal of funding, as well as planning in co-operation with Rasta communities.

One Love - Rasta SA is thus very much a work in progress that has generated a strong and positive response from both the international and local online communities of Rastafari. This early response indicates that much as with the youths’ interpretations of multimedia, the internet is being appropriated as a means of global reasoning for Rastafari internationally.

Conclusion

It is obvious that one of the major pieces of legislation affecting Rastafari quality of life is the illegality of ganja. The most common symbols people recognise as associated with Rastafari is dreadlocks, and the use of ganja religiously. Thus a link is made between dreadlocks and ganja. As both are intrinsic parts of the Rasta belief system, Rastas are targeted as an undesirable element in society because of the social stigma and related perception of immorality attached to criminal activity.

\(^6\) A web address.
\(^7\) An internet term for the amount of visitors to a website, which is measured in ‘hits’.
Du Toit (1977), described the impact the Medical, Dental and Pharmacy Act No. 13 of 1928, and Act 42 of 1937 had in South Africa.

Because of the potential dangers of informers, police raids, or normal arrests the person who takes the drug route subjects himself to severe strain. We must recognise that the first use of a highly illegal drug...represents for a person a change of status, a change from a status of relative immunity from the law to a status where arrest (and prosecution) can follow at any moment (p. 81).

In this case, ganja falls under the classification of a drug, and the use of ganja tars Rasta with a stigmatising brush as criminal, despite the fact that the majority of Rastas encountered with criminal records had no other record for crimes other than the use of ganja. In other words, these were “model citizens” in every respect.

This has an obvious effect on the children of Rastas as they experience discrimination, arrest, and even staying in prison for their beliefs. The media then perpetuates the stereotypes grounded in state policy. However, with the growth of social and symbolic capital Rastafari has accumulated in South Africa, and globally, Rasta has to a certain extent “tamed the beast” to create fifteen minutes of fame when required, usually to highlight injustice and bring national and global support to bear against the state. Thus, as much as some Rasta parents are concerned about the influence of Babylon on their children’s value systems; so are Babylon’s parents becoming increasingly concerned with Rasta’s popularity with their own children. Rasta children’s personal experiences with the ambivalence of the law, in that the state does not always protect them, and in fact, is usually a major source of stress in their lives; strengthens their belief in Rastafari and themselves as the chosen children who are being tested by fire.

However, as they have been born into Rastafari, they internalise this Rasta identity, seeing themselves as chosen and thus different from other children. Their consumption of multimedia would seem to be on a par with children of other cultures – what differs is their interpretation of this media through their own Rasta-influenced cognitive maps.
photographs
Picture 23: Gareth Prince surrounded by Rastafari during the filming of “Face to Face with the Enemy”

Picture 24: Three Brethren Holding the Sign of Sevens
CONCLUSION

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF POLICY ON THE CHILD

Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights.
Get up, stand up, don’t give up the fight.

Everyone’s crying out for peace yeah
No-ones crying out for justice
I want equal rights, and justice
equal rights, and justice.
(Peter Tosh: Equal Rights)

Introduction

As the above lyrics by Peter Tosh demonstrate, a central concern of Rastafari is the attainment of equal rights and justice. South African Rastas are particularly interested in this, as the Rasta call for equal rights and justice is an echo of the language used during resistance to apartheid. This study concludes by presenting the worldview of the Rasta youth, after they have created a unique identity which has been honed by the cumulative effects of their home environment, schooling, and exposure to mass media. The State plays a part as seen in the ethnography, as there exists a continual tension between Rastafari and the State. Hence the title - Assessing the Impact of Policy on the Child.

The previous chapters have all assessed an area of identity influence on Rasta youths, along with documenting the differing agendas of the state versus the Rasta when it comes to raising the Rasta child. Part I gave a contextual background to the subject of Rastafari. Chapter One explored the International ideology of Rastafari in Jamaica - the original roots of Rastafari, the seed of which has taken root and grown in South African soil. This ideology influences the South African experience, and has been taken up by coloureds in South Africa seeking a positive identity following the apartheid identity of “less than white, better than black” (Erasmus: 2001). Chapter Two introduced the unit of analysis, the communities and families involved in the study. Part II, following on from the belief that the foetus can be spiritually influenced by the parents’ practises (Kitzinger: 1966), examined the Rasta parents worldview and their practise of childraising. Chapter Three explored parents’ experiences of conflict with the state, whilst Chapter Four continued this theme with the child’s teaching and enculturation into Rastafari. Part III introduced the child/youth, who has an audible voice and can articulate her own sense of identity. The child’s voice thus made an appearance in Chapter Five, when school-going children commented on their exclusion from, and relations in, school. It is here that the identity formation of the Rasta child can begin to be assessed, as she can express it for herself. Chapter Six elaborated on the mass media influences the youth is faced with, and to what extent she consumes mass culture.

This concluding chapter presents the voices of the youths again, explaining what makes them Rastafari, despite their consumption of mass culture. It also presents the youths’ goals for the future, and how they view the current government.
“The Rascals took my Daddy”: The Policeman as a Symbol of Babylon Oppression.

One observation echoed by almost all the Rastas encountered was the disparity between what they viewed as the role of the police, and the role the police were taking. Not a single Rasta liked the police, and it is interesting to note that whilst some “didn’t mind the police” before they were Rasta, they felt they were unfairly targeted by police once becoming Rastafari. Whenever they mentioned police harassment for ganja, the comment most frequently observed was “what about the rapists and murderers?” This is indicative that rape and murder, are the two main threats to family life in the townships. These are always mentioned in conjunction with each other.

Within this small sample across the three communities there were two rapes reported, one of a one and a half month old baby, the second of a 15 year old girl. There was also a reported abduction of a teenager, two murders, and three deaths following car or taxi accidents. There was also a spate of robberies the communities experienced, from ganja and fruit being stolen to pets, sound equipment and clothes. In every case a sense of frustration was expressed that the police weren't interested in helping the Rasta, only in apprehending them. There is a general attitude on the part of police that if you are already a criminal, you don't deserve assistance. In more than one case, Rastas experienced having their ganja seized and sold back to them by police.

Rastas cope with this through “taking care of their own”. For example, I was told the following story by a Freeland sister.

**BOX 29 - RASTAFARI "JUSTICE"**

Ja, the police, they don’t help InI. They are cruel to InI. Last year, this skelm (rascal), he caught that sister’s daughter. Sister Miriam and her Kingman, they went to the polisie. Maar hulle wil nie hoor nie. Hulle se nee, sy het weggeran – wat is dit – must wait 48 hours of so voor hulle hierdie “missing persons” vorm infill.

(But they didn’t want to hear. They said no, she ran away – what’s it – must wait 48 hours or so before they fill in these missing persons forms.)

En hulle weet, sy het nie weg van die huis gehardloop nie. So die sister, sy het al die ander sisters gebel en ons het vir haar soek. Die I-manne – hulle het in elke huis gesoek, en ons het hom gevind, ja.

(And they knew she hadn't runaway. So the sister, she called all the other sisters and we looked for her. The men, they searched every house, and we found him, yes.)

He had her in this house, and said he would kill her if she made a noise. But dit was te laat sister, hy het alreeds haar gekrag, jy weet? (But it was too late sister, he had already raped her, you know?)

The phrase that the police “are cruel to InI” was echoed often. Several mothers used this phrase when they spoke of their Iman's imprisonment for ganja, stating that the police deliberately sent them to prisons far away so that they are removed from the support of their families and communities. In the above narrative, the Rastas approached the police for help rescuing their daughter. According to the narrator, they suspected where the girl was being hidden, and wanted to lead the police there. However, the police would not assist until 48 hours had elapsed as they thought she was a runaway.
The mother thus called for the assistance of the Rasta community by phoning the other women, who then called on their Iman. A posse of angry Rastas formed and combed the neighbourhood until they found the skelm and the girl. Unfortunately, the kidnapper had already raped her. The sister was reluctant to say what had happened to the skelm. From accounts of similar incidents where Rastas were forced to “take care of their own”, I suspect the man was severely beaten.

It is interesting to note that if the men are not around, women will defend themselves, their kaya and their children if necessary. I was sitting with a group of sisters in Livity Square, who were relating stories of their own resistance to theft in the township with great humour. Inbetween peels of laughter Sister Michelle, short and stout, told of how she chased a thief, and “beat him with a stick”! Part of the humour in the tales was that this was not expected behaviour for women, but was seen by the other sisters as admirable. As Sister Michelle, stated “Sister, ek was so kwaad!” (I was so angry!). Another Sister also related how after her fruit was stolen, she found out who took it and also “beat him with a stick”. The term “I beat him with a stick”, said with great relish, implies much more than the words at face value. It is not the violence that is relished, but the act of defending your own, of not being a victim, of not being reliant on dysfunctional Babylon police that is emphasised. It is thus only when she was so angry that she could take action in this way.

The theft of fruit cannot be viewed as a harmless prank. In that example, the Sister's entire livelihood was derived from fruit. This was how she fed and clothed her child, and survived from month to month. In an environment where resources are scarce and the violent acquisition of these resources commonplace, women need to have multiple strategies to raise a family. Humbleness does not equate to passiveness, self-reliance being an integral part of livity.

Only one male, and five females had not been imprisoned for ganja. Youth’s opinions about Babylon match those of their parents, as they have experienced harassment firsthand from policemen. Brother Noah spent a night in a cell at age three, along with his older brothers and parents; Brother Robert and his friends were chased by drunk police officers when they were nine; and Brother Samuel was beaten for “being clever” with a policeman. In addition several of the girls had been arrested and illegally searched by male police officers before being released.

In the following extract, Noah, now age nine, relates his experiences of being arrested when he was younger.

They did once [arrest us], my father and my mother. I did go with them. We did have ganja. Not one car, there was three or four of them. Then we did go and we had ganja. There was a roadblock. They stop everyone. They put the dogs in. They got in our bakkie, not the other, but the others were also with. We climbed out first. We were also smoking. We did smoke but they can’t take us mos. All of us. We go to the cells and my father did go to the court. We all in the cells. I did go there too. A couple of days. It wasn’t nice. They give us junk food and old food but we didn’t eat it. Give us old bread - not even bread, the mice have eaten of it. Nothing to drink. I was very small. About three or four years old.

It is thus not surprising that when asked “what are your views on the South African government”; and “if you could, what would you ask to be changed in the law”, 19 year old Brother Lance said

Sleg. Hoekem se hulle nie vir die polisie nie dat hulle pla family mense maar nie vang die mense wat moordenaaars en rapists is (Bad. Why don’t they say to the police that they’re catching family people
but not catching the murderers and rapists). They must get people who commit robbery and murder, not disturb people in their own houses who burn ganja. Ganja must be legal for the people.

18 year old Sister Lily had a similar response, stating
They can give Rasta a chance to be free with ganja. They think we’re going to use and abuse ganja. Its not like that. Strictly sister, legalise ganja, and put all the unequal people, the rapists and murderers away.

Rapists and murderers are thus a central concern in this environment. The insistence of the police to prosecute them for ganja smoking is seen in that context as unjustifiable. This hypocrisy is articulated as evidence for Babylon oppression and a perpetuation of the Rasta sense of sufferation. This in itself is proof that they are the chosen people.

Even young children have their own language for the police, referring to them as duppies – bad spirits; tokoloshe; or rascals. The policeman, enforcer of policy in law, is encapsulated in a Rasta child’s bogeyman. Kroll (2000) also makes mention of this term, stating
They scramble about every day in slavery to surround themselves with meaningless and valueless artefacts, pollute their bodies and souls with chemicals in a futile attempt to scrub away and whitewash their naturalness, they clothe themselves with death. For this reason, such persons are sometimes referred to as duppies – ghosts (p. 45).

He then quotes Chevannes (1994) who defines them as follows “Duppies are regarded as the inverse of everything human” (p. 25 in Kroll: 2000, p. 45). Most of the children had experienced long periods without seeing their father as a result of imprisonment. They had also experienced raids on their homes, and even the crèche as demonstrated earlier.

So What About The Children? The Vulnerable Child Speaks.
As been highlighted throughout, one of the most frequently used arguments for keeping ganja illegal is “what about the children”? As has been demonstrated throughout, these children and youths experience more problems from the state, than from the potential abuse of ganja. Ganja can thus be seen as a primary symbol of protest and opposition to the State, due to its dualistic nature as drug according to law, and sacrament according to Rastafari. As ganja is sacred to Rastafari, they do not want to be forced to abstain from their sacrament when they can see positive aspects in its use from a spiritual, meditative and medical perspective. Children and youth themselves, having been raised in a culture that respects, rather than abuses ganja, and avoids use of drugs and pharmaceuticals cannot understand why they and their families experience so much harassment, when they have had personal experiences of drunkenness, violence, and other such activities in the ghetto.

I asked youths from about the age of eight the following five open-ended “grand” questions:
1. What do you think the biggest problem in the world is today, and how would you solve it?
2. What do you think of the South African government?
3. If you could, what would you ask to be changed in the law?
4. What do you think your role in life is?
5. Do you have any specific plans or dreams for the future?
Some of the younger children said they didn’t know. Most of the children mentioned that ganja should be decriminalised. It is interesting that children from nine to older express “ganja must be free for the Rastaman”. They have a sophisticated understanding of ganja as a sacred herb with multiple uses, as has been noted by Dreher (1984) in her analysis of Rasta schoolchildren in Jamaica. Several youths expressed wanting to become lawyers. One wanted to be a musician. All the males played and enjoyed soccer, stating this was “also part of InI”. All the children and youths spoke of respect for fellow man, equalness, love, and peace. Other than the ganja issue some youths criticised the government for not following up on its election promises of housing and jobs. Only one child mentioned HIV/AIDS as a problem, although all distinguished AIDS and TB as serious diseases, rather than common illnesses.\footnote{Whilst conducting fieldwork, I asked each child to give me an oral list of serious versus common illnesses.}

Here follows an extract of some of these youths’ answers.

**BOX 30 - YOUTH NARRATIVES**

**BROTHER LANCE, 19**

1. Ganja must become legal because they come into your house. Don’t have respect. Come mess your house, come to fight you here. Don’t feel irie. Hulle moet weet. Hulle moet leer hoe om te kommunikeer and have respect vir ander mense. (They must know. They must learn how to communicate and have respect for other people). Only way is to go to the government, talk things right.

4. I’d just like to be a better person who treats people right and not treat people unequal. I have good respect for Joseph [the household head] as he has good respect for other people. Hy help ander mense (he helps other people).

5. I want to be a great soccer player one day. I would like to play in Cape Town or J o’urg. It’s a great sport that. Make expensive money cause its only your feet you need. Not there like work in the family where you work with your hands.

**BROTHER MARTIN, 18**

1. So far as I can see the community things and government things are promising jobs and houses. These are just words. The government is in the wrong place. When inity come together we’ll take over. Give a better chance for the people. The government doesn’t want to give Rastas a chance to speak the truth. If you don’t want to hear the truth, you are foolish.

2. I see there is little different for the better. They should do more. The promises they gave – they must work through it. Cause that’s a lot of lies.

3. I’d let the people out of jail for innocent crimes, like ganja. And people who were promised houses must now get them. There must be no separation, must be unity and love.


5. I would like to be a soccer star. Soccer is also part of InI. As I further in soccer, InI shall appreci-love that I still on the same road, not planning something else.

**SISTER MAY, 18**

1. There is no equalness, no righteousness. There is no peace and love anymore.

2. To pray everyday for the sinners. Every day for good lives. This illusion is in the hands of the lord mos.

4. Om seker net a Rasta vrou te bly (To just be a Rasta wife).

**BROTHER ROBERT, 14.**

1. Aids. It’s a man-made thing. Nope, I don’t know how to solve it.
South African, and Rasta!

Much has been written about the fluidity of identity, and how one individual can have multiple identities, aspects of which are highlighted for different contexts. The Rasta parents in this study, having lived through the abolition of apartheid, are interested in equal rights as well as justice, having fought for these ideals. So although they identify themselves as Rastafari, they also identify themselves as coloureds (and other ethnic groups), and South African citizens, who should have certain rights and freedoms afforded to them on this basis.

To gain an understanding into Rasta childhood, it was necessary to have an historical understanding of both South Africa, and Rastafari internationally. This study has argued that the way in which Rasta children are raised in South Africa is influenced by their parents’ experiences of childhood during apartheid. The same conditions of physical and economic oppression and racial segregation that led to the rise of Rastafari internationally, was replicated under South Africa’s apartheid system. The international focus on South Africa by prominent Rastafari such as Bob Marley; and an association by black and coloured South Africans with the lyrics they heard in reggae music, attributed to the popularity of Rastafari in this country. The Rasta message of a ‘free Africa’ inspired the struggle for freedom from apartheid – from Babylon.

However, after apartheid was abolished, the anticipated Zion was not forthcoming, and Rastafari were still subject to the same power struggles as before, where they used their bodies as a symbol of protest, and the State tried to control these bodies. In line with South Africa’s new democratic policies, the child was targeted as a key to economic and social reform in South Africa, specifically with regards to Early Childhood development (ECD), primary health care, and education. The power struggle between the State and Rastafari was thus transferred to the body of the Rasta child, which was simultaneously constructed as both a “vulnerable” and “symbolically pure” body.

The injustices and sufferation imposed on them by the State in the form of conflict with primary health care systems and institutions, and school are points of contestation around which they can rally in order to continue the struggle. The younger children grow up in this environment, and thus take for granted their South African citizenship and incorporation into larger society. As Robert said when asked what was important to him as a young person: “Being Rasta – because it’s my religion. It makes me different from the other youths a lot. We have different morals. Like, Harry and Peter [non-Rasta school friends], they started eating mushrooms\(^2\) and we’re not friends anymore. I don’t like his kind of living”.

Thus the youth’s identity is primarily Rastafari as they “grow in the roots”. This identity displays itself through visual, external symbols such as dreadlocks; but is mostly noticeable in their attitude towards life. As several extracts showed, these youths differentiate themselves from their non-Rasta peers as “we have different morals”. Their ability to follow their strict livity instils in them a sense of superiority and confidence. As they have internalised their Rasta identity, they do not wear as many external symbols of Rastafari as they do when growing up as children. The new generation of Rastas consume

\(^2\) With hallucinogenic properties.
mass media and culture like other children, enjoying hip-hop, nike, tv, and playstations, but they interpret this according to their own conceptual maps, infusing previously Babylon icons with Rasta messages and lessons.

As these children are already in Africa, Babylon and Zion have become abstract spaces representative of oppression versus freedom, rather than a physical location, which I argue is why making use of multimedia and other technologies such as the internet is not being articulated as Babylon or Satan, as often. This points to a new evolution of Rastafari in South Africa that is rapidly gaining power and popularity, and is becoming increasingly politicised and organised, whilst still subscribing to local interpretations of Rastafari livity.

Babylon, however is still recognised in the police, children’s duppies, as well as the demonocracy which supports the imprisonment of Rastafari for ganja. These youths therefore share the same sentiments as the former generation about the State as they experience stigma, arrest, and harassment for ganja and their dreadlocks, and see themselves as spiritually and ethically different from their peers. They live in the ghetto, and have experienced for themselves the unequal class structures in South African society, sometimes described as two different worlds.

The Rasta family thus forms a safe haven for these children and youths – a space where they can learn a positive framework to explain their differences from other South Africans, and reasoning strategies to continue their education throughout adulthood. I conclude with a comment Noah, aged nine, made about children which sums up the image of the “vulnerable child” versus the Rasta child, and the importance of the Rasta family as seen by him.

Children are blessed - they are not something that just comes and grows bigger. His mother and father must care for him, and they will eat food everyday. If you don't have a mother and father, you won't get food and you'll walk dirty in the street. I don't want to be like them. We must have a mother and a father!


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APPENDIX 1
GLOSSARY

Ahoy: A greeting, like “hello”.

Babylon: This word can represent the State, police, chemicals – basically anything that can be construed as evil. It is on the opposite pole to Zion.

Bakkie: A small two-person truck or van, which could have a canopy.

Bankie: A plastic bank bag that usually holds approximately 20 grams of ganja.

Brethren: A collective term for men.

Brother: A Rasta man.

Cutchie: A cylindrical, hollow object often carved from wood and generally used as the bowl for the chillum or chalice water pipes. Sometimes used alone with a piece of cloth for a mouthpiece filter (Mulvaney). In South Africa it was common for women to share a cutchie. This was often made from a bulb, for example, wild garlic.

Chalice: 1. A ritual water pipe used in Rasta reasoning sessions and grounations. The chalice generally consists of a hollowed-out coconut filled with water and fitted with a large conical hardwood bowl or cutchie which holds the herb. Two holes are made on either side of the cutchie, one to hold a mouthpiece, the other to control air intake. Rastas believe ritual chalice smoking purges body and mind of impurities, thereby facilitating meditation. (Mulvaney: 1990, p. 16)

Dance hall: See dub.

Downpressors: An oppressor.

Dreadlocks: The matted hair which has been left to grow uncut and unbrushed as this is the natural way. Other than the biblical references supporting this, this practise was believed to have been prompted by pictures of Masai tribesmen with matted hair. (Ahkell, 1992, p. 30)

Dub: A local Rasta gathering held on weekends, often held at an individual’s home, or sometimes at a hall as an alternative to a shebeen. Also referred to as dance hall.

Duppie: A bad spirit or ghost.
**Envelope:** 2-4 grams of ganja, sold in a folded up envelope.

**Ganja:** Cannabis Sativa.

**Herbs:** Herbs, roots and tubers used in indigenous remedies. The term is also sometimes used to refer to ganja.

**I:** The most important word and letter in the Rasta vocabulary. The first person pronoun “I” is preferred over the Creole choice “me”. For example, “I have I shoes” replaces the Creole or patois “Me have me shoes”. Rastas believe “me” connotes subservience or objectification of the human individual whereas “I” is thought to emphasise the subjective and individual character of a person. The extensive use of “I” is also an extension of the Roman numeral “I” at the end of Selassie’s title; Rastas pronounce the “I” in Selassie’s name as the first person pronoun “I”. In I, I and I, Rastaman and Iman, all follow a similar principle.

**I-man:** A Rastaman. See “I”.

**InI:** Us. A collective term for Rastafari.

**Inity:** Unity.

**Irie:** 1. Rasta word referring to a spiritually high state of mind or being. 2. Feeling exceptionally good. 3. A common Rasta greeting.

**Ital:** Anything fresh and natural – usually used in relation to food and foodways.

**Ja:** Afrikaans for “yes”. It has become a colloquialism used by most South Africans to denote agreement.

**Kaya:** A house.

**Kingman:** Usually used to refer to a husband or partner. See also Iman, and the I.

**Kwaito:** A South African style of music which consists of freestyling, usually in a number of languages, over a beat. The lyrics are usually protest in nature.

**Livity:** Livity is the Rastafari lifestyle, a Rasta concept related to foodways, behaviour, values and religious behaviour. This concept is explored more fully in Chapter 3.

**Locksman:** A man wearing dreadlocks.

**Majut:** Often referred to as ‘jut’. Poor quality ganja, usually sold in tiny amounts in the township.
**Mek a Trod:** To travel, usually to spread the teachings of Ras Tafari.

**Mos:** An Afrikaans colloquialism with no direct translation, which is used almost as affirmation, to check if the listener understands. A similar Afrikaans word is né, often used as a query at the end of a sentence. For example, a possible English equivalent could be “I’m a Rasta sister like”, or “I’m a Rasta sister, ok”.

**Nyabinghi.** (Nyabingi, Niabingi, etc.) 1. A religious-spiritual movement in Rwanda from the 1700s to the early 1900s named after Queen Nyabinghi, led by a series of spiritually influential women, and focused on military actions against white imperialists and colonialists. 2. An orthodox, primarily religious-spiritual faction of Rastafari. 3. A Rasta ritual/convention also called a *grounation. 4. A name for Rasta music consisting of chants and drumming used at grounations. 5. A nickname (Nyabinghi, Nys, Bingi) for male Rastas, usually dreadlocked. (Mulvaney: 1990, p. 62) The Rasta ritual, ceremony or gathering held on the first Saturday of every month where members participate in chanting and drumming to give praises to Jah. An organisation formed at the time of Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia. Its connotation is “Death to black and white oppressors” (Akhell: 1992, p.7).

**Ones and Ones:** Individuals.

**Pay-as-you-go:** A cellphone package which doesn’t require a contract. Call costs are debited from pre-bought airtime sold in increments of R20, R50, R110 and R300 through Vodacom, MTN, and recently Cell C.

**Rastaman:** A male Rasta.

**Reasoning:** A distinctly Rasta practise where groups of Rastas discuss issues philosophically.

**Rooibos:** A South African herbal tea favoured by Rastas.

**Sanctification:** A Rasta baptism where the child is anointed with olive oil and ganja smoke, and prayed over by elders and high priests.

**Sensi:** Extremely good quality, seedless ganja.

**Shebeen:** An unlicensed bar in the township where alcohol, cigarettes and other goods can be obtained.

**Sister:** A term for a Rasta woman.

**Sistren:** Collective term for Rasta women.

**Skelm:** An Afrikaans word for a rascal, a bad person.
**Slave:** Verb - To work, usually working for Babylon. Also used as a noun, for eg. “my slave” means “my work”.

**Sms:** Used as both a verb and a noun. To send a text message (an sms) from one cellphone (mobile) to another. This is a relatively cheap and effective method of communication that is very popular. Since a “pay-as-you-go” system has been introduced, most people in townships use cells instead of landlines.

**Sufferation:** A Rasta expression that means, ‘to suffer’ eg. I have felt much sufferation.

**Tam:** A knitted or crochet cap which covers the dreadlocks. These can often be very tall to fit long dreads inside.

**Taxi:** A minibus, which has filled a niche in the South African market for transport from rural and township areas to urban centres where people find employment. These have a reputation of being dangerous due to overcrowding, unroadworthy vehicles and speeding. Young girls have also reported being harassed on these taxis. They are widely used as they are affordable, convenient and will stop anywhere (even on a red line in the middle of a freeway!). An attempt to control them has led to the introduction of taxi associations, or unions. Unfortunately a side effect has been taxi violence where rival taxi companies attack each other’s vehicles often leading to bloody gun confrontations.

**Tokoloshe:** An African incubus of sorts, reputed to be small and hairy with an enormous penis which can be controlled by a sorcerer. Some people have a tradition of sleeping with their bed on bricks so as to prevent the tokoloshe from harming them in the night. It has become a South African bogeyman of sorts for all cultures – “careful or the tokoloshe will get you”.

**Trodding:** To travel.

**Word-sound-power:** A term meaning

**Yard:** This word has a complex meaning. In South Africa, the “yard” is usually a small area outside the house but within the boundary wall.

**Young Lion:** An adolescent Rasta boy or young man. Also sometimes used with children. Is used only for males.

**Zion:** Heaven on Earth.
51. Registration of learner for education at home

(1) A parent may apply to the Head of Department for the registration of a learner to receive education at the learner's home.

(2) The Head of Department must register a learner as contemplated in subsection (1) if he or she is satisfied that-

(a) the registration is in the interests of the learner;

(b) the education likely to be received by the learner at home-

(i) will meet the minimum requirements of the curriculum at public schools; and

(ii) will be of a standard not inferior to the standard of education provided at public schools; and

(c) the parent will comply with any other reasonable conditions set by the Head of Department.

(3) The Head of Department may, subject to subsection (4), withdraw the registration referred to in subsection (1).

(4) The Head of Department may not withdraw the registration until he or she-

(a) has informed the parent of his or her intention so to act and the reasons therefor;

(b) has granted the parent an opportunity to make representations to him or her in relation to such action; and

(c) has duly considered any such representations received.

(5) A parent may appeal to the Member of the Executive Council against the withdrawal of a registration or a refusal to register a learner in terms of this Act.
APPENDIX 3
UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION & CONVENTION ON
THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child: 1959 (2)

10 principles were:
1. non-discrimination
2. special protection and opportunities and facilities by law and other means to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity;
3. the right to a name and nationality;
4. the right to the benefits of social security, adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services;
5. the rights of a special-needs child to the treatment, education and care required by his or her particular condition;
6. the need for love and understanding so that the child, wherever possible, grows in the care and responsibility of his parents, and in an atmosphere of affection and moral and material security;
7. entitlement to education, which should be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages;
8. to be among the first to receive protection and relief;
9. protection against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation, including that which is associated with employment (there was a Societ proposal to extend this to embrace corporal punishment, but it met with considerable opposition);
10. protection from practices which may foster racial, religious and other forms of discrimination.

Emphasis on protection and welfare, no idea of the child as a person, or rights to self-determination


1. General rights. These encompass the right to life, the prohibition against torture, freedom of expression, thought and religion, the right to information and to privacy.
2. Rights requiring protective measures. These include measures to protect children from economic and sexual exploitation, prevent drug abuse and other forms of incest and neglect.
3. Rights concerning the civil status of children. These include the right to acquire nationality, the right to preserve one’s identity, the right to remain with parents (unless their best interests dictate otherwise) and the right to be reunited with their family.
4. Rights concerned with development and welfare. These include the child’s right to a reasonable standard of living, to health and basic services, the right to social security, to education and to leisure.
5. Rights concerning children in special circumstances or ‘in specially difficult circumstances’. These extend to such children as children with special needs, refugee children and orphans. There are special regulations on adoption, the cultural concerns of minority and indigenous children and rehabilitative care for children suffering from deprivation, as well as a prohibition on the recruitment of soldiers under 15 years of age.