Law, Religion and the Family in Africa

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8 LAW AND THE COMPETING INTERESTS OF PARENTS AND THE STATE IN CHILD-REARING IN AFRICA: ZIMBABWE RASTAFARI PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

And we must look into ourselves, into the depth of our souls. We must become something we have never been and for which our education and experience and environment have ill-prepared us. We must become bigger than we have been: more courageous, greater in spirit, larger in outlook. We must become members of a new race, overcoming petty prejudice, owing our ultimate allegiance not to nations but to our fellow men within the human community.

– His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I²

The epigraph, extracted from Emperor Haile Selassie's "War" speech to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City and delivered on 4 October 1963, called for world peace and challenged people to do a self-introspection in order to create one large human family, which he called "members of a new race". This historic speech is significant to Rastafarians, who deify Haile Selassie I and considered him to be JAH Rastafari. The speech shows his vision of a world with peace, tolerance and respect for human rights against the backdrop of historic imbalances on the basis of race, gender, class and religious divides. It is on the basis of this speech extract that the chapter draws its parameters for a Rastafarian understanding of a family in both its natural (consisting of parents, spouses and children) and metaphoric holistic senses.³ Essentially, a family is a basic unit of

- 1 Professor of Religious Studies, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Great Zimbabwe University. Member of the ACLARS Publication Committee and ACLARS representative for Africa's Southern Region.
- 2 Extract of Emperor Haile Selassie's speech to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City on October 4, 1963. See Selassie H. 1963 "Address to the United Nations, 1963". Online at: <https://bit.ly/3qhDhSd>; See also Akhalbey F. 2018. "Read Emperor Haile Selassie's iconic 1963 speech that inspired Bob Marley's hit song 'War'", *Face2Face Africa*, 21 May.
- 3 Family has diverse forms and interpretations. By "natural family", I regard the household (*oikos*) as a form of a private kinship system consisting of parents, spouses and children as a natural place for families, which is the basic social unit. In the African context, Rastafarians consider the natural family to be heterosexual and not homosexual, in spite of its exclusive and normative tendencies. In what I call the "metaphoric holistic" sense, family here refers to a non-biological relationship manifesting through, for instance, churches (*ekklesia*) or congregations and defined on the basis of faith and common ideological orientation, rather than the natural kinship ties. This is a public and heterogeneous body where members call each other "brother and sister", with a more egalitarian than patriarchal arrangement, in

society which is key in determining who we are – both privately and publicly – and is influenced by culture in different ways and at different times in different places. It is a social construct and a way of life with diversity and plurality attached to it.⁴ For instance, there is a nuclear family normalised through religious beliefs, marriage rituals and other characteristics, which has put other family forms at the margin. This makes the concept of family amorphous and fluid in its application and meaning, even amongst Rastafarians. In its functional character, the family is normally heterosexual, male-constructed and dominated by a parenting role in some cases. Parenting is a critical child-socialising practice that can be conceived as a purposeful activity whereby parents intend to care for new generations, as well as to introduce them in their family, communities and society at large.⁵ As family practice, parenting is informal in nature and becomes inseparable to many daily activities of caregivers.⁶

The chapter seeks to provide a historical and ethnographic study of Rastafari perspectives on law and the competing interests of parents and the State in child-rearing in Zimbabwe. The research posits that the competing interests of parents and the State are heavily anchored in the Rastafarian quest for identity, the complex processes of socialisation and (re)construction of parenting practice within the family context. The study grapples with the questions that include: What is the Rastafarian understanding of a family? To what extent are the Rastafarian family values relevant to the existential challenges in Zimbabwe? At the backdrop of a heterogeneous and multi-faith society, what relations and challenges exist between Rastafari and non-Rastafarians in terms of inter-faith marriages and the raising of children in one faith or the other or even attempts to do both at once? How do Rastas groom their children in light of their faith, the law and children's rights? Before looking into these questions, we turn to the theoretical framework and research methodology for this study.

contrast to natural families. This is the sense in which Rastafarian understanding of the family will also be conceived as one grand Rastafari family or what Emperor Haile Selassie I referred to as “members of a new race”. See, for example, Johnson LT and Jordan MD. 2006. “Family and Marriage in Early Christianity”, in Browning DS et al (eds). *Sex, Marriage and Family in World Religions*. New York: Columbia University Press. See also Therborn G. 2014. “Family Systems of the World: Are they Converging?”, in Treas J, Scott J and Richards M (eds). *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 3-19 at 4-9 referring to the seven world family systems.

- 4 Mvududu S and McFadden P. 2001. *Reconceptualizing the Family in a Changing Southern African Environment*. Harare: Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Trust (WLSA), 11, 12.
- 5 Grusec JE and Hastings PD. 2008. *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research*. London: The Guilford Press; Rogoff B. 2003. *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 6 Du Bois-Reymond M. 2009. “Young Parenthood in the Netherlands”, *Young* 17(3):265-283.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is informed by Afrocentricity. Concurrently known as Afrocentric theory or Africology, Afrocentricity is the study of African phenomena. It was popularised by Molefi Kete Asante and other Pan-Africanist scholars.⁷ In its thrust, Afrocentricity focuses on the authenticity of what is indigenous to Africa. In this paradigm, Africa is the subject, rather than the object. In addition, Africa is active, rather than passive. It is a cause, rather than an effect. Africa is the centre rather than the periphery. Lastly, Africa is the maker of history, rather than an incident of history.⁸ In essence, Afrocentricity is a response to the derogatory Western scholarship on Africa, Africans and their cultural heritage. In other words, it seeks to deconstruct Eurocentric denial and misrepresentation of African history and culture.⁹ According to Asante, Afrocentricity calls for a “collective consciousness” amongst African people where “all African phenomena, activities and ways of life to be looked at and given meaning from the standpoint and worldview of Africans”.¹⁰ Afrocentric theory is helpful in this study, given that Rastafari uses an Afrocentric framework in its worldview. Afrocentric theory can be useful in exploring Rastafari perspectives on law and the competing interests of parents and the State in child-rearing in Zimbabwe. Through Rastafari, a critique of the African ideal of the family and procreation can be repositioned at the centre of analysis and not at the periphery. Therefore, Afrocentricity can enhance an understanding of the intersections of law, religion and family through the matrix of Rastafari in Zimbabwe.

Methodologically, this qualitative study gathered data through direct observation of Rasta and non-Rastafari day-to-day family activities manifesting through “word, sound and power”. In-depth interviews were all conducted by the author, mainly amongst Nyahbinghi Rastafari communities in Zimbabwe. Documentary analysis of print and electronic media included local newspapers, social media messages and recorded music. The data collection methods were used in a complimentary way and were corroborated by the use of the phenomenological and sociological approaches to enhance the understanding of the interplay of law, religion and the family from the Rastafari perspective. Through the use of the phenomenology of religion, an insider perspective is enhanced through the elements such as *epoche* (bracketing of preconceived ideas), empathy and *eidetic* intuition (grasping the

7 See, for example, Asante MK. 2015. *The Pursuit of Africology: On the Creation and Sustaining of Black Studies*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

8 Mazrui AA. 2014. *African Thought in Comparative Perspective*. Newcastle-Upon-Tyre: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 287, 291.

9 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, 191.

10 Asante MK. 2007. *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance*. Malden: Polity, 27; Sibanda, “Rastafari Perspectives on Land Use and Management”, 191.

meaning or essence) of Rastafari family values and activities.¹¹ The sociological approach was instrumental in promoting the interplay of religion and society.¹² Through sociology of religion, a sense of “collective consciousness” due to family ties operates on the basis of a fellowship inspired by feelings of common historical experiences and social togetherness.

The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, referred to the aspect of “social system integration” or as he phrased it, “social solidarity” in which people’s norms, beliefs, and values constituted collective consciousness and created social interaction between families, small communities and groups of people who share a common religion.¹³ This is useful when Rastafari family values and beliefs are interrogated as social facts for understanding the phenomena under study. For instance, the Rastafari call for the government to legitimise their use of marijuana and to allow dread-locked Rasta children to attend public and private schools are critical social issues to be understood in the legal as well as sociological implications. On the basis of the concept of “collective representation”,¹⁴ by which ideas, values or ideologies are conveyed, Durkheim insisted that the individual becomes socialised by adopting the behaviour and symbols of their group as a social glue. This is vital in explaining the socialisation processes amongst Rastafari children as part of their quest for identity and how these processes assist them to make sense of their existence. Thus, notwithstanding the weaknesses of the phenomenological and sociological approaches, they have been employed in a complimentary way in this study. The next section focuses on a historical overview of Rastafari in Zimbabwe.

RASTAFARI IN ZIMBABWE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Rastafari is often identified as a minority new religious movement (NRM) with roots in Jamaica and a relatively long history of existence. It emerged from the matrix of oppression and marginalisation of black ex-slaves in poverty-stricken conditions of the Caribbean society.¹⁵ At the time of its evolvment, Rastafari was inspired by the ideas of Garveyism, Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism. Marcus Garvey

11 See, for example, Cox JL. 1996. *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.

12 Bourdillon MFC. 1990. *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 2.

13 See Turner JH. 1981. “Emile Durkheim’s Theory of Integration in Differentiated Systems”, *The Pacific Sociological Review* 24(4):385. Turner further notes that, for Durkheim, integration was where: (a) individual passions were regulated by shared cultural symbols; (b) individuals were attached to the social collective through rituals and mutually reinforcing gestures; (c) actions were regulated and coordinated by norms as well as legitimated political structures; (d) and inequalities are considered legitimate and correspond to the distribution of talents. Thus, what was “abnormal” contributed to his understanding of the concept.

14 Spencer ME. 1981. “The Idea of the Person as a Collective Representation”, *Human Studies* 4(3):257-271.

15 Parsons G. 1993. “Filling a Void?: Afro-Caribbean Identity and Religion”, in Parsons G. (ed). *The Growth of Religious Diversity; Britain from 1945, Vol 1*. London: Routledge, 243-273;

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inculcated the philosophy of black pride through the “Back to Africa Movement”, which enchanted all black people to develop group solidarity as African people. He nurtured a family collective consciousness by proclaiming that Africa was for the Africans both at home and abroad using the Universal Negro Improvement Association’s motto: “One God! One Aim! One Destiny!”¹⁶ This solidified the “collective representation” of Rastafarians, especially with the coronation of Ras Tafari as Negus of Ethiopia, who adopted the title Emperor Haile Selassie I on 2 November 1930, thereby fulfilling Garvey’s prophecy of a black redeemer king.¹⁷ Indeed, Rastafarians were “Garveyites”, the real ideological “successors of Marcus Garvey.”¹⁸

As Pan-Africanists-cum-Ethiopianists in both the Caribbean and Africa,¹⁹ Rastafarians looked to the literal fulfillment of Psalms 68:31, which says “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.”²⁰ Africa and Ethiopia are regarded as “Zion” and “Promised Land”, which is the counterpart of “Babylon”, a place of all forms of oppression and suffering. In contemporary times, Rastafari has grown and spread to become a global phenomenon, and it came to Zimbabwe partly through reggae music popularised by the music icon, Bob Marley at onset of Zimbabwean independence in 1980. In this manner, Rastafari has become one large family, socially integrated through roots reggae music, once described by Carolyn Cooper, who creatively recast Karl Marx’s dictum that religion is the opium of the masses by stating that, in Jamaica, “reggae is the *ganja*” of the people,²¹ thereby symbolising its “collective representational” role amongst Rastafarians. Hinged on their belief in the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, the Rastafarian family beliefs and practices are aptly summed up by the Zimbabwean social anthropologist Michael Bourdillo, thus: “The dress of Rastafarians; their appearance, including their long platted hair; their songs, which depict much of the culture in which they live as ‘Babylon’, the biblical city of evil; their use of drugs, forbidden by state authorities; all comprise a rejection of the society in which they live and the political systems in which they have little or no influence.”²² The above

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

16 See, for example, Van Leeuwen D. 2000 “Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association”. Research Triangle Park, NC: National Humanities Center, October.

17 Afolabi JA. 2004. “By the Rivers of Babylon: The Bondage Motif in the Performing Arts, Life and Aesthetics of Rastafarians”, *TINABANTU* 2(10):37.

18 Tafari IJ. 1980. “The Rastafari – Successors of Marcus Garvey”, *Caribbean Quarterly* 26(4):1.

19 See, for example, Campbell H. 1988. “Rastafari as Pan Africanism in the Caribbean and Africa”, *African Journal of Political Economy* 2(1):75-88.

20 King James Version. All citations from the Bible used in this chapter are from the King James Version (KJV).

21 Cooper C. 1988. “‘Ragamuffin Sounds’: Crossing over from Reggae to Rap and Back”, *Caribbean Quarterly* 44(1/2):156.

22 Bourdillon, *Religion and Society*, 170.

observations represent some of the core beliefs and practices of Rastafari on which the study can anchor its exploration of the competing interests of Rastafari parents and the State in child-rearing. The next section provides a closer look at the Rastafari understanding of the family.

RASTAFARI UNDERSTANDING OF THE FAMILY

The Rastafarian view of the family emanates from both the Judeo-Christian tradition and African Indigenous tradition. Through the former tradition, Rastafarians identify themselves as the true Israelites who are in a position to offer a proper reinterpretation of the Bible, which Western Christianity distorted. By the same token, the Rastafari view of the family is biblically based, including their teachings and practices on matters such as human sexuality, the use of *ganja* and the cultivation of dreadlocks as an observation of the Nazarene vow. Rastafarians claim that JAH Ras Tafari has given them the Bible as a child-rearing handbook, from which they especially make use of Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers, amongst other portions of the Bible. The family is regarded as a blessing from God, and they promote heterosexual relations in marriage while rejecting sex outside marriage. Rastas are committed to the goodness of sex, marriage and family.

The Rastafarian understanding of the family also draws from African indigenous tradition. Rastafarians agree with what John S. Mbiti, an African Christian theologian, pointed out as the wide range of members who constitute the family, including children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, various relatives from the father's and mother's side and the departed.²³ This resonates with Rastafari Afrocentric orientation. The two main family forms are: the nuclear (or cognatic) family consisting of the husband, wife and their children and the extended (lineal) family consisting of a fairly large number of people related by descent in one line from a living or dead ancestor.²⁴ Clan names, totems and food avoidances are inherited lineally within families. These natural private forms of the family based on a kinship system are vital to Rastafarians. However, beyond these, there is also an alternative public and heterogeneous form of family anchored in common Rastafari faith, which I describe as the "metaphoric holistic" type. Thus, whether it is the private natural family or the public and heterogeneous forms, the Rastafari family is fundamentally a unitary structure that pursues the ideals of One Love, respect, honour, discipline and worship in the home and at Nyhabinghi shrines. The Rastafari family is the framework through which Rasta children are nurtured and socialised. Through the Rastafari movement, all members adopt the metaphoric totemic symbol/title of the Lion of Judah to become *shumbarume* (lions) and *shumbahadzi* (lionesses) in the trod. The family is where some cultural practices are affirmed, tolerated and rejected in the face of competing interests of parents, children and the State.

23 Mbiti JS. 1975. *African Traditional Religion*, New York: Praeger.

24 Shorter A. 1974. *African Culture and the Christian Church*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 164.

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Following data collection, certain themes emerged in the research underlying this chapter. The research established that the family is a key socialisation platform amongst Rastas. It is where people are brought into the world, nurtured, supported and raised to participate in society. In addition, the family is where Rasta children discover what it means to be Rastafari in faith and practice. The way they dress, what they eat, their dreadlocked hair style, their use of *ganja*, the forms of marriage and sexuality constitute the major themes at the centre of the competing interests and convergence between the Rastafari family and the State. These themes are further explored below:

Dreadlocked hair style

Rastafarians have a biblical basis for their use of dreadlocks.²⁵ The dreadlocks are part of a Nazarene tradition signifying a covenant with God. This has seen the emergence of Nazarene families amongst Nyahbinghi Rastas in Zimbabwe, where the young and the old are clad in dreadlocks as a spiritual vow. In addition, dreadlocks are a natural hairstyle, which Rastas wear as a distinctive marker of black pride and identity.²⁶ They are also an emulation of the *dreaded* lion's mane, the lion being the symbol of Rastafari. However, the use of dreadlocks found many Rasta families clashing with public school authorities in Zimbabwe. As one Rastafari elder noted, there is a two-tier system of education at their disposal: public education which is formal and offered in public and private schools and "true" education of reading a chapter a day from the Bible. This is protracted through family socialisation and at Nyahbinghi shrines. For example, the cases of Farai Benjamin Dzvova²⁷ and Tawanda Mudzinganyama²⁸ in Harare come to the fore. The courts eventually ruled in favour of the Rasta children on the basis of upholding their freedom of religion and belief, as supported by the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Amongst Rastafari adults, there was discrimination and stigmatisation by employers and state agents on the basis of the dreadlock hairstyle. In *Chikweche v Zimbabwe*, the case of Munyaradzi Gwisai is one of the most outstanding examples of the legal battles between Rastas and the State in Zimbabwe. Gwisai was asked to remove his

25 See Numbers 6:5, which says, "All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow."

26 See Chitando E and Chitando A. 2004. "Black Female Identities in Harare: The Case of Young Women with Dreadlocks", *Zambezia* 31(1&2):1-21.

27 *Dzvova v Minister of Education, Sports and Culture and Others* (2007) AHRLR 189 (ZwSC 2007); Interview with Ras Binghiman by F Sibanda, Glen Norah, Zimbabwe, 23 February 2013. In this case, Farai successfully challenged the decision of the Ruvheneko Government Primary School to expel him from the school on account of his Rastafari dreadlocks. It was argued that the school's decision violated Section 19(1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

28 Matope T. 2002. "School Expels Dreadlocked Pupil", *The Herald*, 11 September.

dreadlocks before taking of loyalty and office as a lawyer by a High Court judge in 1993. On the grounds of Rastafarian religious convictions, Gwisai appealed against this High Court order. The Supreme Court later ruled in favour of Gwisai in 1995.²⁹ The court considered “sincerity” of belief and respect of his “freedom of religion”, as well as “freedom from discrimination” as stipulated in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

In general, whereas some non-Rastas wear dreadlocks as fashion, Rastas have experienced stigma and discrimination for “dirty unkempt hair”, which is deemed “crazy” and as giving rise to suspicions of social malfeasance. Dreadlocks have also been mistaken as a sign of moral decadence. The misrepresentation of dreadlocks emanates from their commercialisation, such that people can no longer easily distinguish who is a Rasta or a gangster. There is a tendency to paint all of them with the same brush as Rasta. This has led some Rastas to cover their dreadlocks when they are in public places and only uncover them while in places such as the *binghi* (worship place) or at home. It is stressed that “Uncovering the dreadlocks in public is like throwing our pearls or blessings away. Dreadlocks are our pearls. The ‘dread’ part of it is lost when people use them as fashion style and cosmetics.”³⁰ The value of dreadlocks is that they are a spiritual antenna giving Rastas natural strength, a sense of pride, resistance to oppression and African identity in contrast to chemical and artificial hair pieces. Apparently, across different religions, spiritual people have long hair. It is a paradox that Christians follow Jesus Christ who is frequently depicted as having had long hair, but they do not keep it themselves. Nevertheless, you can be Rasta without dreadlocks.³¹ In this way, Rastafari child-rearing family practices pertaining to dreadlocks are sometimes perceived as anti-social, and their exposure to non-Rastafarian schools, peers and the mass media in society has not always been tolerated.

Rastafari use of ganja/marijuana

Just like dreadlocks, the Rastafari use of *ganja* has a biblical, theological and ideological basis. Basing on Revelation, Rastas claim that *ganja* is referred to as the “Tree of Life” for the healing of the nations.³² (Revelation 22:2, cf. Genesis 1:12). In Zimbabwe, Rastas play on the rhyme and utility value of Shona word *mbanje*

29 See *Chikweche v Zimbabwe* 1995 4 BCLR 533 (ZS). The Supreme Court reverse the High Court decision to refuse a Rastafari attorney as a practitioner into the Zimbabwe Law Society.

30 Interview with Elder Trevor Hall by F Sibanda, Harare, Zimbabwe, 30 December 2012.

31 Interview with Elder Trevor Hall.

32 See Revelation 22:2, which says “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Comparatively, Rastafarians justify their use of *ganja* on the basis of Genesis 1:12, which says “And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.”

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(*ganja*), which they creatively call *mupanjere* (wisdom weed).³³ Rastafarians claim that the wisdom weed was found growing on the grave of King Solomon, who in his lifetime had a reputation of wisdom. The weed is also called a holy herb and a sacrament. Indeed, *Cannabis sativa* is taken as a holy herb used medicinally, herbatually, spiritually and culinarily by Rastas. The other type of *ganja*, known as hemp, is grown for fibre and is a low THC-producing strain but is also a multi-purpose environmental friendly plant. Rasta families have always clashed with the State agents on account of their use of *marijuana*, because it is categorised as a drug regulated by the law. In their Afrocentric disposition, some Rasta Elders argued that whereas *ganja* use has a biblical basis, it is also significant to note that traditional Tonga, Tswana and Shona healers, amongst others, used it to ward off evil spirits and cure various ailments.

Today, Rastas continue to struggle for the decriminalisation of marijuana. In defense of medical marijuana, Rastafari families uphold the use of *ganja* as a “miracle plant” and a “tree of life” on account of its healing properties. In a telephonic interview with one Rastafari Elder on children’s use of marijuana, he categorically stated:

Marijuana is food-medicine whose use has no age limit. JAH-JAH has given a handbook on child-rearing, which is the Bible. The herb is for the healing of the nations. Children consume the leaves and have the herb administered to them in various ways (including inhalation, steaming, teas) all determined by individual parents according to their understanding of what is best for the child. This is a practice which has endured for thousands of years.³⁴

The above proclamation shows that parental guidance is key in socialising the Rastafari children on the proper use of marijuana. Along the same lines, one Rastafari Elder explained, thus:

Rastas do not condone children to smoke *ganja* but they could be given *ganja* tea. Smoking ganja would stunt their growth. Even for meditation, youth were not allowed to use it from traditional times as in Rastafari. They should wait until they are adults and responsible. We teach the children and youth to be responsible and accountable for their actions. We catch them young.³⁵

Therefore, emphasis was not on smoking marijuana amongst Rasta children and youth for recreation, but on exploiting the healing properties of the herb. This is a critical question, particularly in the context of pandemics, such as Covid-19. In the same vein, the government-initiated immunisation programmes amongst babies and children have been shunned by majority of Rastas families, leaving the discretion of individual parents to traverse this murky terrain. Majority of Rastas are

33 Whereas “*mbanje*” is the Shona word for *ganja*, “*mupanjere*” combines “*mupa-*” (generator or source of wisdom) and “*-njere*” (wisdom), which qualifies it as a “wisdom weed or herb”.

34 Telephonic interview with Man Soul JAH by F Sibanda, Gweru, Zimbabwe, 10 September 2019.

35 Interview with Elder Trevor Hall.

skeptical and trust the use of organic herbal remedies and food-medicines to promote human flourishing as the most critical move. Thus, the question of immunisation is one area where Rastas may find themselves on a collision path in light of their faith, the law and the violation of children's rights on the basis of how they are groomed.

The long struggle and advocacy for legalisation of *ganja* is beginning to get a respite through the Zimbabwean government initiative of promoting medical marijuana research and industrialisation through Statutory Instrument 218 of 2020.³⁶ The paradox is that the existence of exorbitant application fees for securing a license to venture into this initiative are prohibitive to the majority of Rastafarians, despite their having been socialised to do self-reliance and informal occupations, which they call "JAH works". Therefore, instead of benefiting Rastafarian advocates of the legalisation of *ganja*, the competing interests of elite non-Rastafari families are taking over this multi-billion business venture.

Ital vegetarian food and diet

Although Rastafarians are not a homogenous group in terms of their food and diet, the majority of Nyahbinghi Rastas follow a strict vegetarian diet. The Rastafari lifestyle is guided by observance of the law, as stated in the Bible and African tradition recommending foodways, composed of natural fruits, vegetables and natural growing grains such as finger millet, *rapoko* and sorghum. With Rastas prioritising an African frame of reference and holistic lifestyle through their foodways, an Afrocentric thrust becomes evident. In this way, on the basis of Rastafari family, children are socialised to "eat right" and to shun "junk food or GMOs", because they reason that nutrition is the first line of therapy. Eating *Ital* (vital/natural) food is the fortress of good health. Rastafarians thrive on a vegetarian diet and use of food-medicines in the family.

From documentary evidence, the research was shown a copy of "The Rastafari Code of Conduct"³⁷ as one of the documents (outside the Bible), which Rastas use to guide their family foodways and diet. Basing on a lifestyle commensurate with *Ital livity*, families are encouraged to follow the examples and teachings of the Nyahbinghi tradition on health and dietary practice. Rastafari lifestyles resonate with the dictums which say: "You are what you eat" and "Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food". The organic foodways are a collective representational symbol of common significance amongst Rastafarians, which convey ideas, values, or ideologies of African authenticity in contrast to Western

36 Statutory Instrument 218 of 2020 [Cap. 18:24], Agriculture Marketing Authority (Industrial Hemp) Regulations, 2020]. This regularised the growing, processing and supply of industrial hemp (cannabis) by farmers in Zimbabwe for industrial purposes. See also, for example, Tsiko S. 2020. "Zimbabwe: Zim's New Cannabis Law Opens Doors for Big Business", *The Herald*, October 1.

37 See The Rastafari Code of Conduct. 2016. Online at: <https://rastafariglobalazania.wordpress.com/2016/03/31/the-rastafari-code-of-conduct/>. The document also refers to Rastafari as "The Nation and Family", which is useful to this study.

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consumerism. In order to illustrate this point further, Elder Trevor Hall had this to say:

In teaching them to be responsible, we nurture children and youth not to eat meat but to put their trust in the vegetarian diet. Eating meat would turn them into *Nyamabinghis* instead of becoming *Nyahbinghi* Rastas. This diet helps them to build strong immune systems as long as they have a balanced nutrition from what they eat. Yet, the urbanites are sometimes not clear on what a vegetarian diet is. They eat *sadza* and a small portion of veggies. The urbanites want fast foods, fries and (ham)burgers. This is a threat to the growth of *Ital* Rastafari.³⁸

The above observations show the politics of food production and consumption at play. A closer look at the word “Nyamabinghi” reveals that it consists of the term “*nyama*”, which is the Shona word for “meat”, and “*binghi*”, which identifies with Rastafari place of worship or a gathering at such a place. The Rastafarians in Zimbabwe are mainly of the Nyahbinghi tradition, thereby making “Nyamabinghi” to be a corruption of the word “Nyahbinghi”. In other words, Nyamabinghi refers to Rastas who are meat eaters and who are failing to adapt to the strict Nyahbinghi vegetarian diet. The issue of “nyaming” (meat eating) was also confirmed amongst empresses (women Rastas) by Empress Indica, who observed, “Most women find it difficult to keep the dietary rules particularly on the issue of meat. Empresses married to non-Rastas may be forced to follow a different dietary pattern from that of Rastas.”³⁹

Rastafari views on human sexuality

Rastafari in Zimbabwe has been influenced by the Jamaican homophobia emanating from elements of righteousness, natural *livity* and the chanting down of “evil”. This resonates with the defence of the family through denouncing abortion rights and “pretend family relationships” in a permissive society.⁴⁰ Rastas say that JAH designed male and female for procreation. Rasta is there to create families following the example of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I and Empress Menen. These two respected figures provide a typical model of a Rastafari family to be emulated. The Rasta position tallies with the government position, especially during the tenure of former President Robert Mugabe, known for his explicit anti-homosexuality stance. Rastas read themselves into the Bible and claim to be true Israelites pursuing pure lives, where the body is the temple of the Most High and it is to be kept holy. Preoccupied with maximising their fertility and reproductive capacities, Rastas loathe homosexuality and are sceptical of the use contraceptives,

38 Interview with Elder Trevor Hall.

39 Interview with Empress Indica by F Sibanda, Chaminuka House, Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe, 3 November 2012.

40 See Annetts J, Law A, McNeish W and Mooney G. 2009. *Understanding Social Welfare Movements*. Bristol, UK: The Policy Press, 176. Rastas dismiss the claims made by lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) activists as intolerable.

deemed as a “Babylon” ploy to stunt population growth amongst blacks. On this note, the State and Rastas sing from the same hymn sheet. Given that fertility is very vital for Africans, it is not surprising that both the State and Rastas argue against the practice, basing their argument on an Afrocentric position, which says that homosexuality is an unnatural and un-African sexual identity.

Rastafarians promote a heterosexual marriage, through which procreation in the family is possible. Homosexuality is chanted down as evil, a form of witchcraft because the relationship does not promote reproduction. The anti-homosexual standpoint finds fertile ground on the Rastafari beliefs and teachings. The biblical instruction to “be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28, KJV), empowers Rastafarians to shun same-sex marriage and Western-based contraceptives and family planning methods, so as to create large families. Homosexuality and family planning are considered incompatible with and counterproductive to the African family.⁴¹ An ideal family consists of the father, mother and child – the original Trinity. In expressing their sexuality, no fornication is tolerated. *Hungochani* (same-sex relationships) are regarded as alien, abnormal, silly, non-reproductive, dissident and an unacceptable sexuality. Although, this anti-homosexuality is a standard position amongst Rastas, one cannot rule out the possibility of some Rasta gays and lesbians who are still in the closet for fear of stigmatisation and exclusion. On this note, rightly or wrongly, Rastafarians fail the test of promoting the advice of H.I.M. Emperor Haile Selassie I’s vision to “become members of a new race, overcoming petty prejudice.”⁴² In the Rastafari family, homosexual rights do not qualify as human rights. This is a non-compromising stance, which is exclusionary to homosexuals as “out group” members to Rastas. In a framework guided by global trends, there are various pitfalls in the Rastafari family whereby Rasta children’s use of the internet may expose them to pornography and homosexuality, if they surf without parental guidance. Therefore, caution is to be exercised on the basis of dangers of cyberspace in the digital age.

RASTAFARIAN CHILD-REARING PRACTICES AS A QUEST FOR IDENTITY: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Rastafarian child-rearing practices can be easily linked to a quest for identity and expression of liberation through natural family and public family platforms. The meaning of parenting practices in Rastafari families is informed by reference to the Bible and African culture. In this way Rastafari use of dreadlocks, *ganja* and *Ital* foodways are consistent with their quest for identity. Along this cultural continuum, they have experienced discrimination and stigmatisation, which are perceived as a risk factors to Rastafari *livity* and human flourishing in the socialisation processes of their children and youth. The use of public schools and the stigmatising challenges

41 Sibanda F. 2017. “One Love, or Chanting Down Same-sex Relations? Queering Zimbabwean Rastafari Perspectives on Homosexuality”, in Van Klinken A and Chitando E. (eds). *Public Religion and The Politics of Homosexuality in Africa*. New York: Routledge, 191.

42 See the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter. Selassie, “Address to the United Nations”.

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faced by their children shows the Rasta parents' quest for belonging. In urban spaces, Rasta children's media use is encouraged, but caution is to be exercised on the basis of dangers of the cyberspace in the digital age. The need to promote inclusion, pluralism and intercultural dialogue cannot be over-emphasised. This becomes challenging when Rastas stress the anti-homosexual stance and insist that homosexuality is an unnatural and un-African sexual identity that does not warrant human rights. Whereas this standpoint coheres with that of the government, law and the State, it goes against the advice of H.I.M. Emperor Haile Selassie I to conquer petty prejudice, which would seem to recommend a tolerant stance, anchored on One Love philosophy. This would initiate policy changes to address structural dehumanisation through Rastafari natural and public family platforms.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of family in understanding Rastafari child-rearing practices, cultural and lived religious perspectives in light of their intersection with the law. Rastafari families are guided by the Bible and Afrocentric ideas in child-rearing. Although religious pluralism and freedom of religion are endemic in Zimbabwe, however, tolerance and inclusion of the dreadlocked Rastafari children in public schools and adults at some work places, remain problematic. Some Rastafari cultural identities have put Rastas in a cultural *cul-de-sac* with the State law and owners of educational institutions and other employment sites. This is especially so with dreadlocks, which are sometimes stigmatised as a sign of moral decadence amongst their wearers, whose use of *ganja* earns them the further label of "drug addict". The Rastafari *Ital* foodways and diet are key identity markers, but they are yet to be fully embraced by the government and the society at large. Immunisation of Rasta children has been lackadaisical thus far, and may bring existential challenges in due course because of processes and uncertainties that affect health.

Almost everywhere, (including Zimbabwe) Rastafarians are a popular lot that form "The Rastafari Nation and Family" as "Children of JAH" or "JAH People" – "True Israelites" reminiscent of the biblical "Chosen People". The Rastafaris' gendered cultural views have resulted in the promotion of traditional family values that shun a permissive society advocated through "pretend family relationships" of LGBT communities. Emperor Haile Selassie I's speech delivered at the UN General Assembly in 1963 is of paramount importance to the people in the Rasta community. Contemporary Rastas grapple with the challenge of trying to apply this advice towards the evaluation of existing family systems. Rastafari family life is the crucible for everyday experience for transformative parenting practices. The chapter concludes that the interface of the parent, child and the State remain a contested landscape in identity formation in twenty-first century Zimbabwe.