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Dread Love: Reggae, RasTafari, Redemption

Introduction

Over the last 40 years roots reggae music has been the key medium for the dissemination of the RasTafari message from Jamaica to the world. Aotearoa NZ is no exception to this trend wherein the direct action message that Bob Marley preached to ‘get up stand up’ supported the radical engagements in the public sphere prompted by Black Power.¹ In many ways, Marley’s message and demeanour vindicated the radical oppositional strategies that activists had deployed against the Babylon system in contradistinction to the Te Aute Old Boy tradition of tactful engagement. No surprise, then, that roots reggae was sometimes met with consternation by elders, although much of the issue revolved specifically around the smoking of Marijuana, the wisdom weed.² Yet some activists and gang members paid closer attention to the transmission, through the music, of a faith cultivated in the Caribbean, which professed Ethiopia as the root and Haile Selassie I as the agent of redemption. And they decided to make it their faith too.

In this chapter we will consider these groundings with RasTafari. We shall retrieve a *whakapapa* of *mana motuhake* (self determination) between Ethiopia and Aotearoa. We shall examine the renewal of a maligned indigenous culture through the cultivation of a ‘dread love’. And, recalling Tigilau Ness’s motif of *kowhaiwhai* dreadlocks, we shall witness, through RasTafari, the inhabitation of spiritual Blackness on indigenous grounds.

Roots reggae and Te Kupu (the messenger)

Although roots reggae was known to some already, the release in 1975 of Bob Marley and the Wailers' *Natty Dread* album marked the definitive arrival of the genre.³ Subsequent re-releases of *Catch a Fire* and *Burning*, followed by new material such as *Rastaman Vibration* and *Babylon by Bus*, consolidated the far-reaching impact of Marley among the youth. The reception of Burning Spear and other roots bands such as Black Uhuru and Culture deepened this impact.⁴ Island Records releases dominated reggae sales in record shops. However, the predominant dancehall format – the '45 single – entered Aotearoa NZ in a subterranean fashion via the same routes travelled by Black Power literature, i.e. through relatives living abroad (especially in Britain), arriving African students, or returning Māori and Pasifika merchant seamen, a few of whom had passed directly through Jamaica.⁵ Some of the sufferers could also appreciate the island aesthetic of rudebwoy/RasTafari films such as *The Harder They Come* with its roots reggae soundtrack.⁶ Many more could relate to the look and feel of the musicians and actors – Black, poor and on the margins of the law especially with regards to the smoking of Marijuana.⁷ At a time when there was little social capital to be gained from being young, gifted and Māori, Marley – an international artist and 'soul rebel' – looked like one of the 'cousins down the road'.⁸

The medium of roots reggae was in many ways familiar to Māori. Orality is a key component of Māori sociability, and music has always been a powerful medium of communication.⁹ In fact, there exists a long Māori tradition of musical activism against land appropriation by Pākehā.¹⁰ By the mid-twentieth century, Māori songwriters such as Tuini Ngawai were appropriating popular Western tunes and 'dubbing' in their own, sometimes subversive, lyrics to produce *waiata haka* (dance poems). Additionally, the folk/biblical bases for the proverbs that Marley and others used to convey their messages also existed in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) wherein there exists a tradition of publically

narrating meaning through proverbs (*whakataukī*). Moreover, for well over 150 years, biblical verses had been recited and realigned to constitute the next iteration of the long *whakapapa* of Māori prophetic movements (to which we shall turn in the next chapter).¹¹ For instance, the Ringatū faith has a tradition of utilizing old Māori songs through which to sing certain Psalms.¹² So perhaps the RasTafari who, in the mid-1980s, emerged around Ruatoria on the East Cape, an area where the Ringatū Church is common, already recognized many of Marley's lyrics as Māori spiritual utterances.

Even the specific rhythms of roots reggae and its accompanying modes of vocal expression were familiar to many Māori. This was especially the case when it came to the practice of chanting, which, as a musical form, is highly respected in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world). Knowledge of the chant was placed in the third of Tāne's baskets (*kete*) as he reached the highest levels of the spiritual domain and brought back the baskets of knowledge to humankind.¹³ Māui himself regularly used chants as part of his binding skills, for example, when forcing the sun to slow down its passage across the firmament.¹⁴ Even the basic triplet rhythm of Māori chanting resonates with the pronounced triplet pattern found in much reggae music, for example, in Marley's *Exodus*.¹⁵

In all these ways, then, roots reggae could resonate with Māori sensibilities across political, aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. Listening to this music, Aotearoa sufferers would pick up on the message because '*te kupu te mea nui*' (the words are the main thing), while the rhythm 'showed ourselves again in another form'.¹⁶ Above all, by playing the 'music of the afflicted people', Marley manifested, in the estimation of Te Hoko Whitu, a RasTafari from the 'Ruatoria Dread', as *te kupu* (the messenger).¹⁷ Many listeners of the 1970s and 80s will testify that Marley convinced them to emancipate themselves from 'mental slavery'.¹⁸ Although not all young sufferers were Māori or Pasifika, here too, the 'words got through'.¹⁹ For instance, Denis O'Reilly, Pākehā member of the Black Power gang and instigator of Keskidee Aroha, listened to the album *Catch a Fire* after 'getting the bash' from the police one day, and felt a growing sense of outrage.²⁰

In April 1979, one month before the Keskidee Aroha tour, Marley arrived to play a legendary concert at Western Springs, Auckland. The event was attended by 21,790 people including university students, musicians, activists and gangs who, rather than fighting each other, threw ounces of Marijuana on stage.²¹ David Grace, a popular and politically astute Māori reggae artist, saw Bob Marley the same year in Sydney, Australia, but the effect was the same: 'Jesus Christ walked on stage!'²² Some activists managed to meet Marley at White Heron Lodge in Auckland where the Jamaican entourage was staying. Miriama Rauhihi-Ness – Panther, Black Womans Movement and Keskidee Aroha member – hosted the I Threes (Rita Marley, Judy Mowatt and Sister Hines) at her house and subsequently held grounding sessions with Mowatt concerning the Twelve Tribes of Israel – the RasTafari organization of which Marley had become a member.²³

Upon arrival to the country Marley was greeted at Auckland airport with a *pōwhiri* (welcome ceremony) by Ngāti Whātua, the local people of the land. And just as had been the case with Spivey and would be with Keskidee and Ras Messengers one month later, Marley was greatly affected by the warmth of the greeting and the way in which it grounded him in the people and the place.²⁴ That the greeting was offered by Ngāti Whātua was especially poignant. One year prior, they had lost a struggle against the selling of Takaparawha by Auckland council to corporate interests. Also known as Bastion Point, this land had previously been gifted by the tribe to the council as a reserve. Many of the key Māori, Pasifika as well as Pākehā activists came to stand in solidarity with Ngāti Whātua at Bastion Point. But after 507 days, they were all forcibly removed by over 500 police who subsequently tore down the marae complex called *Arohanui* (deep love) that had been erected.²⁵ The land was returned, much later, under the Waitangi Tribunal process; Ngāti Whātua re-gifted it to the people of Auckland as a recreational space. During the 1977/8 resistance at Bastion Point, Marley's *No Woman No Cry* was played 'time and again' along with *Redemption Song*.²⁶

The most famous Oceania reggae group to date emerged out of this politically charged context. Herbs had begun as a social band.

However, with helpful direction from Ross France (founder of the Ponsonby Workers Cooperative and member of Keskidee Aroha), and Polynesian Panther Will 'Ilolahia (who became their manager), the group's first songs inflected contemporary political issues and spoke intentionally to 'street Ponsonby'.²⁷ One group member, Dilworth Karaka, had 'come through Bastion Point' and had also been involved in Keskidee Aroha.²⁸ The front cover of Herbs' first album featured a picture of Bastion Point with the title, 'Whats' Be Happenin'?' Released in 1981 on the eve of the Springbok tour, the album contained an anti-Apartheid anthem, *Azania* (penned by Ross France), which was not played on some radio stations due to its message.²⁹ Also included was a tribute to Marley entitled *Reggae's Doing Fine*, which was recorded the morning after Te Kupu had joined the ancestors in the realms of Te Pō (the realm of dark potential).³⁰

Herbs, though, was not the first Māori or Pasifika reggae band. Polynesian Panther Tigilau Ness had set up Unity in the Ponsonby area as a response to Alma Rei's band Chaos that had already emerged out of Takapūwāhia Pā in Porirua. Chaos toured with Keskidee Aroha, and the Porirua Pā also hosted the troupe; RasTafari from the Pā still remember this visit as a formative moment.³¹ By 1982, according to David Grace, the Pā was 'full of dreads'.³² Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Porirua Pā had a fundamental part to play in the opening up of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) to roots reggae and the RasTafari message. This drawing together of energies is understandable if we consider that urban Porirua developed around the Pā, which remains one of the markers of the *tūrangawaewae* (place of belonging) of Ngāti Toa. In this sense, the youth at the Pā could, as RasTafari say, 'sight up' the message because they already inhabited the ground they stood upon. There are some parallels here to the peculiar nature of Ōtara as an urban space, and the early focus put by the youth there on cultural rejuvenation as we witnessed in the last chapter.³³

Emerging from Porirua's eastern suburbs, where many migrant Māori families resided, was another roots reggae band called Sticks and Shanty. Thai Sticks are a form of Marijuana that at the time were readily

available in Aotearoa NZ. Shanty Town was the name of a hut in the Porirua suburb of Titahi Bay; influenced by the anti-apartheid/honour the Treaty movement of the 1970s, the word Shanty was intended to connect the poor people of Porirua to the shacks of Soweto.³⁴ With music equipment borrowed from the Mighty Mongrel Mob gang, Sticks and Shanty also struggled for airplay of their messages within a Pākehā-controlled broadcast industry.

In retrospect Reihana Ngatoro, a member of Sticks and Shanty, is convinced that reggae was – and perhaps remains – a ‘stepping stone to *tikanga*’, a term that connotes the culturally correct way to do things for the sake of wellbeing.³⁵ Ngatoro had moved to east Porirua as a teenager. Living in a viscerally racist urban context with separated parents who spent the majority of the time working for a living under great stress, and with no grandparents immediately available to fortify him with a sense of integrity, Ngatoro was confronted with a stark choice. The ‘fatal impact’ thesis of settler colonialism posited that the indigenous can either survive by dispensing with their culture or die practising it. However, Marley’s message taught Ngatoro another thesis, a decolonial one: survival was itself a culture; and in order to survive one had to have a culture. This was the compass and energy store provided by Marley. In this sense, the RasTafari message was not only a stepping stone to *tikanga* (the correct way) but a revitalization of the very notion of *tikanga* itself.

For all these reasons a number of reggae bands in the 1980s would align themselves closely with the Māori reparations movement concerning breaches to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi). Dread, Beat and Blood – featuring David Grace – was one such band that hailed from Porirua Pā. Aotearoa was another band whose members were influenced by Marley and the Wailers and Herbs yet purposefully wrote songs in Te Reo (the Māori language). Many of Aotearoa’s songs were influenced by the band’s attendance of political *hui* (meetings), with their gigs feeling more like ‘political rallies’.³⁶ Thus, within a short period of time, roots reggae had quite literally become the soundtrack to the Māori renaissance.³⁷

The medium of roots reggae facilitated the most intimate grounding between the children of Tāne/Māui and Legba of the time. In fact, 'Uncle Bob' was such a household name that it was not unusual for youngsters to assume that he really was a familial relation.³⁸ Marley has, on occasion, even featured in family shrines.³⁹ Ruia Aperahama, a member of the Rātana faith and Māori musician who translated the Wailers' songs into Te Reo (the Māori language), provides a potent example of this intimate grounding with RasTafari. In 2008, he undertook a pilgrimage to Jamaica and brought with him a very special gift (*taonga*) for Marley's *whānau* (family) that signified a covenant between the Māori and Jamaican peoples. The gift was carried in a *waka huia*, a sacred container – sacred because the gift it carries is imbued with the personal spirit of the giver. The inscription on the container translates as: 'it was Māui who changed our world forever, little by little.'⁴⁰ (We might remember that through chanting, Māui harnessed the power of the sun for the good of humanity.) Woven into personal and spiritual *whakapapa*, binding back the children of Tāne/Māui to their decolonial pasts and selves, Marley is *te kupu o Āwherika* (the African messenger), child of Legba, relative of Māui.

Nonetheless, we need to make a distinction between reggae music and the RasTafari faith. The latter is sometimes communicated through the former medium as roots music. However, reggae is not foundationally a RasTafari medium. And Marley was first and foremost a messenger of RasTafari, the Black liberation faith that spoke so acutely and poetically of injustice, resistance, emancipation and redemption. RasTafari proposes that sanctification lies in inhabiting Blackness as a righteous condition. With this 'dread love', RasTafari venerate a particular personality, the African-Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I alongside Empress Menen Asfaw. In both rural and urban Aotearoa NZ I can testify that many houses have posters of Marley adorning their walls in prominent positions. However, portraits of Selassie I are few and far between.⁴¹

But some sufferers did look to where Marley directed them and 'sighted up' the Conquering Lion of Judah as their King too. They began to inhabit RasTafari on indigenous grounds in order to practise

a dread love among their people. Small in number, they were big in effect. Although far from Jamaica, they were closer to Ethiopia. For, while South Africa and Aotearoa are bound together in a *whakapapa* of colonial injustice, Ethiopia and Aotearoa are bound together in a *whakapapa* of *mana motuhake* (self-determination).

Aotearoa/Ethiopia

From 1855 Emperor Tewodros II began in earnest the centralization of a loose patchwork of principalities that at the time formed Ethiopia. Without embarking on such a process, Ethiopia would have soon been carved up between Italy, France and Britain – the key encroaching imperial powers in the region. The defensive project to consolidate and express Ethiopian sovereignty on the world stage reached its apogee when Haile Selassie I, as crown prince Ras Tafari, entered Ethiopia into the League of Nations in 1923. However, in the intervening time period, European powers regularly sought to militarily and diplomatically neuter Ethiopia. In many ways, this history is contemporaneous and cognate to the Māori pursuit of *mana motuhake*, with the Kīngitanga (Māori King Movement) emerging around 1854, a series of other *kotahitanga* (unity) movements following alongside and in its wake, and the last Māori prophetic movement of this era beginning in the early 1920s under the ministry of T. W. Rātana.

Charles Speedy – known euphemistically as Captain Speedy – is a useful character through which to start to draw out the constitutive linkages between these two defensive projects.⁴² The Captain's father, Major James Speedy, was an imperial army veteran who retired to Aotearoa NZ in 1856. After 1861 Captain Speedy travelled extensively in Ethiopia before joining his family at Mauku in 1864. He arrived in the most pivotal episode of the wars over land when imperial troops invaded the Waikato, the home of the Kīngitanga. At this point, Captain Speedy served as a captain and adjutant of the Auckland

militia, later receiving a Māori Wars medal. In 1867, Captain Speedy joined Lord Napier's staff as advisor on the expedition to Ethiopia wherein British forces stormed Magdala, inflicted a decisive defeat on Tewodros II's forces, and robbed churches and other houses of many artefacts. On Queen Victoria's suggestion, Captain Speedy was appointed guardian to Prince Alamayu Simeon, the son of Tewedros II, who had committed suicide at Magdala. The son died in Britain. However, a young boy called Emir Ali, a cousin of Emperor Menelik II, was also 'saved' by the British army, and entrusted to Captain Speedy, who delivered him to the coast, and ultimately, Britain. Ali left Britain within one year as a ward of the ship's captain of the *Star of India* and, perhaps after hearing of the land of the long white cloud from Speedy, eventually arrived in Auckland in 1874 where he was to remain for the rest of his life.⁴³

On two occasions – 1868 and 1886 – Captain Speedy lectured on Ethiopia to mainly Pākehā audiences in Aotearoa NZ.⁴⁴ But Māori were also paying attention to the struggle over Ethiopian self-determination. A key moment in the imperial showdown between Ethiopia and Europe came with the Battle of Adwa in 1896 wherein Italy was roundly defeated by the armies of Menelik II. Four years later a newspaper representing the *Paremata Māori o te Kotahitanga* (the Māori Parliament) ran an article in Te Reo entitled 'Te Kīngi o Etiopia,' which relayed the biblical encounter of Makeda, Queen of Sheba, with King Solomon, siring the Solomonic lineage (to which Selassie I claimed 225th direct descent). The article ended with a brief report on the recent Battle of Adwa.⁴⁵ The message was clear: learn from those biblical African polities that have been able to retain and defend their *mana motuhake* in the face of European slavery and imperial expansion.

From 1923 onwards New Zealand civil servants followed the discussions in the League concerning Ethiopia's putatively uncivilized status by virtue of the slave-raiding and slave-holding that still occurred within and across its borders despite Selassie I's attempts at reform. Regular calls were made by European observers for what would

nowadays be termed humanitarian intervention.⁴⁶ In September of 1935, with the Italian army massing on the border of Ethiopia ready for invasion, the New Zealand delegate to the League announced that his country was prepared to hold to the principle of collective security and support sanctions against Italy.⁴⁷ New Zealand was one of only a handful of League members who consistently supported Ethiopia's sovereignty during the Italian occupation. When he re-entered Addis Ababa on 7 May 1941, five years to the day from his departure into exile due to the Italian invasion, Selassie I sent a personal telegram of good wishes to the New Zealand Prime Minister.⁴⁸

Defending his country's principled position (which soon became contrary to that held by Britain) Walter Nash, minister of finance, argued that the peoples of Aotearoa NZ most certainly cared about what would happen to Ethiopians under Italian occupation. Nash reckoned that 'we [have] such a regard to our own coloured race that it [seems] natural that regard would be extended to other coloured races'.⁴⁹ Certainly, Nash was wearing the rose-tinted glasses of settler exceptionalism. But he was not wrong in his assessment of the support held by many of the working class for the Ethiopian cause, which is demonstrated by a set of stop-work meetings held by the New Zealand Seamen's Union in Wellington, Lyttelton and Auckland on 5 October 1935.⁵⁰ One newspaper commentary in the lead-up to the war was given by an elderly Emir Ali himself.⁵¹ And positive assessments of Selassie I's post-exile governance appeared in newspapers during the rest of the war.⁵² Were these assessments garnered from Captain Speedy's famous lectures decades earlier, wherein he had informed the Pākehā chattering classes that Ethiopia was none other than the fabled Christian land of Prester John?⁵³ And had some Māori perhaps remembered the reports of Adwa from the *Kotahitanga* newspaper?

Let us return to the first half of the 1980s. Rauhihi-Ness recalls that shortly after her return from Jamaica, where she had committed herself to the RasTafari faith, a *tangi* (funeral) required her to return to her family home in Levin. Already somewhat chastised by some of her Māori *whānau* (family) for supporting the struggles of Pasifika peoples

as a member of the Polynesian Panthers, Rauhihi-Ness had apprehensions about now greeting her family in the divine and precious name of an African emperor, Haile Selassie I. And yet when she did so, some of her elders recognized the name approvingly. They had served in the North Africa and Italian campaigns of the Second World War as part of the 28th Māori Battalion and during these sojourns they had met and talked with Selassie I, who expressed his admiration for the Māori people.⁵⁴

There is one more chapter to this story. On 13 October 1941, in gratitude for New Zealand's refusal to recognize Italy's claims to sovereignty over Ethiopia, Ethiopian Minister Blatta Ayela Gabre gifted to W. J. Jordon, New Zealand High Commissioner to London, a signed portrait of Selassie I in a gold and silver frame.⁵⁵ This portrait subsequently disappeared only to emerge again in 2010 as part of an auction of UNESCO items. A private interest successfully bid against the National Museum for the item. At the first national grounation of RasTafari in January 2011 at Wainuiomata, a Twelve Tribes of Israel member, Ras Mark Solomon, along with his *whānau* (family) from Porirua Pā, presented the portrait and affirmed that RasTafari would henceforth be its guardians.

A dread love

Ras Solomon was one of the sufferers of Aotearoa who in the 1980s were to build a relationship with Selassie I on domestic battlefields, especially, the streets and prisons populated by gangs and activists. There, they would rejuvenate past anti-colonial connections between Aotearoa NZ and Ethiopia in order to cultivate a 'dread love' for their peoples as they pursued *mana motuhake*.

By the late 1970s many members of Māori and Pasifika gangs – from the Mongrel Mob to Black Power to King Cobras – were enthusiastically listening to roots reggae. For some members, RasTafari even

provided a non-aligned pathway – a way out and a chance to retain a non-conformist position towards society but not by committing apostasy to one gang by joining another.⁵⁶ The ‘soul rebel’ stance of RasTafari was largely respected by gangs. Sometimes, those who proclaimed themselves RasTafari in prison, whether gang member or not, were left alone by inmates and not required to affiliate one way or the other.⁵⁷ As I have already noted, prison in the United States and in Aotearoa NZ acted as an incubator of Black Power. So too for the RasTafari message, usually transmitted through reggae. In the early 1980s reggae radio shows received many letters from inmates.⁵⁸ At this point some prisoners were serving sentences related to political activism. Here are the written sentiments of another activist and political prisoner, a member of the Patu Squad (the military wing of the Springbok protest movement): ‘That Musical Youth song [*The Youth of Today*] is on and fuck man, everytime I hear it, I can feel the vibes, man, da fucken power the youth represent. If you listen to the lyrics carefully you can comprehend.’⁵⁹

Tigilau Ness, a Polynesian Panther and member of the Keskidēe Aroha national collective, had also been given a significant prison sentence in 1982 for his part in the anti-apartheid protests. Noticing that Ness had started to grow dreadlocks, the Warden asked him what religion he was and replied on his behalf, ‘Rastafarian’. Ness accepted the naming; he had been travelling in that direction anyway.⁶⁰ As a dreadlocked RasTafari, fellow inmates including gang members held him in ‘a kind of reverence’. But one Māori youth from the East Cape, Chris Campbell, was curious as to why a dreadlocks was reading the white man’s Bible.⁶¹ The two would proceed to have regular grounding sessions in prison regarding the RasTafari faith. Ness shared with Campbell that according to the Twelve Tribes of Israel order, the East Cape youth was of the tribe of Gad. Campbell provided Ness with a gift of sand shoes, a precious commodity in prison. After leaving prison the two visited each other and met up on the 1984 *hikoi* (march) to Waitangi to protest against continual breaches to Te Tiriti (The Treaty).⁶² Returning to the East Cape, Campbell led the

Ruatoria Dreads, a number of whom had previously been members of the Mongrel Mob.⁶³ Campbell brought back from prison the ‘face of the King of Kings’, that is, Haile Selassie I, as prophesied in Psalm 24.6: ‘This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.’⁶⁴ The Ruatoria Dreads would become (in)famous for confronting the local government, state and even some of their own relations over the return of tribal lands taken on long-term leases (mainly by members of the Church Missionary Society), and especially the return of the sacred mountain Hikurangi to the *tangata whenua* (people of the land), Ngāti Porou.

A few years later, some members of the Ruatoria Dread were serving prison terms in Mangaroa prison. There they grounded with Api Mahuika, the Ngāti Porou Rūnanga (council) chairperson, who explained to them the tribal contexts of their struggles.⁶⁵ In prison they also encountered Harold Turner, a world-famous theologian of new religious movements. Turner, in his retirement, had become curious about the burgeoning RasTafari faith in Aotearoa NZ and had lectured on the topic to the Secretary for Justice and superintendents of prisons.⁶⁶ Turner then facilitated the Dread’s engagement with Norman Perry’s Mana Trust.⁶⁷ Perry, a respected Pākehā, had served in the Māori Battalion during the Second World War and had been a secretary to Sir Apirana Ngata, the original Te Aute Old Boy. Perry had also cultivated a relationship with the Ringatū faith. Perry’s Mana Trust worked with Māori prisoners so as to rehabilitate them through the teaching of their tribal traditions and associated *tikanga* (correct ways). Ringatū ran through many of the Dread’s families, and they themselves had been reintroduced to the faith by Tame Te Maro, an elder of Ngāti Porou.⁶⁸ Te Maro was a staunch activist for indigenous rights and an early influence upon Ngā Tamatoa in terms of reviving the principles of Te Tiriti. Te Maro himself had studied with a famous Ringatū *tohunga* (learned one) called Hori Keti, who maintained that Te Tiriti was no less binding than the covenants of the Old Testament.⁶⁹ Perry facilitated further study by key members of the imprisoned Dread, leading to a deeper grounding of RasTafari and Ringatū.

After these prison groundings the Ruatoria Dreads then began to hold regular gatherings along the lines laid out by Ringatū. On holy days (called Rā) the Dread would come together – elders, women, men and children – in a supportive environment. Young men would be treated with respect and would treat women with respect. We should note that some of the Dread, although themselves now having children, had rarely in their personal lives experienced a caring environment.⁷⁰ So, just as the RasTafari message had reintroduced some of the youth to the very principle of *tikanga*, i.e. living according to a correct way, so did the faith reintroduce some of the youth to the very principles of *manaaki* (care) and *aroha* (sympathy, love). For the Ruatoria Dread, RasTafari thus provided a compass and energy store with which to retrieve a dread love of one's people.

Let us now turn to examine the retrieval of a dread love by activists. Central, in this regard, is the forming of the Aotearoa NZ chapter of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. By the late 1970s visceral street politics had started to exhaust activists who had little substantive to show for a decade's worth of confrontation except increasing right-wing turns by the government of the day. As the Keskidēe Aroha project testifies to, strategies had to change so that the protesting body could be nurtured in the long run by a liberated soul.⁷¹ At the time, Miriama Rauhihi-Ness, who, it will be remembered, had grounded with the I Threes during Marley's visit, explained the shift as follows: 'Back then we were angry, angry, angry, hitting out at anything. Now, we know what we're angry about. That's what Rasta and reggae have given ... Back then, black Americans put us in contact, and gave us a blackness, a political vehicle we could use. Rasta is another vehicle.'⁷² Ness expressed similar sentiments: We haven't time to fight this black/white thing. It wearies you. Rasta is an alternative way. A way to teach your children the truth, and to practice a dread love among your people.⁷³ These testimonies indicate that activists felt a need to at the very least complement opposition to the system with a positive love (*agape*) for their communities. For some, as I mentioned in Chapter four, this meant returning to various *tūrangawaewae* (places of belonging) that

assimilation through urbanization had sought to segregate them from. (In fact, the cartoon magazine that Keskidee Aroha members sold in order to raise funds for the tour dramatized the story of just such a return.) But for a few activists this process (also) led to a grounding with RasTafari.

At a Black Women's *hui* in June 1982 arguments flared over Māori and Pasifika relationships and the use of the identifier Black instead of Māori. Rauhihi-Ness and a number of her close activist acquaintances, tired of the arguing, left the meeting. From identifying with political Blackness Rauhihi-Ness and others sought to inhabit a more expansive spiritual Blackness through the RasTafari faith. With the help of Hensley Dyer, a Jamaican Twelve Tribes member resident in Auckland, Rauhihi-Ness, also accompanied by Herbs musician Toni Fonoti, journeyed to Jamaica to meet with Gadman, the prophet of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, 'The RasTafari 'mansion' to which Marley had belonged. Having decided that she could no longer function as a 'political animal', Rauhihi-Ness returned and in November 1982 the first meeting to 'praise Jah' was convened in Auckland.⁷⁴ In 1985 the New Zealand chapter was incorporated within the international structure of the Twelve Tribes; in 1986 the prophet Gad visited New Zealand to 'seal' the house, returning once more in 1989. In the intervening period, many of the Aotearoa NZ executive visited both Jamaica and Ethiopia.⁷⁵

The Twelve Tribes in Aotearoa NZ operate along the lines set out by HQ in Jamaica in terms of liturgy, administration and mission. A central practice among the Twelve Tribes is the reading of one chapter of the Bible every day, so that the reader might find the truth for her/himself. However, a central aim for each Twelve Tribes house is to ensure that its membership can feed, clothe and shelter themselves. In this respect, the spiritual mission of the Twelve Tribes can be said to be underpinned by a Black Power ethos of economic self-sufficiency arising out of Marcus and Amy Ashwood Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).⁷⁶ In the Auckland house, Garveyism mapped onto the same ethos of self-determination that had

already been put into practice by Māori and Pasifika activists. Indeed, the majority of the foundation members of the Twelve Tribes house in Aotearoa NZ were activists associated with the Polynesian Panthers from the Ponsonby area of Auckland.⁷⁷ And the house also attracted other politicized youth; one group from Porirua were planning to join the Ruatoria Dread in the East Cape but upon hearing about the Twelve Tribes diverted instead to Auckland.⁷⁸

For these spiritual and economic purposes the Twelve Tribes set up a physical headquarters in Auckland where revenue-raising and conscious-building dance parties were held. (Many more came to the Twelve Tribes through this route.⁷⁹) In preparation for these events, sewing, cooking and musical bodies were formed.⁸⁰ With regards to the latter, the Twelve Tribes leaned on its activist connections and sent some of the children of members to a music school run by Taura Eruera (the old chairperson of Ngā Tamatoa).⁸¹ The Dread Lion band was subsequently formed, which then morphed into the Twelve Tribes of Israel Band. Yet although music was an economic base of the House, the executives had bigger plans. Hensley Dyer, who was for a while the de facto leader of the House, aimed to eliminate unemployment among its members within five years.⁸² This was an urgent task because in the years immediately following its inauguration the unemployed composed 80 per cent of the Twelve Tribes membership.⁸³ Towards this aim the Nu Vision Work Trust was formed, which cooperatively sought and provided employment for members, alongside the teaching of trades, crafts, budgeting and pre-school education.⁸⁴ This was the economic manifestation of a dread love.

And so, by retrieving a dread love for their peoples, the Aotearoa followers of Haile Selassie I renewed the *whakapapa* of Aotearoa/Ethiopia. But just as in all groundings between the children of Tāne/Māui and Legba, this retrieval was not without its contentions. Let us now examine some of the challenges specific to inhabiting RasTafari on indigenous grounds.

Inhabiting RasTafari

As we have witnessed with Keskidee Aroha, even the peripheries on the imperial world map can be ranked hierarchically against each other. In the 1970s the Caribbean 'soul rebel' enjoyed a cultural cache that Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) had yet to really instil among its youth (Ngā Tamatoa and other vocal activists notwithstanding).⁸⁵ Many in Aotearoa NZ were attracted to wearing another self and story, despite the fact that the RasTafari faith sought to emancipate the sufferers from mental slavery and to know themselves in the world on their own grounds.⁸⁶ This was the clear message that Marley himself gave during his stay in Auckland: Aotearoa sufferers could not be RasTafari and Jamaican; they would have to be RasTafari *and* Māori, Samoan, etc.⁸⁷ It was a straightforward commandment, but a complex practice.

Hensley Dyer, de facto head of the Twelve Tribes in Auckland, possessed significant prestige when it came to setting the terms of debate regarding the place of RasTafari in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world). As the only 'bona-fide' African-Caribbean resident in Auckland representing the only RasTafari organization imported directly from Jamaica, Dyer exuded authenticity whether he wanted to or not.⁸⁸ A major incident took place when Hensley and other members of the Twelve Tribes travelled to the East Cape to meet the Ruatoria Dread. Hensley later recollected his message to the Dreads, which was, in fact, at odds to that given by Marley: 'You can't serve two masters. You can't be half Māori and half Rasta. If you're going to be a Māori, be a full Māori, because that is beautiful.'⁸⁹ While Hensley certainly did not demean or disavow the Māori world, his statement inferred that to inhabit RasTafari one would have to vacate indigenous personhood. The Ruatoria Dread did not take kindly to the advice; and when asked how one can be Māori and Rasta, the sardonic reply was – and remains – 'How can you be Māori and a bus driver?'⁹⁰

Dyer's logic seems to have encouraged some Māori members of the Twelve Tribes to even associate Te Ao Māori (the Māori world)

with Babylon – a force of disunity and division. And at least some members of the Twelve Tribes identified this feature in the tribal nature of Māori social and political organization; or, as one member once memorably put it: ‘up with Rasta, out with the schisms of Māori’. Some members even chastised Ness for keeping an association with activist groups such as the Waitangi Action Committee, which were, in the early 1980s, contesting the dysfunctional Treaty relationship.⁹¹ In this sense, even *mana motuhake* – the struggle to redeem guardianship and governance over ancestral land – could be interpreted as ‘giving a strength’ to Babylon.

While attending a Twelve Tribes monthly meeting in March 2010 I was witness to a revealing *kōrero* (discussion) that spoke to these contentions. Twelve Tribes organizations have an executive membership wherein each tribe is represented as well as a Sister Dinah who often provides key directions to the house. At meetings, the executive sit in front, on the ‘bench’. The current representative of Dan at this time, a Māori man, equated Aotearoa NZ with Babylon claiming that this was not his land even if it was the place of his birth. Furthermore, Dan would be involved in no *mana whenua* (land) politics, nor would he use Te Reo as these would tie him further to Babylon. Sometime afterwards, Sister Dinah spoke and provided a *mihi* (greeting). Although not directly addressing Dan, her *kōrero* (speech) addressed the issues that he had raised. Sister Dinah recounted a visit to Ethiopia wherein an Ethiopian had asked her of her mother tongue. She had replied, ‘English’, whereupon the Ethiopian interjected, ‘No, what’s your mother tongue?’ And at that moment Sister Dinah realized that, as a Māori woman, it was Te Reo. She further noted that the Twelve Tribes’ prophet, Gadman, had revealed that spiritual Israel would be composed of many nationalities, not just one.

This *kōrero* (discussion) demonstrates that, within the Twelve Tribes, the practice of inhabiting RasTafari on indigenous grounds has been critically worked through in sustained fashion over a long period of time. And a number of long-term members have variously reassessed Hensley’s original precept (while some never accepted it in the first place). Jules

Issa, for example, nowadays positively identifies with Ngāti Porou, 'my culture', and states that, as Māori, she was born with the *wairua* (spirit). She wishes to immerse her children in both the Māori and RasTafari worlds: 'Te Reo is a *taonga* [gift] that I'm going to take with me back to Africa.'⁹² Indeed, the project to return to Ethiopia remains a fundamental aim of the Twelve Tribes house in Aotearoa NZ. But I would suggest that here, too, there have been subtle shifts, if not in the basic imperative then perhaps in the tactics, strategies and purposes of the movement of Jah people. For example, among long-term followers of the prophet Gadman there is now an inter-generational dimension to the journey: 'maybe not in our lifetime, but our children's or grand-children's'; and for many, the timeline now includes the pursuit of reparations for colonial wrongs in Aotearoa NZ and Oceania in general where there is 'work to do first'.⁹³

This brings us, finally, to a fundamental pillar of the RasTafari faith – restitution for the children of Legba kidnapped and trafficked across the oceans. Marcus Garvey's call for 'Africa for the Africans at home and abroad' is given biblical authority in Micah 4.4, and it has been manifested in Haile Selassie I's granting of five hundred hectares in Shashemene in 1948 to the peoples of the African Diaspora for their support in the Italian/Ethiopian war. Some people see Garvey's espousal as aligning perfectly with the key principle of the second article of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty), articulated by Saana Murray as 'Māori control over things Māori'.⁹⁴ For instance, reflecting on his relationship to the message of RasTafari, roots reggae musician David Grace argues that as *tangata whenua* (people of the land) he cannot culturally identify as African or Jamaican. Yet Garvey's calling – transmitted through RasTafari – resonates intimately with him as Māori: 'a people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots'. When Grace heard this statement from Garvey in a roots reggae song, he came to the conclusion that 'Yep, you're talking about us too'.⁹⁵ Back in the late 1980s, Grace had confrontations with the Twelve Tribes in Auckland over the significance of the Garveyite dimension of RasTafari philosophy and its logical and principled affirmation of *mana motuhake*.

Te Hoko Whitu, a Ruatoria Dread, inhabits the RasTafari faith through a similar disposition towards Garvey: 'soldiers chased Te Kooti as they chased Garvey out ... the message is the same.'⁹⁶ Te Kooti was a guerrilla fighter who partook in the land wars of the 1860s, and was also a prophet and founder of the Ringatū faith to which the Ruatoria Dread are strongly connected. For Te Hoko Whitu, the binding skills of Te Kooti and Garvey were the same: 'to tie the land and people together' against colonial forces. Here, Ringatū, Garveyism and RasTafari inhabit the same indigenous ground. Hone Heeney, another Ruatoria Dread, refigures the Genesis narrative to reflect this inhabitation. The Dread are the cherub who, with a flaming sword, guards the Garden of Eden. The task of the cherub is not to guard Eden from entrance by the sons of men; rather, it is to protect the people of the land of Eden from incursion by Babylonian forces.⁹⁷ This indigenous RasTafari has never left Zion, but has trod (spiritually journeyed) in it from creation; and he will stay to protect it.

Conclusion

When roots reggae played on the airwaves it transmitted a subversive message on a deeper frequency. Encoded in this message was a decolonial science designed to repair the wounds of near-fatal impacts. This science facilitated a renewal of soul power and of some of the cardinal values of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world): *tikanga* (the correct way), *manaaki* (hospitality) and *aroha* (sympathy). RasTafari redeemed for the Aotearoa sufferers a dread love for themselves. But the ground for inhabiting RasTafari had long been prepared through a *whakapapa* of *mana motuhake* between Ethiopia and Aotearoa NZ. In these ways RasTafari is inhabited on indigenous grounds; *kowhaiwhai* and dreadlocks have taken root together; and Aotearoa and Ethiopia are bound through a dread love.

Unlike knowledge production/consumption (a subaltern under-taking), knowledge cultivation turns matter around and folds it back

on itself so as to rebind and encourage growth. This circulatory process of oxygenation necessarily interacts with a wider biotope, enfolding matter from diverse cultivations. So far in this book we have followed the children of Tāne/Māui as they ground with the children of Legba and retrieve anti-colonial designs for *mana motuhake*. We have moved from the political to the theological, to art and to faith, and from comparison to identification to inhabitation. But we are now moving towards an enfolding of RasTafari within prophetic traditions indigenous and endogenous to Aotearoa NZ. We are in the presence of the Dread cherub who guards the Garden of Eden and is adorned with dreadlocked *kowhaiwhai*. We have arrived on the threshold of the spiritual domain. Here we must respectfully ask for intercession so we might cross over and visit the uncolonized spiritual hinterlands. The prophets will channel us in the right direction.