

"Religion and Revolution in the Lyrics of Bob Marley"

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In one of his many interviews, Bob Marley made the statement that reggae music had always been there, and that what made his music important was the lyrics. "Yes, it's necessary to understand the lyrics," he insisted [*Time Will Tell* 1992]. One connection of roots reggae to an earlier Caribbean tradition--specifically, calypso--is this emphasis on meaningful lyrics. According to Billy Bergman in his book, *Hot Sauces: Pop, Reggae and Latin*, this partiality for meaningful lyrics can be traced back to the African griot. He writes:

Africans, brought as slaves to the island of Trinidad--the birthplace of calypso--found the griot tradition a useful way of saying things that were not to be broadcast in other ways. Diatribes against their oppressors could be couched in verse. The African tradition of ridicule songs was also maintained in after-work song sessions in which different work gangs praised themselves and made fun of others. . . .

[Later] . . . the political and social happenings of the Eastern Caribbean, and the world, were composed and commented upon in calypso lyrics. World wars were discussed, and legendary figures such as Roosevelt praised or condemned according to the views of the singers. Black news from around the world was especially noted. . . .

The living newspaper tradition of calypso continues to this day. . . . [Bergman 1985:57]

After reading this description, I was struck by a comment I remembered Marley had made to an interviewer about his music: "Reggae music" he said, "is a people music. Reggae music is news. Is news about your own self, your own history, things that they wouldn't teach you in a school . . ." [*Time Will Tell* 1992].

When I first heard Marley's music I was captivated by its rhythms, its poetry, and its spirit. As Marley said, with reggae "you getting three in one music, you know. You getting a happy rhythm with a sad sound with a good vibration [Whitney 1982:87]." But I was even more compelled by its spiritual and political messages. Because of my background in philosophy and religion--more specifically, cultural values and social change--I found the music full of seeming contradictions. Is it political or is it religious? Is it, to use sociologist Max Weber's terms, this-worldly or other-worldly [Weber 1958]? Is it escapist or revolutionary? Does his religiosity entail an immanent or transcendent view of the divine?

As I studied Marley's lyrics, I found that besides their connection to the African tradition of social commentary, his prophetic pronouncements and advocacy for the oppressed--as well as his mystical inspiration from Rastafari--have a close affinity with ancient Judaism and first-century Christianity, as well as with later Jewish mystical movements (specifically, Lurianic Kabbalism, Sabbatianism, and Hasidism). In fact, because secular society has a tendency to uproot everyone, Jewish history--which is largely the story of a people in exile--is very relevant to an understanding of the African Diaspora as well as modernity in general. Thus Jewish alienation--and I would argue that Jewish religion is primarily a religion of alienation--can be seen as a paradigm for the tendency of the modernization process to uproot all human beings.

It is no accident that Rastafarians have been called "Black Jews" and refer to themselves as the true Israelites. In fact, Rastafari is closer to the essence of Biblical religion and has grasped the Biblical message more authentically than modern European versions. Authentic Biblical religion--not what developed after the first century--involves a profound and intense rejection of the oppressive power structures in this world and the prevailing status quo. Unlike Christianity, which developed into a religion of a people with roots and with power, Rastafari is more like ancient Judaism, which was the religion of a people facing powerlessness and landlessness.

One can study religion employing a theological analysis, or one can offer a socio-cultural and political interpretation of religious beliefs. What I want to do is the latter. In other words, I want to look at *why* Marley believed the way he did, not offer criticism of *what* he believed. By looking at the social location and historical circumstances of the Rastas, one can determine the primary influences on the formation of their value system. And by asking "what are the social and historical causes of Rastas being what they are?" it is possible to de-mystify and make rational sense of the Rastafarian experience and of Bob Marley's enigmatic lyrics and interviews.

Lasting changes in religious belief, and new religions, come about not because of arguments or persuasion, but because of vast social transformations and dislocations. One of the causes of Rastafari is the reaction to catastrophe: the disastrous experiences of slavery and colonialism, as well as the calamitous experience of mass unemployment and of being regarded as economically surplus, or superfluous [Campbell 1987, DeCosmo 1994)]. Living the life of a marginalized ghetto youth, Marley was in tune to the consequences of the social transformations and dislocations that Jamaica had experienced. And even though Rastafari arises from a specific culture and specific historical circumstances, because it returns to the roots of Biblical religion and grants dignity to those individuals in whose hearts Jah resides, it speaks to all oppressed groups of people and has universal significance, just as does Marley's music.

Marley's songs can be divided into two types: 1) they are either political, religious, or a mixture of the two; or 2) they are love songs or dance tunes without a political or religious message. In a count of eleven of Marley's albums, beginning with *Catch a Fire* in 1973; and continuing with *Burnin'* (1973); *Natty Dread* (1974); *Rastaman Vibration* (1976); *Exodus* (1977); *Kaya* (1978); *Survival* (1979); *Uprising* (1980); and ending with three posthumous albums, *Confrontation* (1983), *Rebel Music* (1986), and *Talking Blues* (1991), there were 87 songs of the first type and 21 of the second. (The specific breakdown is as follows: *Catch a Fire*, 7 songs-#1; 2 songs-#2; *Burnin'*, 9 songs-#1; 1 song-#2; *Natty Dread*, 7 songs-#1; 2 songs-#2; *Rastaman Vibration*, 9 songs-#1; 1 song-#2; *Exodus*, 6 songs-#1; 4 songs-#2; *Kaya*, 2 songs-#1; 8 songs-#2; *Survival*, 10 songs-#1; *Uprising*, 9 songs-#1; 1 song-#2; *Confrontation*, 10 songs-#1; *Rebel Music*, 10 songs-#1; *Talkin Blues*, 8 songs-#1; 2 songs-#2.)

In those tunes with a political or religious message, I have identified three biblical themes Marley, as a Rasta, stressed: 1) the prophetic command to demand justice from power elites; 2) the theme of exile and return; and 3) the idea of tolerance, rather than condemnation, of the shortcomings of those individuals who are not part of the power structure. An example of the latter would be his response to an interviewer who remarked that many people claimed to be Rasta who were not. He said, "I don't come to judge a man. . . . Him say him a Rasta. Who is him to say, when Jah say leave all judgement unto Him? [Bob Marley Interviews]."

Within Rastafari are points of contact with numerous ideologies, as Rex Nettleford claims [Owens 1976:xix]. Marley has alternately been called mystic, prophet, priest, apostle, poet, shaman, rebel, revolutionary, Black nationalist, democratic socialist, folk hero, reggae king, messiah, and Pan-Africanist. (During Marley's induction into the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame in January of this year, U2's Bono called him "prophet, soul rebel, Rastaman, herbsman, wildman, a natural mystic man, ladies man, island man, family man, Rita's man, soccerman, showman, shaman, human, Jamaican [Reggae Report 1994:14].") Thus, depending on the person describing him, Marley's music appeals on many different levels.

There are those, especially with a Marxist perspective, who would prefer to ignore Marley's many references in his music and his interviews to Ethiopian leader Haile Selassie as Jah. Yet Marley continued until the end of his life to talk about his identity and inspiration as a Rasta. Before and after every concert he would praise Jah Rastafari. And he always performed in front of a scrim of Haile Selassie's image. Furthermore, in one of his last interviews the year before he died (and five years after the death of Haile Selassie) he stated:

We know that there is a God Jah Rastafari, Selassie I. I believe in Selassie I more than I believe in myself. And I believe in myself. I do everything for Selassie I. I sing for Selassie I. If I eat a grape [Marley paused and dramatically reached for and ate a grape] I do it because Selassie I wills it. Jesus Christ came to earth and said "In two-thousand years I will come again." Well, two-thousand years have come and Selassie I is on earth. Now is the time [O'Neill 1980:23].

When asked how he wrote his music, Marley claimed that "it just happen, it Jah inspiration come through, man [Bob Marley Interviews]." Some admirers simply refuse to accept that Marley and the Rastas--in a very literal way--affirm that Selassie is the Almighty. In their refusal to see religion as anything other than the "opiate of the people," they see Marley as a political rebel and freedom fighter, largely ignoring his religion or even denying that he had one.

On the other hand, some critics deny the political and revolutionary potential of Marley and Rastafari in general, dismissing it as an unrealistic apocalyptic, millenarian messianism. They see Rastas as yet another example of a people escaping into mysticism who are powerless realistically to change things escaping into mysticism. And it is true historically that whenever people are without political power, they tend to organize around the church. It is in the nature of human beings to attempt to make their situation meaningful, either in politics or religion. So if they have no viable political or economic role, often a new religious movement--and sometimes a mystical or millenarian one--will make its appearance. But these types of mystical religious movements can be conservative or revolutionary. Rastafari, I argued in last year's paper for this conference, is an example of the latter [DeCosmo 1994]. It is possible for politically powerless people to use means other than political action and turn them into effective means for liberation.

Rastafari is thus not an "escapist" millenarian religion but a form of cultural and, increasingly, political resistance based upon a foundation of mystical belief. As Horace Campbell and Mervyn Alleyne argue, religion and rebellion have always been linked in Jamaica. As Alleyne writes, "From the very inception of the slave society . . . religion and rebellion became

associated in a symbiotic relationship. . . . [T]his association between revolt and religion remained important throughout Jamaican history [1988:83]."

What did Marley himself have to say about religion? In one interview he claimed, "I don't have a religion, ya know. I am what I am, you know, and I am a Rastaman. So, this is not religion. This is the life [*Time Will Tell*]. And in another he said, "Me don't have a religion . . . me natural, not a religion, just a natural thing you suppose to have [Whitney 1982:86]." I would like to argue that Marley was using a very specific definition of religion. What Marley saw as religion is a set of doctrines that legitimate the status quo with its concomitant exploitation, suffering, and oppression. It is not surprising, therefore, that Rastas reject what they call religion as a colonial relic. As one Rasta put it, "We don't business with religion! A colonial thing that! That is what the white man bring down here to enslave the black man! [Owens 1976:82]." And, as Joseph Owens argues, many fail to see "how radically different is Rastafarianism from everything else that Jamaicans call 'religion.' [1976:254]."

What Rastas are contending is that traditional religious institutions no longer have any validity. But their criticism itself comes from a religious perspective. To put it in sociologist Peter Berger's terms: ". . . religious perspectives may withdraw the status of sanctity from institutions that were previously assigned this status by means of religious legitimation [1969:98]." Before the face of God, these invalid institutions are seen to be human constructions. By the way, this same outlook was what set off Israel from the surrounding cultures of the ancient Near East.

Most of the religions in today's religious marketplace are standardized, secularized, and privatized, and are considered by increasing numbers of people to be irrelevant to economic or political realities. This is largely due to the secularization process, which Berger defines as "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols [Berger 1969:107]." Because of secularization, religion has ceased to refer to the cosmos or to history, and increasingly pertains only to individual psychology. It has become a private choice, applies only to one's private life, and manifests itself in public life only as rhetoric. As Berger claims, "religious traditions have lost their character as overarching symbols for society at large, which must find its integrating symbolism elsewhere [1969:153]."

It is only because no one seems to know how to create new religious forms and institutions that we keep using old ones. But, as many academics have noted, it's not professors but prophets who create new religions or religious movements. And those prophets are bound to come, to use one of Marley's terms, from "low places" rather than high ones. As Berger claims, religiosity is the strongest "on the margins of modern industrial society, both in terms of marginal classes (such as the remnants of old petty bourgeoisies) and marginal individuals (such as those eliminated from the work process) [1969:108]." And, we might want to remind ourselves that, in the time of Jesus, 90% of the Jews were illiterate. Moreover, those who became Christians were, from the point of view of the Romans, the followers of a despised Galilean rebel against Rome, a criminal and a nobody.

Religion can be a world-maintaining or a world-shaking force; Marley criticized the former and exemplified the latter, despite what he said about not being religious. If one accepts a broad definition of religion, then one can accept the idea that Marley's music, as well as his life, was highly religious. Although Marley himself was a theist, the broad definition which I propose does not even have to entail theism. Religion is what one believes about the nature of reality

And Social Darwinism's claim is that only the fittest should survive, since the whole aim of nature is to be rid of the losers, the defectives, those who, more often than not, are from a minority ethnic or religious group. "Of greatest importance," Rubenstein argues, "is the fact that both Calvinism and Darwinism provide a cosmic justification for the felicity of the few and the misery of the many [1976:186]."

Thus, despite whether political elites go to church or not, these belief systems function as a viable religion in that they provide an "overarching structure of meaning." And the attractiveness of these belief systems increases as the world's economy worsens. As Rubenstein argues, this is because they enable their adherents "to believe that their social location, way of life and fundamental values are cosmically grounded rather than the accidental product of precarious human invention [1976:190]."

What Marley and the Rastas have done is turn Babylon's value system upside down, just as the Jews and Christians did in antiquity, and just as various Jewish mystics did during the time of the medieval persecutions in Europe. The biblical theme in Matthew 20:16, "So the last will be first, and the first last," is often suggested by Marley's lyrics. The sufferers, who appear to be last on earth, are really first: after all, they are the children of the "Higher Man," the "Rasta Man," the Black King, Haile Selassie I. Even in what some critics have called a sell-out to disco, the song "Could You Be Loved" on the *Uprising* album (1979), Marley warns would-be accusers that they are accountable to an authority higher than themselves: "So while you point your fingers, someone else is judging you." And when, in the same song, he uses the apocalyptic lines that "only the fittest of the fittest shall survive," he does not mean the ruling elites shall survive, as Social Darwinism would maintain, but the oppressed sufferers (or "downpressed" as the Rastas would say).

Marley thus reverses the survival of the fittest myth, which historically expanded wherever capitalism and imperialism went, providing a pseudo-scientific justification for the white races taking over Africa and other colonial outposts in the underdeveloped world. In a song on the *Catch a Fire* album, he warned, "Slave driver, the table is turned/Catch a fire . . . you gonna get burned [Whitney 1982:70]." Inspired by Scripture, in "Ride Natty Ride" on the *Survival* album he claimed: "The stone that the builder refuse/ Shall be the head cornerstone [Whitney 1982:199]." Or in "Guiltiness" on the *Exodus* album, he stated: "Woe to the downpressor/ They'll eat the bread of sad tomorrow [Whitney 1982:102]." And lastly, in "Want More" he contended: "They stab you in the back . . . /But Jah have them in derision/In the valley of decision [Whitney 1982:61]."

Another theme predominant in Marley's music is the that of exile and return. The theme, which has been central to Rastafari due to the influence of Marcus Garvey's thought, can be taken politically or religiously, or in both dimensions at the same time. In the case of the Rastas, there is an effort to return to Jah and righteousness in a mystical manner through various meditative rituals involving drumming, smoking ganja, and dancing, as well as a physical return to the original homeland, Africa.

As Garvey had said, "every race must find a home; hence . . . [blacks] are raising the cry of 'Africa for the Africans,' those at home and those abroad . . . the thoughtful and industrious of our race want to go back to Africa, because we realize it will be our only hope of permanent existence [Tafari 1985:9-10]." In the decades after Garvey, as jobs became more scarce and they increasingly left the Caribbean for better prospects elsewhere, many Rastas came to perceive themselves as doubly homeless. As Campbell explains, "Twice removed from their homeland in Africa and from their

or, to use Berger's terms, religion is one's "sacred canopy" of meaning, the values one holds ultimate in terms of one's vision of reality and life [1969:19]. It entails a meaningful ordering of--and an ultimate frame of reference for--human experience and humanly constructed meanings. Religions' classical task is that of "constructing a common world within which all of social life receives ultimate meaning binding on everybody [Berger 1969:25]." In addition to that, religion provides a way to share the crises of life and to find our identity.

Rastas recognize the fact that traditional religious morality has concentrated too much on individual rather than social sin. As Owens argues, they see "the insufficiency of the predominantly individualistic morality which has absorbed the Christian tradition for centuries. Rather, the Rastas emphasize a *social* morality, such as would define evils which are not of any individual's making but which are really the responsibility of the society as a whole. Thus one Rasta called for an 'international moral morality . . .' [1976:203]."

The result is that for Rastas the concern is with redemption rather than salvation, to use religious terminology. "Redemption" applies to a whole community, whereas "salvation" pertains only to the individual. As early as the 1930s Rasta founder Leonard P. Howell declared that "What is needed today is international salvation, not individual salvation [Owens 1976:17]." Religion's purpose was not to serve the status quo and make demands of individuals, rather it was to make leaders and nations accountable for their sins and to demand that they amend their ways.

As a Rasta, Marley referred to the status quo, or the oppressive western system as "Rome" or alternately, "Babylon," from the New Testament Book of Revelation. In his lyrics and interviews he often characterized Babylon as a vampire, a dracula, an evil place inhabited by devils. Babylon and Rome were equated with whiteness, but with the qualifier that white did not necessarily mean skin color. As Marley explained in an interview: "I see white as a system . . . I stand for the black . . . Anyone who accepts Selassie I in his heart is black. I don't see white skin or black skin [O'Neill 1980:24]." And in another interview he said, "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 man who create me, who cause me to come from black and white [*Time Will Tell*]." Like the Rastas in general, he refused to tolerate Babylon politricks or religion; that is, political or religious legitimations of a social order that obviously had no use for him or the other "sufferahs." To him, politics and church were the "same thing" [Boot 1983:11].

There are also other religio-mythic elements in American society that are not as easy to recognize--namely, a type of secularized Calvinism and Social Darwinism--that function to support the status quo. These mythic elements enable governing elites to see their success as evidence of divine election and to see the "failure" of the poor and other social outcasts as evidence of divine rejection. According to theologian Richard Rubenstein, secular elites see the poor (the "sufferahs") as those whose plight is deserved since they have failed life's supreme test, whereas the elites have passed the test. Rubenstein writes:

Just as there was a tendency among earlier Calvinists to interpret worldly success as evidence of divine election, so observers have noted a tendency on the part of members of the American elite to regard their ability to excel in a fiercely competitive mass society as a sign of their own election and an almost "divine right" to govern the most powerful nation on earth [1976:183].

adopted home in the Caribbean, the Rastafari, as part of the black population of Europe, yearned for a land which they could call their home [1987:8]."

As a Rasta, Marley's lyrics often describe a state of exile, a feeling of being a sojourner in a strange land. He expressed what was essentially his homelessness to an interviewer: "My home is always where I am. My home is in my head. My home is what I think about [*Time Will Tell*]." He often wrote of being enslaved and in exile. In "Concrete Jungle," for instance, he wrote, "No chains around my feet but I'm not free/I know I am bound here in captivity/Darkness has covered my light/And turned my day into night." Or in "Slave Driver" he wrote: "Every time I hear the crack of the whip my bloods cold/I remember on the slave ship how they brutalized my very soul [Whitney 1982:200]." In "Burnin' and Lootin'" he wrote: "This morning I woke up in a curfew/Lord knows, I was a prisoner too [Whitney 1982:47]." And lastly, in "Redemption Song" he indicated once again that exile could be a state of mind when he sang, "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery/None but ourselves can free our mind [Whitney 1982:200]."

Every religion must face what religious scholars call the problem of theodicy; that is, how to affirm God's justice and righteousness in the face of great suffering and oppression. Consistent with Judeo-Christian theodicy, Rastafarians maintain that Africans of the Diaspora had been taken into slavery and scattered by Jah for turning their backs on Him. Therefore, it is incumbent upon them, as Owens contends, to "strive to be ever more faithful to their God, in the hope that he will release them from their torment and lead them to the new Jerusalem [Owens 1976:40]." In "Exodus" Marley proclaimed the need for "another brother Moses" to deliver his people, the Rastas, and asserted that "Jah come to break down oppression, rule equality/wipe away transgression/and set the captives free."

Thus, in light of the above, I must disagree with those who claim that Marley's inspiration from Rastafari was not central and refuse to admit its significance. When Marley said he was not religious in an attempt to disassociate himself from the predominant versions of Biblical religion in the West as they have evolved through the centuries, his point is well taken. Nevertheless, I would argue that his criticism itself came from a religious perspective.

Now we'll turn to the third theme in Marley's music, the prophetic command to demand justice from power elites and to challenge the system. Whereas some suffering is for past sins, there is also a type of suffering which is undeserved, and that occurs when Rastas are persecuted for doing what is right and good. In the case of the latter, you must "stand up for your rights" and "don't give up the fight" because "life is your right" to quote from what is perhaps the Wailers' most well-known song, "Get Up, Stand Up." To understand in what way Marley conceived himself to be engaged in the struggle against Babylon, we must turn to the second idea contained in the title of this paper, the concept of revolution. He used the words "soul rebel" and "revolutionary" to describe himself. And the lyrics to his song "Revolution" read: "It takes a revolution to make a solution/Too much frustration, so much confusion." What did Marley mean by the word? He did not mean that Rastas should take up arms and overthrow the government in Jamaica. When he was asked whether or not he believed in violence, he replied: "Rasta don't believe in violence, man. Rasta don't believe, Rasta know [*Bob Marley Interviews*]."

And Marley told an interviewer that he "really [felt] sick in the heart" when he saw the youth fighting the youth in Jamaica simply because they were hungry, couldn't find jobs, and were being used by politicians [*Time Will Tell*]. As early as the 1965 song, "Simmer Down," Marley

had been preaching to the youth to quit killing each other. Later, in "Coming In from the Cold" he asked: "Would you let the system make you kill your brotherman/No dread no/Would you make the system get on top your head again/No dread no." When an interviewer asked him whether he ever felt like getting violent, he answered: "One time I feel like I shall take up my arms you know and do a thing, but Jah say, no youth, be cool . . . too much wickedness out there, you know [Bob Marley Interviews]."

And when Marley was attacked for having lapsed from his militancy by including eight love/dance tunes on *Kaya* (an album put out the year after an attempt was made on his life), he replied:

People don't understand that we live in this earth too. We don't sing these songs and live in the sky. I don't have an army behind me--if I did, I wouldn't care, I'd just get more militant! Because I'd know, well, I have 50,000 armed youth and when I talk, I talk from strength. But you have to know how you're dealing. Maybe if I'd tried to make a heavier tune than *Kaya* they would have tried to assassinate me because I would have come too hard. I have to know how to run my life, because that's what I have, and nobody can tell me to put it on the line, you dig? Because no one understands these things. These things are heavier than anyone can understand. People that aren't involved don't know it, it's my work, and I know it outside in. I know when I'm in danger and what to do to get out. I know when everything is cool, and I know when I tremble, do you understand? [Boot 1983:16]

Although most Rastas are pacifists, when asked if they would take up arms when the time came to repatriate to Africa and the authorities tried to prevent it, according to Owens, Rastas consistently answered that they would do what they had to do if Jah so commanded. As one Rasta said, "We don't really have to fight to go home. Rasta don't make war. Rasta don't fight war. Yet if it come to a war to go home, I-n-I have to war to go home! If it come to a literal fight, I-n-I have to put I-n-I shoulder to the wheel, and fight our way out of Jamaica! [Owens 1976:210]."

In addition, the desire to avoid guns and violence does not necessarily mean that Rastas will not exact vengeance of a sort, at least in fantasy. In the 1977 Jamaican film, *Rockers: It's Dangerous*, a bunch of Rastas who were having their meager possessions ripped off by a wealthy restaurant owner found out where the warehouse was in which he was stashing the stolen property. Instead of calling the police or becoming violent, they did something very clever. They proceeded to find all the vehicles they could--mostly broken-down trucks in serious need of repair--and formed a midnight caravan which journeyed into the fenced-off compound containing the warehouse. They tied the security men up, broke into the warehouse, and loaded the stolen goods into the trucks. Then they delivered television sets, radios, stereos, furniture, refrigerators, stoves, bicycles, and motorbikes to the streets so that by early the next morning, Christmas had arrived in the ghetto!

Marley often used what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins has called "fighting words"; he issued warnings and made threats in his music. For instance, in "Crazy Baldheads" he warned: "I and I build the cabin/I and I plant the corn/Didn't my people before me/Slave for this country/Now you look at me with such scorn/Then you eat up all my corn/We gonna chase those crazy baldheads outta the town [Whitney 1982:30]." And the original demo of "Chant Down Babylon" recorded in 1978 under Lee Perry's supervision used the words "burn down

Babylon" rather than "chant down Babylon [Davis 1990:205]." Marley had also used the word "burn" in an earlier song, "Burnin' and Lootin,'" but said later that the song was "not really about burning down the city but burnin down certain things out of our mind fe live in one harmony [*Time will Tell*]." And lastly, in "Babylon System" he urged: "We've been trodding on the winepress much too long/Rebel, rebel [Whitney 1982:126]."

But rebellion can take many different forms. It can safely be concluded that Marley was not an absolutist about violence. How the battle was to be fought depended on the historical situation one found oneself in. He told an interviewer:

I expect if you're living by the gun, if gun is the fight, then FIRE gun. If where you come from, you fight with sticks and stones, then fight with sticks and stones. If the fight is spiritual, then fight spiritual, because everywhere the fight goes on. We don't have any alternatives. . . . A lot of people defend South Africa, some secretly, some openly. A lot of white people defend South Africa, and when you keep the black man down in South Africa you keep him down all over the earth. Because Africa is Solomon's goldmine. So--war! Either I and I lives, or no-one lives. You know what the big fight is? It's that black people--and only black people--mustn't say the truth about Rasta . . . Just imagine being a Rasta in this world which doesn't like Rasta. We could be enjoying being something else, but no [Boot 1983:17].

I would compare Marley's position to that of Malcolm X, who never used a gun against anyone but who said after his house had been bombed if he had had a gun in his hand and had the perpetrators in the line of fire, he would have used it. Similarly, in "I Shot the Sheriff," Marley sang that he shot the sheriff down after he saw him "aiming to shoot [him] down."

The Rastas also appear to share Marx's view of violence. That is, even in an absence of armed conflict, when political and economic systems cause great oppression and suffering, then that is a type of systematic violence that is being done to a people. In addition, the Rastas seemed to be aware that war would be an unfortunate necessity until many evils had been overcome. Marley's 1976 song, "War," based on Haile Selassie's 1968 speech to the United Nations says it all:

Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned
Until there are no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation
Until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes
Until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race . . .
Until the ignoble and unhappy regime that now hold our brothers in Angola, in Mozambique, South Africa in sub-human bondage, have been toppled and utterly destroyed . . .
Until that day . . . everywhere is war! [Whitney 1982:117]

There were rumors that Marley had a hand in supplying guns to Africa, which is difficult to prove [Boot 1983:17]. But he did visit Africa and met with guerilla fighters in Zimbabwe, inspiring them with the song by the same name [Davis 1990:217]. In "Zimbabwe" he did not mince words about fighting. He wrote: "So arm in arm, with arms/We will fight this little struggle/'Cause that's the only way/We can overcome a little trouble . . . We gonna

fight/We'll have to fight . . . /Fight for our rights . . . /So soon we'll find out who is the real revolutionary . . . [Whitney 1982:129]."

According to Owens, revolution for the Rastas is a very broad term, meaning more than just toppling the system. It can also mean "a change of heart and mind, such as indicated by the cultivation of locks." As one Rasta told him, "When you wear the locks, you are a revolutionist [Owens 1976:208]." It is my contention that Marley's understanding of revolution cannot be understood apart from his faith in Jah. He indicated that, in addition to resistance against the system, the revolution would be ^{revolution of the} ~~an~~ spiritual one. As he wrote in "So Much Things to Say": "I and I no come to fight flesh and blood/But spiritual wickedness in high and low places/So while they fight we down/Stand firm and give Jah thanks and praises [Whitney 1982:105]." And he told an interviewer, "What we want is some people power, and the only people power is Rastafari [*Legend*]." The goal, as he said in the song by the same name, was "survival." More specifically, black survival.

The only way blacks would survive, Marley maintained (and the reason he wanted a larger black audience for his work) was to unify. The cause of unity was the most important aim of what he called his "peace work." He declared: "This work, this peace work--it don't stop. It never stop. We know it never stop. That mean we the youth got our work to do [*Time Will Tell*]." As he wrote in "Israel Vibration," "We've all got to sing the same song [Whitney 1982:114]." By singing "redemption songs," Marley knew he could change the world. Therefore, he declared himself to be a revolutionary whose arms were his songs. He said:

Me see myself as a revolutionary who don't have no help and not take no bribe from no one. Me fighting singlehanded with music. . . . This music you can put up in your house on a placard as one of the vehicles that help free the people from these chain and bondage of oppression [*Legend*].

There are numerous instances in Marley's songs where the idea is conveyed that the music itself is a way of bringing down the system. In the song "One Drop," we hear: "So feel this drumbeat . . ./Feel your heart playing a rhythm/ And you know it's resisting against ism and schism/I know Jah would never let us down [Whitney 1982: 166]." In "Rastaman Chant" the words are: "Said I hear the words of the Rasta man seh/Babylon your throne gone down gone down/Babylon your throne gone down [Davis 1990:114]." And Marley advised that even if a particular battle was lost, don't give up the fight, because "he who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day ("Heathen," on the *Exodus* album)."

To unify the sufferers through singing or chanting happens through a phenomenon called word-power. For both Rastas and for Marley, words are extremely significant and have a mystical power. According to Owens, "the pacifism of the Rastas would be incomprehensible without the conception of the Word as a far mightier agent of change than the force of arms . . ." As one Rasta told him, "'The Word is God, because the greatest weapon is the creation of words. Words! Words is the greatest weapon that man ever have within [Owens 1976:179].'" And another Rasta told Owens, "our arms is truth [1976:206]."

This emphasis on the power of words probably has origins in African philosophy as well as biblical religion. In Genesis God simply speaks, and creation begins. And the gospel of John says the Word was God, and the Word became flesh. Accordingly, a Rasta hymn reads as follows: "Glory to Word, glory to Sound, glory to Power, glory be unto the name of the dreadful

God in man, Jah, Rastafari [Owens 1976:178]." For Rastas, using words means taking action. Thus, as Owens contends, "the Rastafarians use their thought-power to renovate, to re-create, themselves and their world [Owens 1976:187]." Marley agreed, claiming that "It's what your mouth say keep you alive. It's what you mouth say, kill you [Whitney 1982:94]."

For Rastas and for Marley, Jah is ever-present when one praises his name. "By the act of calling themselves by the King's name," Owens write, "the brethren not only proclaim their union with the Emperor, but actually effect the union [Owens 1976:124]." As one Rasta told Owens, "Jah say: Wherever two or three sit together touching anything according to my name, behold, I'm here! [Owens 1976:186]." Another Rasta told Owens, "Jah say, open your mouth and him will fill it with words for ina you the word is. . . . Jah take the heart of man to be his secret dwelling-place which is the throne! [Owens 1976:268-9]."

Similarly, Marley suggested that Jah's voice was already within people--a "natural mystic"--and that they could hear it if they just "listened carefully." He told an interviewer, "Well, you see, the people have a voice inside that talk to them. That is a voice that these people must listen to. Because in everything you're going to do, there is a wrong way and a right way. And if you listen good, you will know the right way, because there is a voice inside talking to everyone. Seen? Seen! [*Time Will Tell*]."

Word, sound and power are often linked by Rastas to natural events such as earthquakes, lightning, and thunder. I don't know if it was a planned part of the stage act or one of those frequent thunderstorms so typical of Kingston, but Marley's most moving performance was in Kingston during the "One Love" Peace Concert in 1978. It was accompanied by great flashes of light or lightening and booming thunderous sounds. During the song, "Jamming," he alternately chanted and sang in a trance-like state of mystical fervour. He chanted: "To make everything come true, we got to be together. Yeah, yeah. And through the spirit of the Most High, His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile I Selassie I, we're inviting the two leaders of this land to be here, to shake hands." Then he sang: "To show the people that you love 'em right/To show the people that we're gonna unite/To show the people that we'll love 'em right/To show the people that everything is all right." There was a flash of lightening and the sound of thunder, as Marley chanted, "Watch, watch, watch, watch, watch, watch what you're doing. I want to send a message right out there. I mean, I'm not so good at talkin,' but I hope you understand what I'm tryin' to say. Well I'm tryin' to say: could we have, could we have up here, on stage here, the presence of Mr. Michael Manley and Mr. Edward Seaga?" Then he sang again: "Oh! I just want to shake hands and show the people that we gonna treat 'em right, we gonna unite, we gonna meet 'em right, we gonna unite, get get get get . . ." Then there was more lightening and thunder. Finally Manley and Seaga came on stage and joined hands with Marley and with each other [*Time Will Tell*].

Those Rastas who saw the word as the power of Jah working through human beings, and who listened very intently to Marley's words, and who then saw him miraculously unite the two hostile opposition leaders, were convinced that peace was on its way. Unfortunately, it was not to be. But it was one of Marley's most incredible, inspirational performances.

Some of Marley's songs seemed to suggest that Jah would effect a redemption, thereby unifying the black survivors, but no one knew when it would take place. Marley suggested in "Ambush in the Night" that "we know not the hour," and that Rastas would just have to wait until that time. And he seemed to be very pessimistic in "Real Situation" when he wrote: "Check out

the real situation/Nation war against nation/Where did it all begin, when will it end/Well it seems like total destruction/The only solution/And there ain't no use/No one can stop them now." And in "Natural Mystic" Marley wrote: "It may be the first trumpet/Might as well be the last/Many more will have to suffer/Many more will have to die/Don't ask me why [Whitney 1982:25]." And lastly, in "We and Dem" he wrote: "It's too late . . . men have lost their faith . . . We no know how me and them a go work this out [Whitney 1982:145]." The reason for the pessimism is that, in apocalyptic religions, before redemption can occur there must be a period of apocalypse--or tribulation--during which there is much suffering and death. After it is over only a chosen few, a righteous remnant, will remain. One can use a birth analogy to explain it: there is great pain and suffering in childbirth, but at the end of the suffering comes new life.

As late as 1980 Marley continued to describe redemption in terms of the sufferers' return to Africa, quoting from his song, "Exodus." He told an interviewer, "Africa gives a man a place to build a home where he wants to live, and to build the kind of house that he wants to build. A man can grow a vineyard if he wants. The weather is always fine. The temperature is always warm. Even the breeze agrees with me. Yah, man, even the breeze agrees with me [O'Neill 1993:24]." And in Africa they would be able to be safe and "have no fear for atomic energy," as he wrote in one of his last songs, "Redemption Songs."

Thirteen years after Bob Marley's death, we are still faced with the ultimate question in the modern world: have we lost the ability to appeal to people's practical reason or duty to God, or is all that remains money and guns? Can we dare hope for a decisive political and social transformation without the usual accompanying collective trauma? As Rastafari continues to flourish, we are lead to ask, is there still hope for peaceful revolution? Bob Marley would answer in the affirmative. As he put it in "Wake Up and Live": "Rise ye mighty people/There is work to be done/So let's do it little by little . . ." After all, as he said at the end of one of his concerts, "the Rastaman vibration is *positive!*"

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