

BOOK REVIEW

Monique A. Bedasse. *Jah Kingdom: Rastafarians, Tanzania, and Pan-Africanism in the Age of Decolonization*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017. xiii + 254 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$32.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781469633596.

Jah Kingdom: Rastafarians, Tanzania, and Pan-Africanism in the Age of Decolonization is a joy to read, remarkable for its poetic prose, analytic heft, and myriad interventions on multiple fronts. Over the course of an introduction, six chapters, and an epilogue, Monique Bedasse turns much of what we think we know about Rastafari on its head to showcase the many ways the movement was an integral force in anticolonial pan-Africanist politics in the Caribbean, Europe, and on the African continent. Bedasse argues that during decolonization, repatriation to an independent Tanzania (and the impact of such repatriation on diasporic and continental Africans) was foundational to Rastafari's international spread. And yet, Rastafari repatriation has not received "the serious attention it deserves" (189).

At its core, *Jah Kingdom* privileges movement "first and foremost" (3). Based on previously unexamined written documents located in Jamaica, Trinidad, the United States, England, and Tanzania—as well as oral interviews and other materials provided by Rastafarians—the book hinges on the analytic framework of "trodding diaspora" ("trod" being the term Rastafarians use to refer to travel or a journey). Such a framework intimately weaves the evidentiary base with narrative, in that, "To center the trod as travel is to recognize that Rastafarians embody the archive...Rastafarians typically engage in secrecy and are unapologetically selective when deciding which researchers they will trust...They have self-consciously identified and named the colonial/written archives as 'imperial' and thus unreliable in the reconstruction of Rasta histories. As such, their emphasis on orality represents a choice to seek an autonomous intellectual space" (6–7). "Trodding diaspora" thus decenters both the nation-state and national archives in order to offer an analytic and archival approach that is "transnational, multisited, and sometimes multilingual" (184).

The book starts in Jamaica. Chapter 1 unpacks the evolution of Rastafari (as a worldview) to highlight the inherent plurality that both undergirded the

movement and characterized the lives of the Rastafarians who eventually trod to Tanzania. Chapter 2 moves to Tanzania, which “usurped Ethiopia” as the promised land in Rastafari imagination. Ethiopia’s standing as such has “never been seriously challenged” (17) and yet, as Bedasse demonstrates, after 1966 Tanzania emerged as a pan-African hub or “mecca” (49). Repatriation began in 1976; Joshua Mkhululi and Ras Bupe Karudi, who led the exodus from Jamaica to Tanzania, viewed repatriation as the fulfillment of prophecy. The policy of *ujamaa* also deeply resonated with Rastafari who trod to Tanzania, and merely being in Tanzania enabled Rastafari to support African liberation movements and forge alliances with pan-Africanists around the world. A decentralized and complex movement, Rastafari has historically defied straightforward categorization, so *Jah Kingdom* exposes and explores the movement’s “internal plurality” in order to provide “an interior history” of Rastafari (10). Several of the most influential Rastafari men also made their way to Tanzania via England, where they joined the Universal Rastafari Improvement Association (URIA). The URIA and the connections they fostered in Britain in the 1970s were a crucial component in the history of Rastafari repatriation. Though a mass repatriation of Rastafarians to Tanzania never did transpire (there were 26 original repatriates), such relatively small numbers belie the “colossal impact” repatriation had on pan-African diasporic politics and community during decolonization (17).

A brief review can in no way convey the many contributions of *Jah Kingdom*. While most studies of Rastafari predominantly focus on the movement’s cultural manifestations, such as reggae music and art, Bedasse argues that the “wholesale dismissal” of Rastafari as a serious philosophy has led to “reductionist and sanitized narratives,” which have produced an “incomplete memory of social movements and black radicals” (188). Centering Rastafari repatriation also reframes Tanzanian nationalist historiography by upending the “long-entrenched vision of Zion as Ethiopia” (47) and recognizing the local Tanzanian attraction to Rastafari philosophy. Intervening in scholarship on transnational pan-Africanist networks during decolonization, Bedasse sheds new light on how England became central to the evolution of Rastafari beyond Jamaica, emerging as a “launch pad diaspora” that linked Africa, the Caribbean, and black Europe (11). One would like to hear the voices of more women—for men are “at the center” of the narrative (9)—though the author acknowledges that Rastafari women typically refused invitations to be interviewed. Still, women were just as integral to repatriation as men, and the few women’s voices Bedasse was able to access underscore “the need to venture beyond the male-centered narratives that have dominated histories of Rastafari and of pan-Africanism more broadly” (182).

Exquisitely written, painstakingly researched, and eloquently argued, *Jah Kingdom* concludes by graciously suggesting possible directions for further, fruitful study—such as exploration of the ways in which some Tanzanians combined Rastafari with their Muslim identities, or how Rastafarian practices in Tanzania impacted indigenous African religious belief and practice. In this narrative which is refreshing for its scope and far-reaching gaze, Bedasse

leaves readers continually rethinking the interconnectivities between Rastafari, Tanzanian, and pan-African agents during decolonization.

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