22 PROMOTING HUMAN FLOURISHING THROUGH RASTAFARI ITAL FOODWAYS IN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

The production and consumption of food are common processes amongst all human beings in order to attain a flourishing life. Food is a biological necessity, which humanity needs in order to sustain life.² Since food is embedded in the cultural system, the cultivation, preparation and consumption of food contribute significantly towards the formulation of identity claims of individuals and groups.³ Essentially, food binds people together and gives them an identity, culturally, socially and religiously.⁴ What we eat, how we eat, when we eat and with whom we eat varies across group, spatial and temporal dimensions,⁵ but ultimately deploys an overarching influence on identity and human flourishing. For Mary Douglas, a renowned social and cultural anthropologist, food can be a “blinding fetish in our culture”, which makes “our ignorance [to be] explosively dangerous” and at the same time reveal its dual nature as necessity and luxury.⁶ As a necessity, food becomes a practical question and a basic human right to subsistence included amongst the list of rights, particularly Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services”.⁷ In a way, food is a double-edged sword that is concurrently, both “itself and more than itself”.⁸

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 - 2 Fajans J. 1988. “The Transformative Value of Food: A Review Essay”, *Food and Foodways* 3(1-2):143-166.
 - 3 Passariello P. 1990. “Anomalies, Analogies, and Sacred Profanities: Mary Douglas on Food and Culture, 1957–1989”, *Food and Foodways* 4(1):53-71.
 - 4 Maposa RS and Sibanda F. 2011. “Going an Extra Mile: Linking Religion to Family Diet and Consumer Patterns in Zimbabwe”. Paper presented at the Fifth Annual International Federation of Home Economics Africa Regional Conference, Gaborone, University of Botswana, 26-28 September.
 - 5 Fajans, “The Transformative Value of Food”.
 - 6 Douglas M. 1979. *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Abarca ME. 2004. “Authentic or Not, It’s Original”, *Food and Foodways* 12:2.
 - 7 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc A/810 at 71 (1948).
 - 8 Passariello, “Anomalies, Analogies and Sacred Profanities”, 53.

Apparently, what Mary Douglas and other researchers on food and foodways raise, warrants a fuller explication concerning the paradox associated with the human consumption and use of food. Notwithstanding the fact that healthy food and diet are the life blood of human survival and human flourishing, the implication of referring to food as a “blinding fetish” reminds one of the effect of the “Coca-colisation” and “McDonaldisation” of the food industry with their attendant problems in today’s world. Both “Coca-colisation” and “McDonaldisation” signify the alienation and its trappings, as well as the exploitation of a majority of the people by the ruling classes, as they are used to denote the globalisation of capitalist American culture. This turns food into “living politics”. Specifically, as a backdrop to the global obesity epidemic, people are beginning to realise that some commercial foods, such as Coke and other sugar-loaded soft drinks, are not healthy, but because of advertising, “Coca-cola sells itself as democratic, international and liberating”.⁹ At this stage, two illustrations will suffice to show the dangers of food that further propel Mary Douglas’s point about food as a “fetish”, dangerous to society. First, between January 2017 and July 2018, there was an outbreak of *listeria monocytogenes* food poisoning from contaminated, processed meat products in South Africa that killed 216 people with 1,060 laboratory-confirmed cases.¹⁰ It was declared by the officials in South Africa as the largest ever detected *listeria* outbreak in known history and confirmed by the World Health Organization as a world record that called for food safety laws and food safety management systems to be put in place. This shows that the safety of industrially produced food can never be guaranteed. Second, in Zimbabwe, year after year, there are reports of dozens of people dying after eating poisonous mushrooms.¹¹ The effect of poisonous food on humanity

9 Berger AA. 2009. *What Objects Mean: An Introduction to Material Culture*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 150; Afrika LO. 1998. *African Holistic Health: Your Guide to Health and Well-being*. New York: A&B Publishing Group, 90, says “there is no commercial safe food to eat for the masses. Commercial foods have an overabundance of toxic, poisonous, and synthetic chemicals which destroy and deteriorate the human body. Instead of the consumer eating the foods, the foods are eating the consumer’s health.” This shows the paradox of food.

10 See, for example, Whitworth J. 2018. “South Africa declares end to largest ever *Listeria* outbreak”, *Food Safety News*, 4 September. It is reported that over 5,812 tonnes of affected ready-to-eat processed meat were recalled and destroyed since March 2018 as a precaution to prevent the spread of *listeria*. See also Macharia J. 2018. “South Africa Traces Deadly *Listeria* to Processed Meat, issues recall”, *Reuters*, 4 March, noting that *Listeriosis* is an infection caused by bacteria that causes flu-like symptoms, nausea, diarrhoea and infection of blood and brain. The bacterium is often found in unpasteurised milk, vegetables grown in contaminated soil, and prepared meat products. Therefore, bacteria from the soil, water, vegetation and animal faeces can contaminate food. Today, concern for food safety persists. Some food producers in the livestock industry have been daring enough to feed their chickens with anti-retroviral drugs to enhance their growth, something that is detrimental to human flourishing. In addition, the antibiotic and anti-microbial remedies eventually become residues in chicken, eggs and beef products, which are hazardous to human health. The use of organic herbal remedies, such as *gavakava* (aloes), in treating some of the chicken diseases is better than conventional options.

11 “Zimbabwe: Mushroom Poisoning Death Toll Rises to 10”, *The Herald*, 6 March 2018. See also Nyathi K. 2018. “15 people Die of Mushroom Poisoning in Zimbabwe”, *The East*

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suggests that food, however simple or sophisticated, can either impact negatively on human flourishing or promote human well-being when it is palatable. It has to be asked: What is the role and place of religion in regulating foodways¹² and diet towards human flourishing?

This chapter examines the contribution of Rastafari *Ital* foodways towards the advancement of human flourishing anchored on the principle of *Ital livity*.¹³ The research focuses on Nyahbinghi Rastafari communities in Africa, particularly those from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malawi and Ethiopia, in the context of their operations at the margins of society. As an Afrocentric cultural and religious movement of Jamaican origins, Rastafari, more often than not, has been misunderstood, discriminated against, stigmatised and criminalised in society.¹⁴ Given that the African continent is often conceived in the West as characterised by food scarcity and food insecurity,¹⁵ the present study analyses how far the Rastafarian system fits within the wider African patterns of linking food, law and religion to human flourishing. It is argued that Rastafari *Ital* foodways are “edible identities”¹⁶ constituting a liberative hermeneutic that can promote human flourishing. The study further provides a comparative perspective on the legal implications of Rastafarian use of food-medicines instanced by *ganja*¹⁷ in the larger African context. The research

African, 9 March. In Zimbabwe, it is common practice for people to harvest mushrooms during the rainy season to use as relish. Amongst the different varieties of mushrooms, some are not poisonous and are a delicacy for some households. However, some eat mushrooms as a result of poverty.

- 12 “Foodways” can be understood as the social, cultural and economic practice in social science that relates to the production and consumption of food showing the intersection of food in culture, tradition and history.
- 13 “*Ital*” or “*I-tal*” in Rastafari diction means “vital” or “total” when referring to food, meals, environment, social atmosphere, or way of living that is wholesome, organic, lively and hence nourishing and healthy. When used in the context of food and diet, it implies natural food or vegetarian food that enhances a vital state of being. Rastas also use the term “*Livet*” to refer to natural food that preserves the body as a temple and results in human flourishing. “*Livity*” refers to the quality of life or livelihood that a person or other living thing has. In this way, Rastas believe that “*Ital livity*” is a natural lifestyle that encompasses organic farming, food and diet. See Sibanda F. 2017. “Rastafari Perspectives on Land Use and Management in Postcolonial Zimbabwe”, in Green MC, Hackett RIJ, Hansen L and Venter F (eds). *Religious Pluralism, Heritage and Social Development in Africa*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 190, 191.
- 14 Sibanda F. 2014. “Quest for Identity: Rastafari Cultural Identities as Expression of Liberation in Postcolonial Zimbabwe”, unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Zimbabwe.
- 15 See, for example, Rademacher A. 2012. “Food Insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *Topical Review Digest: Human Rights in Sub-Saharan Africa* 75-90.
- 16 See Brulotte RL (ed). 2016. *Heritage, Culture and Identity: Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*. Farnham: Routledge.
- 17 See, for example, Sibanda F. 2015. “Legalize It!: Re-thinking Rastafari-State Relations in postcolonial Zimbabwe”, in Coertzen P, Green MC and Hansen L (eds). *Law and Religion in Africa: The Quest for the Common Good in Pluralistic Societies*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 186. *Ganja* is also known as marijuana. There are two forms of *ganja*, that is, *cannabis sativa*, which has a higher *tetrahydrocannabinol* (THC)-producing strain in humans

also analyses the Rastafarian view towards the use of genetically modified organism (GMO) food, which they regard as and unhealthy and toxic waste that threatens the purity of African bodies and African identity in light of the ethics of vulnerability. Essentially, Rastafari culinary arts are guided by the philosophy which says “you are what you eat”,¹⁸ which they deploy by “chanting down”¹⁹ the use of GMO food and other “Babylon” products that impact negatively not only on the African bodies and the environment, but also on the nature-friendly ideals and food sovereignty that could promote human flourishing in postcolonial Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Afrocentric theory informs this study on Rastafari foodways. The theory was propounded and popularised by scholars such as Molefi Kete Asante²⁰ and Ama Mazama.²¹ Afrocentricity is a response to Eurocentricity and the related cultural bias, racism and pejorative Western scholarship on Africa, Africans and their cultural heritage, both at home and abroad. The Western writers had a cynical perception of African diet, medicine, culture and religion, which were often inferiorised, misunderstood, misrepresented, distorted and displaced in all circles of life.²² Eurocentrism was the basis of a philosophy of the centre and the periphery, which placed Western culture at the centre, while African culture was placed at the margins. Afrocentricity, on the contrary, seeks to promote the agency of African people in

(and is used as food-medicine and for meditation) and industrial hemp that has a low THC-producing strain (used to produce fibre, oil, paint and other products). In Zimbabwe, *ganja* is known in Shona as *mbanje*. It is from this Shona word that the Rastafarians in Zimbabwe have used the euphemistic word, “*mupanjere*” (source of wisdom), or “wisdom weed”. Linguistically, the term “*ganja*” is traced to the Indian subcontinent, where it has been associated with the River Ganges in which banks it was grown. The word also appears in the Rig Vedas as “*gaja*” and “*ganja*” and has its root in the Sanskrit term “*ganjika*”. For Rastas, *ganja* is a sacrament and a holy herb whose leaves, *inter alia*, promote the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2) and, therein, human flourishing.

- 18 Afari Y. 2007. *Jamaica's Gift to the World: Overstanding Rastafari*. Jamaica: Senya-Cum. See also Fajans, “The Transformative Value of Food”, which shows that it is an agent for creating and sustaining social and cultural processes. This observation implies that it is something that is ingested and digested and therefore becomes one with the person. Food is not only transformed, but is transformative.
- 19 See Murrell NS, Spencer WD and McFarlane A (eds). 1998. *Chanting Down Babylon*. Kingston: IRP.
- 20 Asante M. 2007. *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance*. Malden: Polity. See also Asante M. 1990. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press; Asante M. 1987. *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- 21 Mazama A. 2001. “The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions”, *Journal of Black Studies* 31(4):387-405.
- 22 See Mndende N. 1999. “From Racial Oppression to Religious Oppression”, in Walsh TG and Kaufmann F (eds). *Religious and Social Transformation in Southern Africa*. Minnesota: Paragon House.

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prioritising an African frame of reference and holistic lifestyle.²³ Afrocentricity is applicable to Rastafari foodways, often peripheralised in light of consumerism and the politics of global food production, which has seen the West “playing God” through the use of GMO technology²⁴ and Western food aid, realising that “there are no people who are free if they are controlled by another people’s foods”.²⁵ In other words, food aid becomes an obstacle that contributes to robotised nutritional slavery and enslavement. This overlooks the specific nutritional and dietary needs of the Africans who have specific bodily differences compared to other races and cultures.²⁶ Along these lines, Afrocentricity calls for “all African phenomena, activities and ways of life to be looked at and given meaning from the standpoint and worldview of Africans”.²⁷ Afrocentric theory is useful in the context of Rastafari *Ital* foodways, which stress natural and holistic diet in contrast to the “Babylon” diet that is anchored on “denatured, highly refined, processed and synthetically chemicalised non-foods”.²⁸ Afrocentric theory is also ideal for this study, because it “stands as both a corrective and a critique”²⁹ to the attitudes and actions of past and present generations with regards to Rastafari foodways and diet in colonial and postcolonial Africa. The agency of Rastafarians in promoting self-determination in food and nutrition is conceived and critiqued. Afrocentric theory, as a critique, also sensitises Rastafarians against abuse of *ganja* amongst children in some Rastafari families that results in stunted growth and cautions about the deficiency of vitamin B₁₂ in the Rasta food pyramid, both of which are averse to human flourishing.

The study underlying this chapter used qualitative research methodology. This encompassed the use of case study methods to examine the *Ital* foodways amongst the Nyahbinghi Rastafari communities in Africa, particularly those from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malawi and Ethiopia. As data gathering techniques, I used participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentary analysis of Rastafari pamphlets and the Rastafari Code of Conduct,³⁰ as well as electronic and print media. During participant observation, I visited different Rastafari families in their homes and

23 Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*.

24 Kotzé M. 2016. “GM Food and Collective Sin: A Christian Theological Ethical Reflection”, *Scriptura* 115:1-10. Rastas promote the use of GMO-free products.

25 Afrika, *African Holistic Health*, 16, 17.

26 Afrika, *African Holistic Health*, 15. It is asserted that blacks assimilate food in their intestines differently from other races and therefore have unique nutritional and medical dietary needs. Thus, Africans must not succumb to European dietary whitewash.

27 Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 27.

28 Afrika, *African Holistic Health*, 16.

29 Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 27.

30 See The Rastafari Code of Conduct, Ratified in July-August 2008 by The NyahBinghi Ancient Council and NyahBinghi delegates from across the Caribbean, Africa and the USA. Online at: <https://www.africasource.com/rasta/sesostris-the-great-the-egyptian-hercules/rastafari-code-of-conduct/An Afrocentric Manifesto>. This is a general guideline of acceptable Rastafari practice or “*livity*”, including the teachings and examples of the elders on health and dietary practice.

at *binghi*³¹ sessions, where I had a chance to attain a deeper insight into Rastafari lifestyles through participating in and having direct observation of their cooking and eating habits. Through triangulation of data collection techniques, the weaknesses of one method were covered up by the strengths of other techniques. The study also benefitted from the insights from the historical, sociological and phenomenological approaches to describe and interpret data at my disposal. The historical approach was vital in tracing the Rastafari *Ital* dietary patterns as resistance to Western dietary enslavement and modern junk food. The sociological approach encompasses the tenets of the sociology of food and eating.³² The sociological approach is relevant in studying food as material culture and eating as a “social act”, a “social event” resulting in the “food social fact”.³³ This shows that food has social implications. Of interest here is the food object and the social meanings derived from its consumption in the perspective of Rastafarians. In that way, food, including what, how and with whom we eat, becomes a powerful device for the articulation and negotiation of individual and group identity in society. For instance, the sociology of food and eating makes one appreciate that, on the basis of gender, male and female Rastas do not share the chalice pot of *ganja*, unlike other types of *Ital* foodways. This evokes the concept of “food social space”,³⁴ useful in unveiling the context under which the sociological perspective contributes to the understanding of food and eating practices. The phenomenological approach allows one to tap into the insider perspective and experiences of Rastafarian *Ital* foodways by using the principles of *epoche* (bracketing out), empathy and anti-reductionism. Insights from these approaches are used in a complimentary way in this study.

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN FLOURISHING

This section grapples with the definitional challenge on the concept of human flourishing. Like any other concept, “human flourishing” is like an elusive butterfly as it defies confinement to a universal definition. In some academic works, human flourishing is traced to its ancient Greek philosophical roots in which Aristotle used the word *eudaimonia*, translated as “happiness” and encompassing “doing well,

31 *Binghi* refers to the shrine where Rastas worship.

32 See Locher JL, Yoels WC, Maurer D and Van Ells J. 2005. “Comfort Foods: An Exploratory Journey into the Social and Emotional Significance of Food”, *Food and Foodways* 13:275. See also McIntosh WA. 1996. *Sociologies of Food and Nutrition*. New York: Plenum Press, 245, where in a view on the sociology of food and eating it is observed that “food, eating, and experiences of the body all have emotional implications”. In addition, Lupton D. 1996. *Food, the Body, and the Self*. London: Sage, 277, says that there are diverse kinds of emotions associated with food, including emotions of anger, anxiety, caring, disappointment, disgust, embarrassment, frustration, guilt, happiness, hate, love, nostalgia, resentment, revulsion, security and comfort. All this shows that food has physical, psychological and emotional effects.

33 Gora LS. 2018. “The Sociology of Food: Eating and the Place of Food in Society”, *Food and Foodways* 26(1):84.

34 Gora, “The Sociology of Food”, 84.

behaving well and faring well”.³⁵ In contemporary parlance, *eudaimonia* is often referred to as human flourishing. For Tony MacCulloch, a mental health practitioner, the word flourishing conjures “visions of life, people, energy, nature, relationships, and human endeavours that blossom and grow in every sense of the word”.³⁶ In other words, human flourishing implies the actualisation of human potential in life. Human flourishing also extends beyond the personal to the inter- and trans-personal dimensions, showing “the spiritual and transcendental dimensions of human wellbeing”.³⁷ Hence, human flourishing is a guided and intentional life that nurtures and promotes good health, good relations between humanity, the Creator and the environment. For instance, the Afrocentric Rastafari commitment to human flourishing in Africa is evident from their perspectives on land use,³⁸ green philosophy,³⁹ environmental ethic⁴⁰ and *Ital* diet, which is the focus of this chapter. In this study, I employ the concept of human flourishing as meaning a powerful positive vision and self-knowledge/self-consciousness that constitutes growing well, making good choices, creating a balance in a “(w)holistic” life, and prospering as well as thriving realised through, amongst other things, following a healthy lifestyle and diet leading to living life to the full and well-being.

A KALEIDOSCOPE OF RASTAFARI HISTORY IN AFRICA

Rastafari emerged as a socio-cultural, political and religious movement amongst oppressed and marginalised black ex-slaves living under the poverty-stricken conditions and at the lowest rung of the Caribbean society. The black people in Jamaica were inspired by Garveyism, Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism which

35 Wolbert LS, De Ruyter DJ and Schinkel A. 2015. “Formal Criteria for the Concept of Human Flourishing: The First Step in Defending Flourishing as an Ideal Aim of Education”, *Ethics and Education* 10(1):118. Aristotle’s philosophy on *eudaimonia* is explored in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, which refers to the highest good.

36 MacCulloch T. 2011. “Flourishing: A Vision for Everybody”, *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 32(5):335.

37 Graham E. 2011. “Frailty and Flourishing: Good-News for Humanity – Response to Alister McGrath”, *Practical Theology* 4(3):337. Elaine Graham refers to Richard Layard’s seven indicators of human well-being as follows: (1) stable and satisfying family relationships; (2) income, although increasing wealth above a certain limit seems to engender diminishing marginal returns; (3) work: not just as provider of financial security, but a source of self-worth; (4) networks of community and friends; (5) good health; (6) personal freedom; and (7) personal values and philosophy of life. From these indicators, good health comes closest to the essence of human flourishing through health food and diet.

38 See Sibanda, “Rastafari Perspectives on Land Use and Management”, 189-203.

39 See Sibanda F. 2015. “Rastafari Green Philosophy for Sustainable Development in Postcolonial Zimbabwe: Harnessing Eco-theology and Eco-justice”, in Chimhanda FH, Molobi VMS and Mothoagae ID (eds). *African Theological Reflections: Critical Voices on Liberation, Leadership, Gender and Eco-Justice*. Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, UNISA, 187-206.

40 Sibanda F. 2012. “The Impact of Rastafari Ecological Ethic in Zimbabwe: A Contemporary Discourse”, *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 5(3):59-76.

resulted in the emergence of Rastafari in 1930, following the crowning as Negus of Ethiopia of Ras Tafari Makonnen, who later adopted the title Emperor Haile Selassie I.⁴¹ In the Rastafari cosmology, the crowning of Haile Selassie I fulfilled Marcus Garvey's prophecy in which a black king and redeemer of the oppressed black people would be crowned in Ethiopia. Today, Rastafari, a black conscious spiritual movement that Haile Selassie I inspired, has grown and spread phenomenally to become a global new religious movement, partly through the contribution of Rastafari reggae music icons such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Burning Spear.⁴² A characteristic feature of Rastafari as a new religious movement from the earliest times to the present in different geo-political boundaries is its existence as a religion of the minority operating on the periphery of society, misunderstood and maligned as a movement of "rascals" and "drug addicts", both in the place of its origin and beyond, including elsewhere on the African continent. Yasus Afari, a Rastafari author and practitioner, describes Rastafari through a subtitle of his book as "Jamaica's gift to the world".⁴³ The Rastafari gift to the world can be conceived on the basis of Rastafari *Ital* vegetarian foodways and diet anchored on African identity and advocated through "Rasta social theory",⁴⁴ to the extent that health food is now big business and part of people's consciousness, the world over.

Rastafari has spread to different parts of the African continent, including Ethiopia, South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe. This process cannot be isolated from the historical developments in Africa. The Rastafari philosophy is partly inspired by Psalms 68:31, which says, "Princes come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will submit herself to God." In general, Africa and Ethiopia are interchangeable in Rastafari cosmology. Rastafari is deeply bound to Ethiopia, which Rastas regard as the "Promised Land" or their "Zion" – a symbol of free and uncolonised African identity.⁴⁵ The earliest

41 Coltri MA. 2015. *Beyond Rastafari: An Historical and Theological Introduction*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 95. Coltri says Ras Tafari was the 225th direct descendent of King Solomon. On 2 November 1930, in St. George's Cathedral, Addis Ababa, Ras Tafari Makonnen was proclaimed as Haile Selassie I. He was the last Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Emperor. This shows a close link between Rastafari and Ethiopian Christianity and the subsequent influence on Rasta cultural and religious activities such as dietary habits. In fact, Ras Tafari was the founder of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Patriarchate in Addis Ababa in the middle of the twentieth century. See also Sibanda, "Rastafari perspectives on Land Use and Management", 192, 193.

42 Chamley S. 2008. "The Rise and Rise of Black Consciousness", *New African* 470:83; See also Sibanda, "The Impact of Rastafari Ecological Ethic in Zimbabwe".

43 See Afari, *Jamaica's Gift to the World*.

44 Semaj L. 2013. "From Peace and Love to 'Fyah Bun': Did Rastafari Lose its Way?", *Caribbean Quarterly* 59(2):101.

45 Coltri, *Beyond Rastafari*, 53. The colours of the Ethiopian flag, namely red, gold and green, are deemed the colours of African liberation movements. The colours are used in making Rastafari dress, bangles and belts, amongst other artefacts. The colour green signifies the natural environment and the vegetarian diet of Rastas that seeks to promote human flourishing.

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recorded settlement of Rastas in Ethiopia was when Emperor Haile Selassie I allocated 500 hectares of land in Shashamane to those who would repatriate to Africa. The Rastas in this community pursued a natural “*livity*” revealing a consciousness to the *Ital* ideal “expressed through diet, hairstyle, a rural experience, a sense of community, and emphasis of simplicity”.⁴⁶ Today, Rastafarians in Ethiopia are not confined to Shashamane, but are found in different rural and urban centres.

The Rastafari communities in Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe developed within the framework of the revolutionary struggles against oppressive “Babylon” systems and postcolonial euphoria associated with independence. Malawi got its independence in 1964 under the leadership of Hastings Kamuzu Banda. History has it that in 1965, His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie I visited Malawi for three days to bless and protect the people, having come at a time when there were ethnic wars for leadership amongst the Ngoni, Yao and Tonga. It is significant to note that Selassie’s message promoted human flourishing through encouraging peace and brotherhood relations amongst the Malawians. During that visit, Haile Selassie went to four districts, namely, Zomba, Blantyre, Chiradzulu and Cholo, where he met a group of farmers, amongst other activities, which in the view of Rastas testified Haile Selassie’s interest in human flourishing through food production and food security. Today, Malawi is home to thousands of Rastas of the Nyahbinghi tradition that began to grow tremendously from 1985 forward, when they became more organised as a group, with many religiously following a natural *livity* encompassing *Ital* vegetarian dietary practices.⁴⁷ The Rastafari experience in Malawi is comparable to that of South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Research has shown that the formal introduction of Rastafari in South Africa was realised in the post-apartheid era on 28 December 1997. This was when Rastafarians from most South African provinces gathered in Grasmere, south of Johannesburg.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the ideological foundation of Rastafari was laid long before its formal inauguration through the influence of two significant movements, namely, Ethiopianism and Garveyism. On this basis, the emergence of the South African Rastafari movement was connected to the black people’s response to social, political and economic marginalisation mirrored in the anti-apartheid and Pan-Africanist

46 Sibanda, “The Impact of Rastafari Ecological Ethic in Zimbabwe”, 68.

47 My interviews with Rastafari elders from Malawi revealed that the Nyahbinghi Rastas in Malawi have organised Binghi Centres that operate under the “24 Elders Nyahbinghi Rastafari”, representing the Northern, Central and Southern regions. There are Provincial/District Binghi Centres with four or so smaller Binghi shrines where they hold Nyahbinghi Assemblies. In the Northern Region, Binghi Centres are: Nsimba, Nkatabhe, Mzuzu, Chitipa, Rumphu, Karonga and Likoma; Central Region Binghi Centres are: Kaware (Lilongwe), Kasungu, Salima, Nkotakota, Nchinji, Dowa, Deza and Ntchisi; Southern Region Binghi Centres are: Chisombezi, Zomba, Mulanje, Palombe, Thyolo, Chikwawa, Musanje, Blantyre, Mwanza, Balaka, Machinga, Mangoche, Ncheu and Chireka. The legacy of Selassie’s visit to Malawi is also captured through land dedicated to Rastafari sons and daughters for repatriation known as “Zomba Emperor’s View”.

48 Chawane MH. 2014. “The Rastafarian Movement in South Africa: A Religion or Way of Life?”, *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27(2):220.

struggles in the twentieth century. The revolutionary element that characterised Rastafari utilised the conduit of reggae music to spread rapidly. In fact, Rastafari only began to spread to South Africa through reggae music, not as an organised outfit, but as a subculture manifesting mainly amongst young black men.⁴⁹ It has been observed that the “armed rebels in the African bush ... [listened] to Bob Marley’s unforgettable roots reggae music, pulled by its refractory status, social and political consciousness.”⁵⁰ This shows the importance of roots reggae music as a source of inspiration about being African and proud to a significant proportion of people in South Africa. The missionary visits of some original founders of the Jamaican Nyahbinghi Order to South Africa such as Ras Boanerges in the 1990s have been credited for the subsequent adoption of Nyahbinghi Order ceremonies and religious regulations,⁵¹ such as the *Ital* vegetarian diet, amongst the Rastafari communities.

In Zimbabwe, the emergence of Rastafari is also anchored in the revolutionary and ideological roots associated with Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism that preceded the independence of the country in 1980. Like in the apartheid era, during the colonial period, Rastas operated as a subculture in Zimbabwe. In this way, although the exact period when the formal Rastafari movement was established is inconclusive,⁵² the most plausible theory points to the postcolonial era rather than the precolonial period. In fact, the historic Bob Marley show and his message at independence eve, on 17 April 1980, coupled with the euphoria of freedom from colonial rule, promoted a fresh perspective amongst the black populace that was a fertile ground for the emergence of Rastafari. Today, Zimbabwe is home to several Nyahbinghi Rastafari houses mainly located in the urban areas. As Nyahbinghi Rastas, they follow an *Ital* food and vegetarian dietary pattern as part of their *livity*.

THE DYNAMICS OF RELIGION, FOOD AND DIET

Research has shown that the choice of food is influenced by different factors, including the “environmental, socio-economic, educational, age, gender, state of health, culture and religion”.⁵³ Notably, religion is amongst the factors that

49 Jarvenpaa T. 2015. “Jumping Nyahbinghi Youths: Local Articulations of Roots Reggae Music in a Rastafarian Dance Hall in Cape Town”, *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 40(1):9.

50 Chamley, “The Rise and Rise of Black Consciousness”, 83.

51 Jarvenpaa, “Jumping Nyahbinghi Youths”, 10. Tuomas Jarvenpaa further notes that there was no direct contact with the Jamaican Rastafari movement during apartheid. Missionary activities were organised by Jamaican Rastafarians in the 1990s in order to buttress the global links between Rastas. Such a move was extended to South Africa.

52 See Sibanda F. 2017. “Praying for Rain? A Rastafari Perspective from Zimbabwe”, *The Ecumenical Review* 69(3):413; See also Sibanda, “The Impact of Rastafari Ecological Ethic”, 67. Some say Rastafari in Zimbabwe preceded independence, because the black fighters in the liberation struggle were influenced by reggae music. Other theorists say the formal groups of Rastafari were established after the attainment of independence.

53 Maposa and Sibanda, “Going an Extra Mile”, 57.

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influence food choice, in addition to food availability, cost, personal preference, cultural upbringing and religious precincts. In Africa, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Islam, African Indigenous Religion (AIR) and Rastafari, amongst other religions, consumer patterns and diet are shaped by their faith and beliefs in order to meet some practical and moral reasons. In Orthodox Judaism, the laws of *kashrut* are important in guiding the type of food eaten and its preparation as enunciated in the Old Testament. Hence, the Jews show respect for the Sabbath in meal preparation and make use of *kosher* butcheries to buy meat, as part of their strict observance of tradition.⁵⁴ Amongst Christians, the food and diet is not homogenous. For instance, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, some follow a lacto-vegetarian diet, while in Johane Marange Apostolic Church, one of the African Independent Churches, a strict Old Testament dietary pattern is followed, such as not taking pork or some fish types without fins or scales, such as eel (*muramba*).⁵⁵ The Islamic diet is also determined by their religion. Based on the Quran, the Muslims stick to *halal* meat products, showing why the “*halal* food controversy”⁵⁶ between Muslims and Christians was essentially a theological struggle on food in Zimbabwe that cannot be underrated. It required a compromise to resolve the food controversy through the Government’s intervention. The Muslims successfully marketed a religious slaughter ceremony that prevented ingesting of blood in animals and birds slaughtered, which was a health risk. Muslims also show their self-discipline by fasting during the Ramadan, the ninth month of their lunar calendar. In African Indigenous Religion, the traditional African diet encompasses edible wild fruits, edible insects, cereals, legumes, nuts, oilseeds, vegetables, mushrooms

54 Maposa and Sibanda, “Going an Extra Mile”, 58. Jews follow the Food Laws stated in Leviticus 11:3, 7-8. For instance, they ensure that they avoid eating creatures that do not chew the cud. In addition, they also take caution that there is maximum blood loss when a beast is slaughtered and where *kosher* butcheries are unavailable, they opt for *halal* meat from Muslim butcheries showing self-discipline. This is comparable to the Rastafari diet that follows the biblical teaching, which avoids the eating of blood. In that way, most Rastas avoid eating meat and take *Ital* food by following a vegetarian diet ensuring a natural *livity*.

55 Maposa and Sibanda, “Going an Extra Mile”, 58.

56 See, for example, Ruzivo M. 2008. “Evangelical Christian-Muslim Relations in Zimbabwe”, *Insight* 6(1):28. *Halal* denotes the food products prepared according to the requirements of the Islamic law. The *halal* food controversy in Zimbabwe serves as a microcosm to a macrocosm of the long history of dialectical Christian-Muslim relations. The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), a Christian organ, planned a boycott of all *halal* meat products in 1996 and even gave an ultimatum to abattoirs to stop supplying *halal* meat by 20 December of that year. EFZ claimed that their freedom of choice and conscience were being violated by about 3% of the population that constitute the Muslim population in Zimbabwe as compared to the over 70% Christian population. They argued that buying and eating *halal* products was ideologically loaded and equivalent to giving in to the demands of the Islamic faith, instanced by the Quran 2:173; 4:02, 173. Hence, EFZ wanted to pressure the Government to stop employing Muslims in the slaughter of meat to be consumed by the Christian majority. They threatened to boycott the purchase of *halal* certified products in supermarkets. In response, the Muslim community threatened to withdraw the licence that certified meat products as *halal* in Zimbabwe, which would negatively affect the Government export markets in the Arab world.

and caterpillars. These constitute a balanced diet, with taboos and rituals enhancing the efficacy of their food and dietary patterns.⁵⁷ This shows the power of culture and religion as important determinants of the food and diet in society, a factor that will be illustrated through Rastafari foodways in the next section.

HUMAN FLOURISHING THROUGH RASTAFARI *ITAL* FOODWAYS

Human flourishing is a vision for most Rastafarians in Africa. The Rastafari commitment to human flourishing is encapsulated in their “green philosophy” and world view pertaining to land use, environmental ethic and *Ital livet* (diet), which are Afrocentric in thrust. The inspiration behind Rastafari green philosophy is His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie I. His Majesty was “a keen observer of human nature and the natural environment”.⁵⁸ Rastafarians record that Haile Selassie admonished Rastas to plant a million trees every year for food (to nourish and feed the hungry), medicine (to heal the sick and partaken as food-medicines) and as a spiritual consciousness for the environment.⁵⁹ The issue of providing food that nourishes and feeds the hungry is raised in the Ethiopian Creed that guides Rastas everywhere. This shows that from its inception the Rastafarians stressed the aspect of human flourishing through *Ital* foodways. The statements which say, “You are what you eat” and “Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food”,⁶⁰ are confirmed in Rastafari lifestyles. A closer look at these slogans reveals that the identity of Rastafarians can be determined on the basis of their culinary heritage. The statements are in tandem with the Rastafari dietary, nutritional and medicinal codes. In addition, the statements suggest that the food they eat is the “fuel for the human vehicle, the body”.⁶¹ On the basis of their food and diet, Rastas can cultivate their physical, mental and spiritual states through making corresponding choices in different areas of life. Rastas argue that originally, humanity was designed as vegetarian-fruitarian and lacto-vegetarian, such that eating flesh, blood and bones was an anathema to their biological make-up.⁶² Thus, though Rastafarians may not be a homogenous group in their eating habits and sources of food, it can be asserted that they regard their food as medicine and their medicine as food consistent with the nature-friendly and holistic way for human flourishing in Africa.

The food and diet of the majority of Nyahbinghi Rastafari communities in Ethiopia, South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe are represented in slogans inscribed on the

57 Maposa and Sibanda, “Going an Extra Mile”.

58 Selassie ES. 2004. “Foreword”, *The Wise Mind of Emperor Haile Sellassie I*. Chicago: Research Associates School Times Publications, 10.

59 Sibanda, “Rastafari Green Philosophy”.

60 Afari, *Jamaica’s Gift to the World*, 142.

61 Afari, *Jamaica’s Gift to the World*, 142.

62 Afari, *Jamaica’s Gift to the World*, 143.

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regalia of some Rasta participants directly observed by the researcher during fieldwork such as “Go Organic” and “Go Vegetarian”. Observation of these slogans gives a clue to the guiding philosophy practised by many committed Rastas in their cultivation, preparation and consumption of food. The idea of “going organic” applies to organic farming and eating foods produced organically without use of artificial fertilisers and chemicals. The idea of “going vegetarian” suggests not only the use of *Ital* food, but also consumption of a vegetarian diet that promotes human flourishing. A significant number of Nyahbinghi Rastas in Africa are doing their best to eat holistic and natural foods, fruits and vegetables, so as to maximise nourishment, as noted in the Rastafari food pyramid.⁶³ The main sources of Rastafari food include vegetables, herbs, whole-grains, fruits, herbal tonics, root drinks and juices, as well as nuts of different kinds that enhance human flourishing.

The study also established that some of the Rastas eat fish and white meat, such as poultry, while some are strict vegetarians who said they do not consume meat, poultry or pork because they believe that human bodies should not be “mortuaries”. In an interview, one Zimbabwean Rastafari elder, labelled meat eaters as “Nyamabinghis”,⁶⁴ in contrast to real Nyahbinghi Rastafarians, who

63 Afari, *Jamaica's Gift to the World*, 155. The following elements are notable in the Food Pyramid as presented by Yasus Afari: (1) At the base of the Rastafari pyramid, there are some cereals and grains such as wheat, rice, oats, potatoes, cassava and yam. These are sources of carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, such as iron and zinc. This level has starchy food prepared through baking, roasting or steaming. (2) The second layer from the broad base has three varieties, namely (a) fruits and juices, (b) legumes and nuts, (c) vegetables and juices – the fruits are important sources of vitamins, fibre, enzymes, minerals and antioxidants. They are rich in medicinal value that promotes health and well-being. The legumes such as beans and peas are sources of protein and minerals for vegetarians, while nuts, such as peanuts and coconut, are sources of protein and minerals. The vegetables and juices are rich sources of vitamins, iron, potassium, fibre and antioxidants. (3) The third level of the food pyramid consists of water, oil, punch, herbal roots and drinks. The herbs include aloe vera, garlic, lemon grass, marijuana, mint and spices, such as pepper, ginger, rosemary, turmeric and cinnamon. The herbs improve the taste of the food and also have medicinal properties that strengthen the immune system, assist the digestive system, improve the blood flow, respiration, relieve pain and medicate the body. The root drinks and juices are prepared from herbs and roots that boost the immune system and have medicinal properties that are recognised in traditional medicine and culture and acknowledged in modern medical systems. They also use some of the barks, buds, leaves and stems in their herbal tonics and drinks, forming part of their *Ital* diet. (4) At the apex of the pyramid, there is milk, fish and cheese (not because of importance, but to show that this food is taken a few times weekly, occasionally or not at all), whereas levels 1-3 consist of food taken daily in varying amounts. Punctuating this *Ital* food and diet is consistent meditation, physical work and exercise in clean fresh air. The whole Food Pyramid shows the Afrocentric nature of Rastafari food-medicines.

64 The word “Nyamabinghi” is derived from a combination of “nyama” (Shona word for “meat”) and “binghi”. The Rastas in Zimbabwe are mainly of the Nyahbinghi tradition. This makes “Nyamabinghi” to be a corruption of the word “Nyahbinghi”. This would refer to Rastas who are meat eaters and who are failing to adapt to the strict Nyahbinghi tradition of being vegetarians.

follow strict *Ital* vegetarian dietary patterns. In addition, one empress⁶⁵ revealed the challenges some Rastas face, particularly on dietary matters. She noted that “most women find it difficult to keep the dietary rules especially on the issue of meat”, but empresses “married in non-Rasta families find it difficult to do otherwise”.⁶⁶ This shows that Rastafari dietary identity is a contested element within the movement and in society.

On another case, one Zimbabwean Rastafari family, which described itself as a “Nazarene family” because its diet that was totally vegan and regarded the body as the temple of the Most High, argued that people needed to be nourished through herbs and organic food. The claim of the “Nazarene family” on *Ital* diet was observed through fieldwork by the present researcher, including visits and sharing food with the family that resides at Dangwe Arts and Culture Village in Kaseke Village. At one time, this Rastafari family hosted some Rastafari brethren from Malawi, which further exposed the researcher to their *Ital* food and dietary system. The “Nazarene family” diet that was prepared and shared by all reflects a Rastafari dietary consciousness that is an identity marker and an expression of liberation from Western consumerism and utensils.⁶⁷ On their small plot of land at Dangwe Arts and Culture Village, the “Nazarene family” practises organic farming in the garden which had some herbal plants, vegetables and fruits that they use to enhance human flourishing.⁶⁸ I observed the use of permaculture and intercropping in their organic farming, which they said was sustainable and does not destroy the soil, in contrast to the use of artificial fertilisers and chemicals. I was also taken to the garden to see the pumpkin and wheat sprouts. The Rasta elders explained that every sprout has strength, just as any cure comes through *Ital* food-medicines. In the case of wheat sprouts, one can cut the leaves and roots and stew them, while the wheat sprouts can be put in hot water and drunk after about five minutes.

65 Empress is a title of honour accorded to female Rastas. They are also referred to as “daughters”, “Queens” and “womb-men”, not “women”.

66 Interview held with Empress Indica by F Sibanda, Chaminuka House, Chitungwiza, 3 November 2012. Female Rastas are known as Empresses. Rastafari diet is not homogenous. Through observation and interviews, it was noted that Nyahbinghi Rastafarians in most African states were following different types of vegetarian diets with some being (1) partial vegetarians, Nyamabinghis whose diet included fish and poultry and no red meat; (2) lactoovo vegetarians, whose diet had plant foods, dairy products and eggs; (3) lacto vegetarians, whose diet had plant foods and dairy products; and (4) total vegetarians (vegans), whose diet consisted of plant foods only.

67 The food was prepared in clay pots and served in wooden plates and cups, which is healthy.

68 Through a group interview discussion at Dangwe Arts and Culture Village with brethren from Malawi on 31 July 2018, it was established that the seeds of all fruits were full of good nutrients. For instance, one could eat moringa and apple seeds every day. In addition, teas and caffeine-free coffee could be made from avocado seed, round nuts, soya beans, *ganja* (from leaves), okra and baobab seeds. It was argued that taking a variety of these *Ital* beverages prevented being addictive. The powder from seeds, such as avocados, could be served in porridge to increase blood levels in the body and to lower blood pressure levels.

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The findings of the study also revealed the creativity of Rastafarians in food preparation, as instanced by the use of soya beans. As expressed by one elder: "Soya has a lot of protein. We call it a magic plant because we can make soya nuts, soya beans, soya eggs, soya ice cream, soya *maheu*, soya pies, soya meat, soya mince and soya milk shake. Rastas are now preparing their own [*Ital*] sausages because those sold in shops may use chemicals or GMOs."⁶⁹

Some of these Rastafari foodways are popular with the public, as they have been shared with Rastas and non-Rastas alike through "*Ital* Food Fairs" and "Family Fun Days" organised from time to time to coincide with important days on the Rastafari calendar.⁷⁰ Rastafarians are conscious in their diet and avoid artificially preserved and genetically modified crops "polluted" by modern technologies and Western consumerism.

As Rastafari evolves in different part of Africa, there are some challenges that they have to grapple with in serving *Ital* food and diet that is balanced in terms of nutrition. For instance, it is said that Rastafari food and vegetarian diet scientifically falls short of vitamin B₁₂, which is crucial for young women and children. In addition, research has established that some *Ital* food which is the ideal for Rastas is either not available on the market or is beyond the reach for many Rastafarian families in Africa. One elder had this to say concerning the difficulties faced in implementing recommended Rastafari foodways: "We must visit each other in homes and learn more on Rasta food which is balanced on vitamins, iron and calcium, amongst others. Rasta *Ital* food is there in the supermarkets, but it is not affordable to many of us. It is impossible to have unleavened bread without having our own bakeries. If people had land, they could grow their own crops."⁷¹ This shows the challenges of following Rastafari *Ital* foodways in Africa.

Building up on the above challenges, there is one controversial area that is anchored on Rastafari food-medicines and is focused on the Rastafari use of *ganja*.⁷² Amongst

69 Group interview discussions with Elders of Marondera Nyahbinghi Rastafari by F Sibanda, Marondera, 15 December 2012. "*Maheu*" is the Shona term for a sour non-alcoholic drink.

70 In Zimbabwe, the researcher established that some commemorations of important Rastafari days are also vital occasions for showcasing Rastafari foodways that provide different *Itals*, including African indigenous food varieties. Sibanda, "Quest for Identity", 294, notes that *Ital* food preparation and presentation was an art that required skill in Rasta diet as stressed by Empress Ethiop and Empress Sheebah in the Zimbabwean context. The name "Ethiop" is complete in its own right, but it is obviously derived from "Ethiopia", which refers to the country and, in another sense, to the whole of Africa, as well as to the element of "blackness". Some of the important days on the Rastafari calendar, including the Earthday (birthday of Emperor Haile Selassie I) and Empress Menen, are sometimes celebrated in ways that showcase *Ital* food preparation.

71 Interview with a Rastafari elder by F Sibanda, Epworth, Harare, 27 November 2011. The coconut or the "dread-nut" is very important in Rastafari diet, but unaffordable to many Rastas. Through observation, I confirmed the exorbitant prices charged for the coconut in the supermarkets.

72 As explained earlier, there are two types of *ganja*: (i) *cannabis sativa*, which has a high *tetrahydrocannabinol* (THC)-producing strain and is used by people for smoking and for

Rastas, *ganja* is used in seasoning food and preparing *ganja*-ginger biscuits as well as herbal tea, that is, *ganja* in tea taken as food and medicine as natural as vegetables and fruits. In Rastafari culture, *ganja* is referred to as a holy herb/weed and is regarded as “Holy Bread” or the “Bread of Life” in its sacramental use. Biblically, Rastafarians uphold that *ganja* is the tree of life is for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2).⁷³ This shows that *ganja* can promote human flourishing, as it can cure countless ailments, such as glaucoma, asthma and cancer. Rastafarian use of *ganja* is part of the African holistic approach to health and food that is significant for medicinal, herbatical, spiritual, recreational, culinary and other practical purposes.⁷⁴ In spite of these life-enhancing uses of *ganja*, Rastas continue to face problems in openly using it. Historically, *ganja* was classified as a dangerous drug “harmful” to health by “Babylon systems”, which criminalised its use.⁷⁵ In recent developments, South Africa legalised the use of cannabis in private places and the growing of it for private consumption by adults, while the government of Zimbabwe legalised licensed farming of *ganja* for medicinal and scientific research.⁷⁶

Alongside *Ital* food and diet, Rastafari promotes human flourishing through art therapy characterised by meditation, physical work (Jah works) and exercise. This is partly anchored on Chi Gong movement – a physiotherapy and yoga philosophy based on Kermetic knowledge.⁷⁷ In line with health and well-being, Rastas say that

consumption as food-medicine, and (ii) industrial hemp, which is a non-narcotic type of *ganja* with a low THC-producing strain.

- 73 See Hewitt RR. 2018. “For the Healing of the Nations: Rastafari Dialogical Narrative Discourse on Decriminalization of Marijuana/*Ganja*”, in Okyere-Manu B and Moyo H (eds). *Intersecting African Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Moral Convergence and Divergence*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- 74 See Afari, *Jamaica's Gift to the World*, 89, who notes that Rastas regard *ganja* as a natural sacred herb, whose multiple roles include the “medicinal, nutritional, pharmaceutical, industrial, biological, cosmetological, cosmological, spiritual, intellectual and therapeutic properties for the benefit of all humanity”. Rastas also refer to Genesis 1:12, 29 in support of their belief that God created cannabis for human use as *Ital* (natural) food-medicine.
- 75 Hewitt, “For the Healing of the Nation”, 131. It is said the anti-marijuana global agenda was made in the USA under a hypocritical and deceptive agenda.
- 76 “Mbanje Smoking Legalised in SA”, *NewsdzeZimbabwe*, 18 September 2018. The licence fees for marijuana farming in Zimbabwe are prohibitive as they were pegged at \$50,000. Most Rastas also lack the land for practising organic farming.
- 77 Interview with Rastafari elders from Malawi and Zimbabwe by F Sibanda, Harare, 31 July 2018. The researcher observed and participated in the Chi Gong physiotherapy demonstrations at Dangwe Arts and Culture Centre led by Priest Batawi and Ras Sakhala of Malawi. Literally, “Chi” is the control of breath, while “Gong” means “master”. Thus, Chi Gong could be understood as master of controlling breath. It was revealed that Chi Gong was a meditation exercise which was originally practised in Ancient times of Kemet (Egypt) by monks, priests and patriarchs. The skills and philosophy of Chi Gong were important for enhancing the physique of soldiers guarding the Ark of the Covenant, which Rastas believe is in Ethiopia. Chi Gong is the breath of life that helped the individual's level of focus, strength, courage and long living. The seven lights that enlighten life are the eyes, the ears, the nose and the mouth. See Martin R. 2016. “Can you practically apply Kermetic Knowledge?” *Khematic Centered Living*, 25 October. According to Martin,

the purpose of Chi Gong is to cleanse, heal and energise the body. One Rasta elder stated: "Our bodies represent heavens with air, water and fire. The highest heavens or the throne [head] and the spinal cord, that is, the River Jordan where milk and honey flows, are cleaned through Chi Gong. You heal oneself through Chi Gong by the art of controlling breath from the diaphragm. The anointed oil from our brain nourishes the entire body or energises it. This exercise opens the seven seals or seven gates in the human body. *Ital* food and herbs complement the aspect of physiotherapy."⁷⁸ Therefore, besides herbs and natural *Ital* food and diet, Chi Gong is critical to Rastafarian health and survival.

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR RASTAFARI FOODWAYS: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Although Rastafarians have a revolutionary quest in food and nutrition that is nature-friendly and geared for self-determination, they are faced with the challenges of consumerism and the politics of global food production. Most Rastafarians in Africa are landless and cannot practise the organic farming that feeds into the *Ital* foodways. For instance, in Ethiopia, some repatriated Rastas who were allocated 500 hectares of land in the Shashamane community by Haile Selassie I lost it to locals when the Emperor was deposed in 1974.⁷⁹ In Zimbabwe, the majority of Rastafari currently do not have land to cultivate, partly due to political and bureaucratic impediments by the government.⁸⁰ Therefore, Rastas remain a minority group on the periphery of society enduring the criminalisation and stigmatisation through labels like "drug addicts", "lazy" and "good for nothing" fellows. This has militated against the Rastafari claim for space at the centre despite their noble motive to "liberate" food and diet for Africa and the Africans. However, despite their limited numerical strength and marginalisation, Rastafari has made some inroads into dietary patterns in Africa. Rastas "chant down" partaking of non-holistic diet based on highly refined and processed foods that oppresses and enslaves people through their stomachs. Instead, they seek to promote human flourishing by purifying African bodies through an *Ital* diet. This is essential for the detoxification of Africa

Kemetic knowledge was based on ancient Egyptian philosophy and principles that never changed. It emphasised that everything that exists is created from within the ALL and that one's reality or universe is created from within oneself. The existential situation is from within. This is mirrored in one's health and anchored on one's diet or effort.

78 Interview with a Rasta elder from Malawi by F Sibanda, Dangwe Arts and Culture Centre, Kaseke Village, 30 July 2018. This shows that physiotherapy and *Ital* food-medicines are complementary. This resonates with the observation raised by Afrika when he says: "African Empires, civilisations, music, art, philosophy, science, medicine and culture were built upon wholistic foods and medicine" (Afrika, *African Holistic Health*, 16).

79 Campbell H. 1985. *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*. Dar Es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 346. From the original 500 hectares of land dedicated for the Rasta community at Shashamene, only 44 hectares were returned to Rastas through negotiations.

80 See Sibanda, "Rastafari Perspectives on Land Use and Management", 189-203.

at a time when some of the GMOs are being shipped to Africa as food aid. Aid through synthetically chemicalised non-foods becomes an obstacle that damages human health and well-being.

In line with the above issue of food aid, Rastafarians are sceptical and readily critique the philanthropocracy of Western humanitarianism. The West, as a “Babylon system” is playing God, through a ploy that eventually intoxicates African bodies. In the Rastafarian perspective, GMO food is not merely food to eat, but it is also political and ideological. This resonates with the observation that “dietary enslavement results in dis-eases, constipation and bodily destruction”.⁸¹ Thus, GMOs and Western diet result in genetic and hormonal modifications that militate against African identity politics, indigenous economies, African Renaissance and Pan-Africanism. Human flourishing of African bodies cannot be realised. The ethics of vulnerability comes through a “food war” that is ideologically charged. Notably, criminalising *ganja* began as a colonial and a monopoly capitalist strategy meant to keep the people poor and not to benefit from its economic and nutritional uses. If the West remains a key player in determining policies on food production, Africa and Africans would remain pauperised in the doldrums of human flourishing. The legalisation of *ganja* farming in Zimbabwe and its private use in South Africa is a promising additional awakening consciousness attributed partly to the influence of Rastafari on the social and cultural way of life in Africa.

CONCLUSION

Essentially Rastafari foodways are organic, healthy and nourishing for humanity on the basis of how food is cultivated, produced, prepared and consumed, which promotes human flourishing. The Rastafari culinary practices are a measure of their social consciousness and effort towards food authenticity, sovereignty and human flourishing. Rastafari foodways are an Afrocentric and liberated diet at the backdrop of the global politics of food production. Rastafarian culinary arts in Africa are guided by the philosophy which says “you are what you eat”. This is an expression of liberation that promotes an illuminated life for all humanity. The concept of *Ital* foodways, especially the focus on vegetarianism and organic eating, finds special appeal with the health conscious, regardless of their religion, and it could be a way of addressing this concern. However, this way of food production currently relies mainly on subsistence farming in Africa, such that it requires fully-fledged engaging programmes in order to commercially farm according to the non-GMO way.

This chapter has demonstrated that Rastafari *Ital* food production can become the answer to the desire for a decolonised and Africanised food production. In the final analysis, I conclude that Rastafarians are stewards seeking the protection of Mother Earth and human flourishing through chanting down the use of GMO foods and other “Babylon” products that impact negatively not only on the African bodies and

81 Afrika, *African Holistic Health*, 16. The word “dis-eases” illustrates how diseases create a situation of uneasiness. One is not at ease.

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the environment, but also on the nature-friendly ideals and food sovereignty that can promote human flourishing in postcolonial Africa. This implies that the future of Africa and that Africans is anchored on the organic foodways and not GMOs. African people and leaders would be well advised to embrace Rastafari foodways to grapple with food scarcity, poverty and “dis-eases” in the twenty-first century. The Rastafari foodways provide a revolutionalised Afrocentric diet consisting of simple, natural *Ital* food-medicines ideal for human flourishing in Africa.