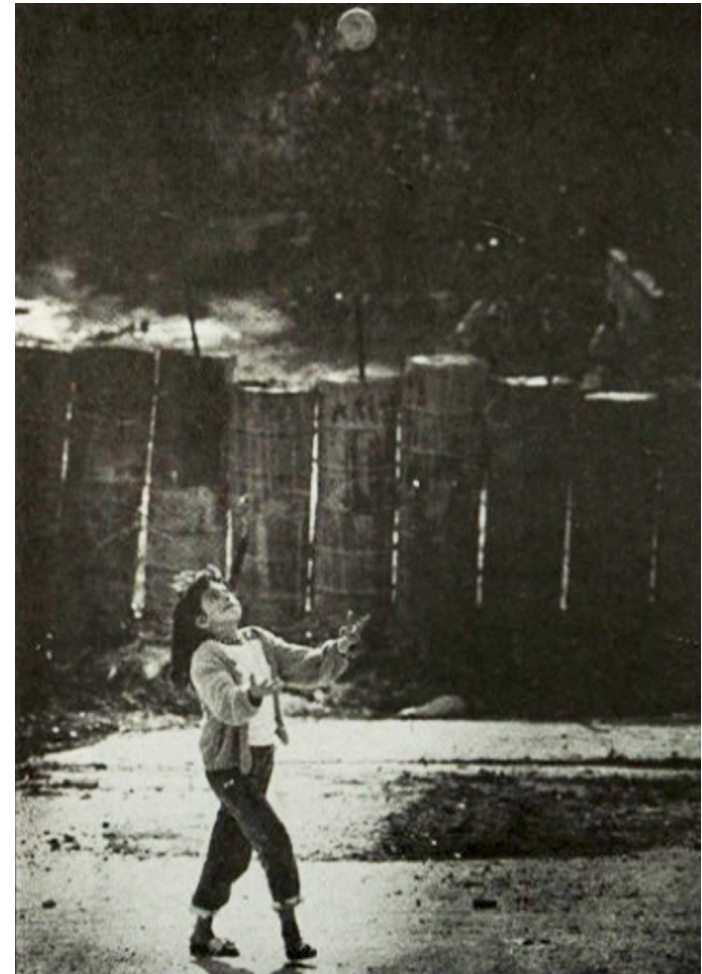


RASTA TIME IN PALESTINE

BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH



**FUCK COPYRIGHT
REPRODUCE AND SHARE**

SEDITIONIST

MOSQUITOES IN JERUSALEM

*I'll kill dat effin mosquito if it lands on me once more,
I am not into pain and I have never killed before
It seems it's out to get me so I'll get it first if poss,
Although I am democratic I will show it who's de boss.*

*Jerusalem is cool tonight, de soldiers stand at ease,
Mosquito, why don't you go and bag a soldier place,
Dey need it, dey are paid to kill, it's their game not mine,
I am only here to see if I can find a Palestine .*

*Your buzz is keeping me awake, I fear you carry Aids
And I've lost sleep de last two nights because of soldier raids,
Do you have any politics, to which church are you going,
Or do you float your vote wherever de wind is blowing.*

*You must be intellectual so why keep me awake,
Tonight you're getting close to me, you're making a mistake,
I've tried to love you through de night and now it's nearly morning,
And now I need to sleep, I can feel my resistance falling.*

*Oh flippin eck, another one, now there's two of you,
You're buzzing me in stereo and I can't tell who's who,
I know dat I could kill you if I tried determinatly
But let's set an example, and live in unity.*

*Dedicated to and inspired by
the people of the Gaza Strip
and the West Bank.*

MY GOD! YOUR GOD!

*So dis is de state dat your kind dreamt about,
And after your beating dis your way out,
Cause I was a witnes, now I want to show,
Explain to me, who is your God?*

*You Dreamt of a homeland, well others dream too,
De fruit was forbidden and now you can't shew,
How can you do dis, in de past it was your,
Is dis in de name of your God?*

*Does your God love children?
Does your God love peace?
Could your God bring justice to de Middle East?*

*Does your God love anyone whatever their kind,
Is your God dis brutal, or is your God blind,
And is your God willing to talk to a nation,
Or did your God come here to wipe out creation?*

*My questions are childlike but I'm in confusion
My question is,
Where is your God?*

©2024 Seditonist Distribution

Permission to republish this work was neither sought nor given. Fuck copyright, no rights reserved. Store, reproduce and transmit this publication in any form you wish and by any means, with or without prior permission or acknowledgement. Do the same.

KNOW YOUR CITY

*Modern city, hot and sticky
 You really want keep it,
 De sunshine feeds it,
 Unnaturally you bleed it,
 A scientist conceived it,
 Solar power lights it,
 Native people fight it,
 America rights it,
 And now your project it,
 Your religion must enjoy it,
 Your city is a cesspit*

*Your dancing in de disco,
 You modelled it on Frisco
 Progression on a go slow,
 And you must fight a war now,
 De world a large don't know,
 How you expand and you grow,
 Get rid of some do so,
 It's in your manifesto.*

*Modern city, hot and sticky
 A European idea
 But you just don't belong there.*

In 1988, Benjamin Zephaniah set off to Palestine and Israel to learn more about the Palestinian struggle for liberation and self determination, and the Israeli view. Here he gives an account of his experiences in a series of fascinating insights – part travelogue, part philosophy, part poetry.

Rasta Time in Palestine was originally published in 1990 by Shakti Publishing LTD. While working on “A Palestine Reader (*incomplete*)” we came across this short but evocative pamphlet. Unable to find a physical copy or pdf, limited to one hour access on an online archive.

So we republished it.
 Permission has neither been sought nor given.

The original included photography by Jez Coulson which we were unable to find in good enough quality to include (other than the cover piece). It also included two maps and a timeline of events which we have cut from this republication as they are now out of date and better resources are readily available.

For further study you can find the original via the Internet Archive or perhaps via other collections. It's ISBN no. is 0951655108.

**“This planet is for everyone, borders are for no one.
 It's all about freedom.”**

**Rest In Power
 Benjamin Zephaniah
 15 April 1958 - 7 December 2023**

INTRODUCTION

1988 was the year of Mandela, as the news 'blackouts' prevented the world from seeing what was really happening in South Africa, the cultural and economic boycott of the apartheid regime was taken more seriously by the average shopper and, in some cases, business people alike. Nelson Mandela became the subject of discussions of school children and a massive concert held in Wembley Stadium to celebrate his 70th birthday was beamed to many countries around the world. Without a doubt he had become the world's most well-known political prisoner.

Two years later and Mandela is released from prison, the ANC is 'unbanned' and another concert is held at Wembley in April 1990 to celebrate his release. This time Mr. Mandela makes a personal appearance and address one billion people, the largest audience ever commanded by any politician, ever. The idea that politics and music don't mix has been forever put to rest.

The South African government did not wake up one morning and decide to start liking black people: the release of Nelson Mandela and other key political prisoners came about as a direct result of the boycotts, the unwillingness of the back people of South Africa to give up their struggle and the united voices of both those in exile and the people of the world in condemning apartheid.

Nelson Mandela became a symbol of hope for people all over the world, a large number of whom had not been conceived when he was first imprisoned. Many it seems, do not really understand the politics of the ANC or would not know the difference between the ANC and the PAC but they are moved by his commitment to his cause.

In December 1987, the 'West Bank' and 'Gaza Strip' hit the headlines of the world press. Every day there were reports of young people being hurt or killed, Israeli soldiers breaking bones and stones being thrown, it was uprising time, intifada time. As I watched, what were then daily news reports of the intifada on television, I saw the same brutal oppression of Palestinian rights as I saw in South Africa. At this time I did not know of the political connection between the two states, but a 'gut reaction' told me that these two regimes were connected in many ways, and if this was so, it should be our duty as 'anti-apartheid' campaigners to highlight these connections.

AS A AFRICAN

*As a African I danced to riddims wild in Nicaragua
I overstood dem well.
As a African I did not celebrate 200 years of Australia,
I understand its history is black.
As a African I went to find Palestine,
I got confused on the West Bank,
And as a African Palestine is important.*

*As a african I grew old,
I went and sat down with Mr. Aatollah.
Mr. Ayatollah told me to mind my own business,
And so did Mr. President USA.
Mrs. Thatcher didn't even talk to me.*

*As a African a plastic bullet hit me in Northern Ireland,
But my children overstood and dey grew strong,
As an African I was a woman in a man's world,
A man in a computer world,
A fly on the wall of China,
A Rastafarian diplomat,
And a miner in Whales*

*I was a red hot Eskmo,
A peace loving hippe,
A honest newscaster
A city dwelling peasant,
I was a Arawak,
A unwanted baby,
A circumcised lady
I as all of dis
And still a African.*

door to each other, one Palestinian, one Jewish, two hotels next to each other, one Palestinian, one Jewish and so on. The problem was I could not find anyone I needed. So I spent the next few days wandering the streets, playing football and eating good food with some beautiful people. But this is Israel and people only spoke of the political situation when they had gained your trust. Very different to the hungry, angry, loud and tearful people of Gaza.

Here, as in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Ramallah, I was seen as a news carrier or messenger because of the fact I was travelling from one place to the other. The greatest interest of most people was Gaza, because I knew more about the current situation than the locals, I was made to feel like a V.I.P., a very important poet.

Black Up In Jericho

I came across many Arabs of African Descent in Jerusalem, but I was really taken aback by the amount of brothers and sisters on Jericho. It was like being in Africa and it was very hard trying to tell people that I came from England. Most people insisted that I could only come from Africa and it was very hard trying to tell people that I came from England. Most people insisted that I could only come from Africa, but a couple did suggest that I could be an American footballer. Still, every half hour I had to go through the whole history of British slavery and the migration of the Caribbean people to Britain. Maybe if I'd been a better educated person I would have known what to expect, but to tell the truth I enjoyed the surprise.

My time in Jericho was mostly spent smoking Shisha and speaking of what I had seen in Gaza and England.

The Christians song I had learned in school called 'Joshua in the Battle of Jericho', played on my mind. The image given to me by all those Christians back home had gone in one day. This place was so quiet, it only had one main road, few shops, and no Christians.

Getting Out

Getting out was a lot easier than getting in.

Although there were obvious differences within the two situations, it was the similarities that I noticed first. Here were two groups of people who had felt the forces of oppression so much that they were out to use 'any means necessary' to liberate themselves, and in both cases it was easy to see that it was women and the young who were on the front line.

These were very basic observations, but I wanted to know more, and as I had many friends from both the Jewish and Palestinian communities in Britain, there is where I began.

Instead of the usual visit for a chat I started to interview them. I had no problems getting answers but there was one thing on which all of us agreed, this was that I could only really understand the subject if I were to go there. So I did what had to be done and found myself 'Holy Land' at the end of April 1988.

'*Rasta Time in Palestine*' contains just some of the things I experienced when I was there. I have tried my best to keep this book simple, direct and truthful. It contains no great intellectual reasoning and will assume that the reader is new to the subject, and hopefully that it will inspire you to learn more.

Benjamin Zephaniah

THE PEOPLE

“THEY are dirty people, their homes are dirty, their animals are dirty and their bodies are dirty, never trust them with your money because they will rob anything”

These are the very words spoken to me by an Israeli soldier as he welcomed me to Israel. I wondered if he was serious, should I put my money in my underpants and hide my camera? Do I have to be ready for a fight at all times? These were things I overlooked when planning my visit, after all, the Palestinians who live in England seem O.K. folk to me. So I planned to tread carefully and taken things as they come. I’ve never believed people in uniforms anyways.

The truth is the Palestinians treated me like a king wherever I went. They were always willing to help me, and they were full of stories which were usually told after meals and sometimes went on till the early hours of the morning. It is well known that Muslims wash very regularly, but even non-Muslims were always trying to keep as clean as possible, and keeping clean is very difficult in some of the conditions they are forced to live in.

When I first arrived in one town here I was to stay, I made contact with the person who would be translating for me and feeding me information, The first thing he had to do was get me somewhere to stay. This was done by simply standing on the street pavement and asking passers by if they had room for one visitor, a friendly visitor. The first two people had no room and were very apologetic, both said I could always come to their homes and eat if I needed to, and the third said “No problem”. He had room and I stayed with his family for the next week. With this family and many other people I met. The idea that I should be spending money was ridiculous, at all costs I was not to stay in hotels or eat in restaurants and I never did.

Every palestinian had a story to tell. Every Palestinian is crying out to be heard and every one is suffering because they are not heard. Yet they are such a welcoming people, they use the word welcome a lot more than the English do, they are open hearted and willing to fight, but also willing to listen and learn. They taught me a lot. These people deserve their country but maybe there are some other countries on this earth who may be a little worried by the example they set.

The War Of Wards

Apart from the war itself, Shifa Hospital in Gaza must be the worst sight I have ever seen. Officially it is a state hospital but the tax payers of Gaza think differently. There were two doctors who had to work for three days non-stop before being relieved. Not being a reporter, I was surprised at their willingness to show me around and also at the way injured people (who were not come) pushed their injuries before my eyes. This I found very strange, as I am used to photographing the nice things in life, I found it very difficult to take pictures of burns, cuts, bullet wounds and broken legs.

People were also very willing to tell me their stories and I listened to all they had to say. The story that stays with me the most was told to me by the victim’s mother as the victim lay in a coma. The boy, aged 12 years, had been hit by a jeep driven by an Israeli woman, who then reversed back over his legs, and then drove forward over his legs a third time.

Reggae In Tel Aviv

This was the only time in my life when I have ever come near to what I believe is a culture shock. After leaving Gaza with its third world image and its war-like atmosphere, it took only one half hour to reach Tel Aviv and I could not believe my eyes. Not a solidier in sight, it was so modern and almost every building is run on solar power. Maybe this would not have shocked me if I would have arrived from London, New York or Johannesburg, but the contrast with Gaza really hit me.

My first night was spent at what I was told was the only reggae club in the city and the only club to let anyone in regardless of race. Inside it was just like any other club but they played reggae. I watched as half-naked people acted as if they were enjoying themselves. A ‘brother’ from my home town of Handsworth speaks to me about his dream of coming to the Holy Land, he tells me Tel Aviv is a cool place, but my mind is on Gaza.

Drowning In The Sea Of Galilee

Here I was at the Sea of Galilee and all I did was jump in, panic because my feet could not reach the ground and get out. Shame, just look at the miracles done here, I told myself, “I must learn to swim before I try to walk!”

Talking to Nazareth

Here I saw for the first time, Israeli and Palestinians living together, not really in harmony, but living together with a touch of Apartheid. Two restaurants next

The atmosphere in the taxi was tense, the five Palestinians with whom I shared the fare were reasoning in arabic, about the state of their country and the big question 'would we get into Gaza?' I was left trying to pick up on any little word I could, then the good old taxi driver tunes his radio onto the BBC world service.

To Gaza, No Poems Allowed

The BBC newsman told us that one youth had been killed and several injured in clashes with soldiers in Gaza. The Israeli forces had imposed a curfew on the area and all press reporters had been instructed to leave. All roads leading to Gaza had been blocked and no-one was being let in or out. As he spoke we could see the road block ahead. We were then stopped, as usual our baggage was searched, and we had to show our ID cards. It was a quiet affair, hardly anyone spoke, and after being searched we were left to sit in the car for about ten minutes for some reason. Many other cars were just sent back.

A young soldier came to our car and shouted like a mad man at me, "what do you want in Gaza? What business have you there?". Well I explained to him I was a man of God, and I had waited all my life to see the Holy Land. He went and spoke to some other soldiers, I guess they felt sorry for me and they let me in. I smiled.

The other passengers in the car were told to leave and I went the rest of the way on foot. I could not believe what I saw of Gaza. At first it was like a very poor Third World town under siege and it reminded me of pictures I have seen of 'Nazi' concentration camps. Some may argue that there are many differences, but again, it was the similarities that I noticed: the large fences, people being marched off, etc. At the same time, I had the feeling of a hero returning home, but I had never been there before. Groups of people (who were mainly children) just followed behind me, most were looking in amazement at my locks. Then of course, the soldiers came.

What followed was what I had been seeing on television back home and now I was at the centre of it. Stones were being thrown, people were being beaten, arrested or forced to get off the streets.

What the people wanted was a poetry reading and I was really excited by the idea. Word spread quickly that I was a poet and I had to prove it, but after making inquiries, I Learned that poetry was not allowed because it could draw a crowd.

THE SITES

*"I went to the River Jordan to find my saviour there,
It's a rolling river there,
Roll River Jordan Roll"*

- traditional Palestinian hymn

The river Jordan, the sea of Galilee, Jericho: for years I read about these places, I sang about them and dreamt of seeing them. I imagined that the river Jordan would be wide and strong, a powerful river, the sea of Galilee would be large and mystical and Jericho a mighty, well populated and busy place. But I found to my surprise that the River Jordan was about two feet wide at the top with a mere trickle flowing along its bed, the sea of Galilee was smaller than I had pictured in my mind, full of tourists and ready to drown me, and Jericho was such a small quiet place, barely populated by humble African looking people. And this is one of the oldest towns in the world!

Overall, all of this land is very beautiful, and I am told the river does get a little larger sometimes, but it just did not match the image I was given by my teachers. What I found more interesting were the buildings. The 'Dome of the Rock' stands proud as if it was the centre of the world and looking at the old city of Jerusalem from outside its walls, I felt as if I could wrap my arms around it and take it home. You can feel the history but the biggest worry is the future.

I have always believed there is a God, but to see many religions wanting this city and to see that the natives are the least heard and on top of this, (and I mean on top of the city walls), to see the soldiers clutching their guns watching the tourist come and go has put me right off organised religion for the rest of my life. I still believe there is something, someone greater than us, but religion with its dogma, rituals, myths and wars, no! The biggest problem with this land is it's just full of soldiers.

THE SOLDIERS

A Palestinian in Jordan told me to never call an Israeli a civilian. “They’re all soldiers.” He insisted, this is something I learnt to understand. Israelis also made similar comments to me. So when I refer to soldiers, I stress I am speaking to those in uniform, simply for clarification.

It’s strange to see so many young people in uniform, both men and women. At night you can always see couples kissing seated on the walls, or in the daytime, women who are shopping with their children and a machine gun strapped to their backs - a very peculiar sight. Very quickly I learnt that whilst in occupied territories, if I kept my mouth shut and hid my camera (which was quite small), that I would be treated like a Palestinian. It was this that really made me understand how life was under occupation from day to day, or more importantly, from night to night. At night in Gaza it was impossible to walk the streets but this could be done in some places on the West Bank, when all the television and press people were safely in bed in the American Colonial Hotel and the tourists were looking forward to the next day touring. It was then that tribulations of living under occupation hit me. I was for most of the time alone on these late night walks or I had Bassim, a 20 year old Palestinian who guided me both physically and verbally.

As you are about to read, my British passport proved to be very useful. For example when a group of soldiers decided they would pass a little time spitting at me. I just stood silent with a ring of confidence hovering over me. I knew I had the power to send them running with their guns between their legs, all I had to do was produce my passport at the right time. These soldiers had a real dilemma, they had to be very nice to the tourists but not very nice to the Palestinians. Ironically, the majority of Israeli soldiers spent their spare time listening to Arab music, including Palestinian music and reggae. In Israel, playing soldiers is on the school curriculum and of course every man and woman must do military service, but there are some who protest against the occupation and militarisation.

In Israel, there are some very well trained fighters with very powerful guns, who are very worried about some small children armed with stones.

TRAVELOGUE

Enter The Dragon

As we waited to be checked by custom officers, I got into a conversation with an Arab-American family who were touching on ‘Arab soil’ for the first time. As we spoke, we were approached by soldiers who led us into separate rooms. I never saw them again

The Search

“Take off your clothes and bend over” I was told, and I started to do so. Off came my shirt, my shoes, my socks and then I handed the soldier my passport. “You are British”, he said, and in my best English accent I said: “Yes sir, I certainly am”. To this he replied “Please put on your clothing and go through customs as normal, there’s been a mistake”.

First Night In Jerusalem

The Palestinian sat on the ground, just a few yards from where some believe Jesus was entombed. He was physically handicapped, his arms were short and his hands were set at an awkward angle, and a soldier was trying to force him to take his penis in his mouth.

I was amazed at the way I was left to watch this and I started to move forward to make sure I was seeing right. Then the soldier turned towards me, he was speaking loud and laughing but I could not understand what he was saying. But I do know it was something to the effect of ‘do you want a try?’ .So I tried to give him my passport. When he saw it, he pushed my hand away, zipped up and ran off into the streets of Old Jerusalem.

Leaving Jerusalem

I had to wake so early this morning, everything had to be done early because at 12 o’ clock every Palestinian goes on strike. It’s part of the Intifada and today there’s good news. Many Palestinians in Israel (1948 borders) have also gone on strike,, but there is no room for celebration as the streets are full of soldiers.

Like Jah Bones, here I speak for myself. I have worked for and supported many of the Rastafarian groups in England at some time, but I have never been a member of any one. The reason is that I believe none of them are politically progressive enough, and it is also worth noting that the politically progressive Rastas refer to links with groups like the ANC or ant-racist, anti-imperialist groups and they still remain Rasta.

I don't believe there will ever be one dominant Rastafarian organisation and would not want one. If westerners cannot define us, then there is a problem with Western definitions and we cannot be too concerned with presenting ourselves to Westerners. I do believe that the way forward for Rastas should be, and will be, to think globally and act locally. It would rather see one Rasta involved in the struggle for human rights in Tibet, than ten Rastas fighting to word a manifesto in Miami.

Where the world 'Babylon' is used, I would like to start naming names, as I see it in religion, in history. The Rasta movement should be aware it is making its own history and writing the Third Testament. When we speak of Haile Selassie as Christ in his kingly character, Christ in government, or Christ as politician, we should let it be known that is exactly what we mean. Christ in his social work character did not try to run a government, but this character's work was to take his seat in government and live like a politician and do the wrongs and rights, make all the mistakes that politicians do, it is this that is most important and the lessons that are learnt, so we are wiser for the future.

It is impossible to take the Star of David away from Rastafari and I would never advocate such a move. After all we believe that David was more of a Rasta than an Ashkenzaim Zionist, but we must make a stand against Zionism as long as Zionism means the oppression of many people. It is important for us to make this stand as it is for non-Zionist Jews, for Zionism is giving Jews a bad name.

RASTAFARI AND ZIONISM

As soon as I mentioned to my Rastafarian friends that I felt a need to write about Rastafari, they all agreed it was not a good idea, I was not planning to write particularly on Rastafari and Zionism but on the many other issues concerning the movement. I was sick of having to deal with people who, because of misinformation, have come to the conclusions that all Rastafarians do is listen to reggae music, smoke marijuana and collect girlfriends. If you believe everything you see in the press and on television, this is understandable. Even if you are walking on the streets and believe that everyone you see wearing dreadlocks, or red, cold and green is a Rasta, you may get the same impression, but there are many non-Rastas wearing dreadlocks and there are many Rastas who do not.

When the Roman Catholic church commissioned a report on the movement they came out with nothing. The problem was there was no leader they could approach, there was no one body or church they could investigate, and no books written on Rastafari by a Rasta author that was seen by Rastas as a book of importance. They heard through the 'grapevine' that it was a religion, but what kind of religion is it when the members are reading the Bible, the Koran, the Torah, Sun Tzu (The Art of War), Walter Rodney and The Communist Manifesto? To add to this, some members are Ital (vegetarian-vegan), some eat meat, some refuse to live in cities and have taken to the hills; while some make pop music, 'digging' the city and driving BMW's. The Catholics did not know what they were taking on and are still left in a state of confusion. It is these very things that Rastafarians say is their strength, so who is going to infiltrate or manipulate the movement?

The fact is, all over the world Rastas differ greatly. Here are three main points that Rastas agree on, firstly, that Africa is the home of all black people, many have returned but some see it in the spiritual sense - a focus of their meditation. Secondly, all believe that Marcus Garvey the pan-Africanist and founder of the Universal Negro Movement Association (UNIA) was a prophet. Thirdly that Rastafari (Haile Selassie) is the head of God's family on earth - Christ in government or the God King of whom Garvey spoke. There are large groups of people in Jamaica, the USA and England who look like Rastas and live like Rastas but do not see Rastafari in the same light. They are known as the Jesus

Dreads. So these are the basic beliefs, apart from the Jesus Dreads (Christian Dreads) that all Rastas hold in common.

Since the afore-mentioned Roman Catholic survey, a well known and respected Rastafarian by the name of Jah Bones was written a book called 'One Love', published by 'The Voice of Rasta', it should be noted that in his preface Jah Bones states 'I take this particular volume to be nothing more, nor nothing less than the reasoning of a Rastafari brother', in other words, 'his point of view' It is, I believe, the most progressive work published by a Rasta to date, but by no means is it a manifesto and I am sure he would be the first to admit that. Rastafarian manifesto was published by 'The Ethiopian African Theocracy Union' which is a church-entered group based in Jamaica. But it was never taken up by the majority of Rastas and is read mainly by church members. It would have been better if it were to have been titled 'the Ethiopian African theocracy manifesto'

When meeting intellectuals at home and abroad, I am always asked if authoritative books on Rastafari can be obtained. When the answer is no, I then have to answer the questions that follow. I could, of course, quote the words I have mentioned, but these would not represent the whole movement. These are papers published on the subject by sociologists and the like but they are written for socialists and the like to satisfy intellectual curiosity, the outsiders view - they only tend to upset Rastas

Throughout the 'Arab World' I was questioned about Rastafari mainly about the use of the star of David, the use of the word Israel and other similarities between Rastafari and Zionism. Many people I met view the Star of David in the same light as the Jews viewed the Swastika, and this is understandable. But the Swastika existed a long time before Hitler, as did the star of David exist long before Zionism. In fact, I was with a very good friend one day in Tunis, (he is a Palestinian and politically active) when we noticed in the old city, in a very old house, a very old inscription on the wall taken from the Koran and decorated with the Sar. It's a shame that such a symbol now represents the oppression of a people. Let's face it, African all over the world use this symbol, most of whom have suffered the same tribulations themselves.

Zion in Rastafari terminology has always been Ethiopia. When Rastas speak of Israel, they speak of the person and not the state. This person's family lineage is only continued in Ethiopia, therefore Rastas refer to Ethiopians as the real Jews.

The largest religious group in the movement is called 'The Twelve Tribes of Israel', and many of their members have returned to Zion. Returning to Zion was a wish granted to them by Haile Selassie in 1955. The place was Shashemene, in the South of Ethiopia. Since then, a change of government has slowed

down the process, but many are still returning. Returning to Zion for them was by invitation and they were welcomed. To be blunt, they never told a native Ethiopian to move anywhere to make room for them.

Whilst in Ethiopia, I asked Ethiopians what they thought of Rastafarians and the general view was one of acceptance. Rastas were seen as just another tribe and their similarities with other tribes were always pointed out. Most have settled in Shashemene, but I found others living in Addis Ababa, Harar, Langeno and Dese. Because Rasta men outnumber Rasta women, many men have married Ethiopian women. Although the Ethiopian Rastas make a great effort to educate their children and organise a self-sufficient community, they have no political agenda, and converse with government officials on 'cultural matters' only.

Let's not forget that the great majority of Rastas never go to church, they live in the West and are more sympathetic to left-wing views. The press are always giving people the idea that Rastas oppress women, but this is a small minority of Old Testament readers. It is like saying that Christianity, and all Christians, are out to kill black people because you have spoken to a Christian white South African.

If progressive Rastas were ever to have a leader it could well have been Walther Rodney, the Guyanese writer and activist. He spent a great deal of time in Jamaica with Rastafarians and recognized their importance. World-wide every Rasta, without being told to, reads his book 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa'. Walter Rodney is referred to by Rastas as a 'brothers'

Most Rastafarians who have European names, change them for African or Biblical names. Some of these are, of course, Jewish names. They will also try to learn an African language, Amharic if possible - the language of Ethiopia from which many Hebrew scriptures were translated.

The only political party ever formed by Rastafarians (that I know of) was formed in London by 'Ras Pinto' and was called "The People's Democratic Party" (PDP). Ras Pinto was more political than religious, and preached that Rastas must understand international politics and learn to articulate the reasons behind their struggle and wishes; and that any Rastas outside Africa must educate themselves before they return. He was a strong supporter of the 'Organization of African Unity' (OAU) and stressed that he did not wish to be seen as a political leader, more a political teacher. The PDP never had a large membership and was later to become Local 33 of the 'Ethiopian World Federation' (EWF), which to date is the largest organisation established with the blessing of Haile Selassie and has offices in many countries, these offices are known as 'locals'