

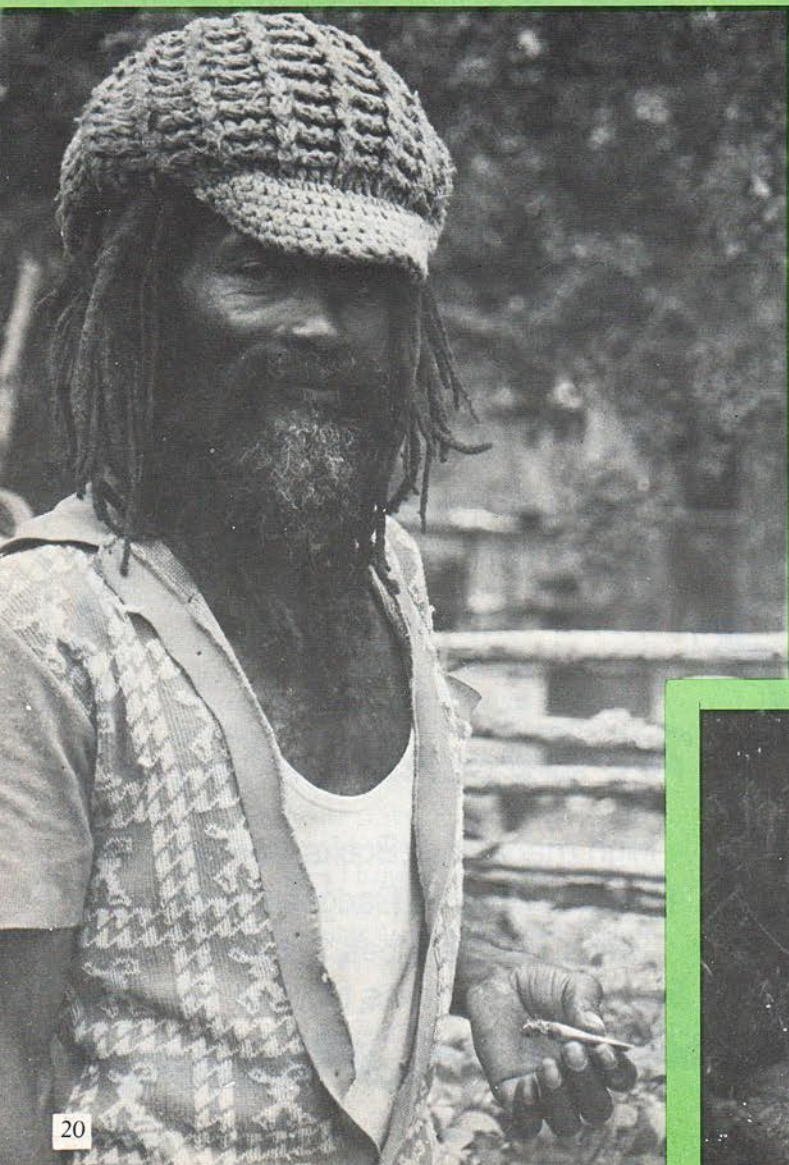
Sacred and profane, holy herb and million dollar wealth spinner, healing of the nations and dope for guns, the ganja tree in Jamaica spreads wide its leaves. The symbolic power of that little tree of knowledge remains immense, raising dreams of freedom, peace and love, inner vision, revolution.

by TIM MALYON

GANGA

BIBLES IN THE FIELDS

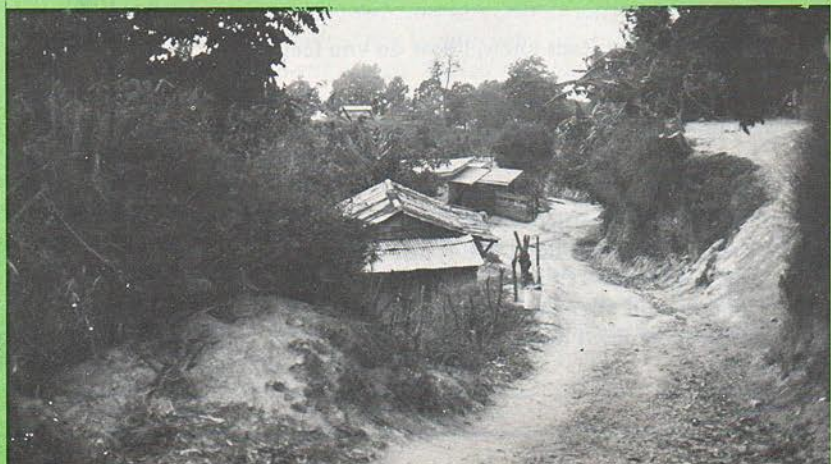
Photos by Tim Malyon



"A cultivation with about 5000 growing ganja trees and a nursery containing about 2000 seedlings was found in the hills of Longville . . . and destroyed by a party of police . . . An open Bible, showing the 27th Psalm ('For in the time of trouble, the Lord shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me.') and held down by 2 stones, was found in the field on the ground. No arrest was made." (from The Jamaican Star)

*"And if we should live up in the hills . . ."
(Burning Spear)*

The path climbed steeply, spiralling up towards higher heights, Blue Mountain Peak, at 7402ft the island's summit. Tiny terraced fields clung to the slope, irrigated by streams and intricate piping systems constructed from the ubiquitous bamboo pole. It felt good to be out, away from the oppressive heat of downtown Kingston, pacing the mountain in the morning light, breath and feet moving with one rhythm which held back tiredness. By the first wooden shack of the last village a young Rastaman stood and blew sweet smoke into the still air. As he saw me an inquisitive smile lit up his open, dignified face. I maintained pace, meditating on the stride, meeting smile with smile, returning his





frank gaze. Silently he fell in beside me, pace for pace, passing the spliff. Thus we trod easily up the village, burning herbs without a word.

*“There’s a natural mystic blowing through the air,
If you listen carefully now, you will hear.” (Bob Marley)*

Above the village we rested, squatting on the crest of the hill where I had gratefully dropped my pack. The sensation of throwing off a heavy pack after long trekking is one of joyous weightlessness, flying. On the opposite side of the crest to the village, far below us, lay a patchwork of fields and chaotic bush in a deep, bowl shaped valley. Raising eyes to the hills, the sun was setting behind Blue Mountain Peak. A small flat cloud hovered over the highest point, burning bright white. Against the darkening blue of the sky pencils of liquid gold, moving rays, arrowed out into infinity from behind the light of white – then slowly withdrew. With sunset mountain stillness deepened, and the soft blue shade of evening gloom darkened gradually into black.

My new companion was the local ganja farmer. Swiftly he disappeared, walking with that powerful bounce common to many Rastas, only to return with a ‘whole heap o’ herbs’ wrapped up in brown paper. Tearing strips off the paper we each rolled cigar sized spliffs. Jamaicans do not generally pass spliffs, reserving that ceremony for the ‘chalice,’ the pipe of peace and communal meditation. Our recent stride through the village had been the exception, a spontaneous ceremony of sharing. Spliffs lit, our reasoning started, two people, sons of oppressor and oppressed, finding easy friendship at the day’s end.

*“We got to come together ‘cause we are birds of a feather,
Got to realise we are one people
Or there will be no love at all.
Got to put aside them segregation,
Got to build our love on one foundation.” (Peter Tosh)*

Born in the country, Leon had moved, like many Jamaican youths, to Kingston. Ground down by poverty, unable, like one third of Jamaica’s population, to find a job, he had returned. Now his income from ganja assisted him in building up his small-holding and achieving some measure of independence from the ‘Babylonian shitstem’ on which he was attempting to turn his back. His Rasta faith, stressing the need for pure food and movement back to the land had reinforced this. Another Rasta ganja farmer commented to anthropologist Dan Wight when asked what he did with the profit from his crop: “Not car, buy two goat.” Whilst the majority of Rastas still remain living in the towns to

which they or their families had migrated, unable or unwilling to escape, Dan Wight found that in the farming community where he lived for three months, those with the most positive attitude towards the country and farming, those who wished to stay on the land and had dropped western dominated big city aspirations were the Rastas. “As Jah say long time ago, man will come vile and der will be dread time, much fighting . . . war could happen any time . . . der will be killin’ an’ tiefin’ an’ a whole heap of tings. Here in the hills is de best place fe be . . . many peoples will hide in dem hills . . . Tings very poor in Kingston. Can’t set up your own ting, man. Me want to live myself alone, have my own ground. Kingston very poor, very violent. Is calm here, can sleep peaceful in the country.”

Fireflies glowed in the valley below. Against the deep black of the sky, stars shone brightly, white, orange, red, blue, colours visible in this clear high atmosphere. Gradually valley and sky became one, a kaleidoscope of lights sparkling in the void.

*“There’s a stalk of Sinsemilla blooming in my backyard...”
(Black Uhuru)*

It was morning, dew still glistening on the sticky bushes burning in the early rays. Unlike the mountain farm visited, where ganja was planted far out in the undisturbed bush, here cane, yam, peanuts and bananas hid the illicit crop. Three farmers were cultivating alongside one another, sharing duty watching the plants as harvest approached, sleeping in a hut hastily erected from wood and palm leaves. The oldest farmer grew traditional ‘kali weed,’ harvesting as soon as seed started to form on the female plants. His neighbours were growing ‘sinsemilla,’ pulling up males as soon as they could be distinguished, allowing the unfertilised females to keep on growing, producing ever larger buds in their desire to attract male pollen. When I arrived, the younger growers were trying to persuade the elder man to pull up his males earlier so that their females would not be fertilised by them. The seedless trend has been set by California growers, and American buyers in Jamaica are persuading more and more farmers to make the change.

Whilst fearing discovery of their fields by police, they also felt threatened by a legal trade which might deflate prices and destroy the organic network of growers and dealers throughout the island who depend on the trade for their living. Clearly the size and traditions of the home market in Jamaica offers farmers some protection. In Colombia, for instance, the largest exporter of ganja to the US, domestic consumption is very small, thereby placing farmers at the mercy of exporters and export syndicates, usually western dominated, who pay farmers ridiculously low prices, 1% of final selling price according to a recent survey. The equivalent figure in Jamaica I would estimate around 10%. Whether Jamaican farmers could benefit from legalisation depends on many unpredictable factors, including the attitude of the Jamaican government, and governments and consumers in importing countries. Western nations have a long history which continues to the present day of grossly exploiting third world labour and agricultural markets. With this in mind the International Cannabis Alliance for Reform (ICAR), a union of legalisation groups around the world, is now committed to protecting the interests of farmers in developing, producer countries under any future legal system. Under the present illegal system, however, farmers are increasingly threatened by the power of major exporters who appear to be cornering export markets, paying off police, military and politicians and able to dictate terms to farmers and small traders with no recourse to legal protection. Such a development threatens local farmers and small, ‘righteous’ western dealers alike.



Babylonian Shitstem

Jamaica's cannabis exports, with Bauxite and the tourist industry, are increasingly relied upon to bring in vital foreign exchange. One estimate published in the *Financial Times* last year quotes income from ganja money to Jamaica at around \$200 million per annum, roughly the island's annual balance of payments deficit. The US *Washington Post* pushed the stakes higher. "By many estimates, including those of US officials, the island's marijuana business is worth \$1.1 billion a year, almost equal to the government's entire foreign debt and greater than all other exports combined." Whichever guesstimate is chosen, it is hardly surprising that following last year's election one of the first speeches made by the new conservative Prime Minister, Edward Seaga, was directed towards Jamaica's bankers, acknowledging the crucial role played by ganja money in keeping the island afloat, and requesting banks "to take foreign money from clients without asking too many questions." (*Jamaican Weekly Gleaner*, 19th Nov. 1980). In a separate interview during his US visit last year, in which he reputedly hit it off famously with Ron Reagan, Seaga concluded: "Regardless of whether we want it or not, the (marijuana) industry is here to stay."

... the legality of sacred ganja use is now being hotly debated ...

Given the size of the trade, it is common knowledge that army, police and politicians are involved. I myself, during my visit to the island, was mistaken for an exporter whilst photographing an airstrip used by ganja 'planes and was informed by the army officer who made this mistake that to land and take off an aircraft would cost me \$5000 Jamaican, or £1000. Babylon can be terribly blinded by the glare of bright coins. Commenting on this aspect of the trade, Seaga again recently stated: "Medical reports seem to suggest that there's no conclusive evidence that ganja is harmful, and therefore the extent to which it can be considered a moral problem in that respect is not clear-cut. But there is a moral problem of a different type, and that is the bribery that runs with illicit traffic. And in at least two cases, we know of gun trafficking that has been associated with it." According to the *Chicago Defender*, Peter Whittingham, a former deputy leader of his own party, the Jamaican Labour Party, was serving time in Miami on ganja trafficking charges when Seaga made this statement. Furthermore, during the run-up to the 1976 elections, and ten days after Michael Manley's at that time ruling People's National Party had declared an official State of Emergency (increasing political gun violence had claimed over 100 lives during the last 6 months), the same Peter Whittingham was arrested in Jamaica. Security forces allegedly found handwritten documents in his briefcase describing the operations of a secret paramilitary group called "Werewolf". The documents listed personnel and weapons,

including 100 submachine guns and 200 rifles, available to the group, which was described in the seized papers as a "militant underground movement . . . willing to take up arms against the communist regime and purge them from our shores."

Sacred Profanity?

Last September a twin engined Beechcraft landed on an airstrip owned by the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church. Police seized the machine and impounded it, but arrested nobody, found no papers in it, and had no idea from whence it came. Three armed officers guarded it for the next one and a half weeks, until early one Sunday morning shots rang out from the surrounding bush. Simultaneously a light aircraft appeared overhead and strafed the runway with machine gun fire. The police fled, the attacking plane landed, a pilot jumped out, took over the controls of the impounded Beechcraft, and both machines disappeared into the blue. Following this incident, the government, police and army expressed grave concern about the large number of airstrips on the island and the frequent illegal landings of foreign aircraft in Jamaica.

Whilst no evidence exists to connect the airstrip owners with the Beechcraft incident, nine members of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church have recently been convicted in Miami on 45 different counts involving the importation of some 105 tons of ganja into the United States. The defendants are appealing against conviction, but Church members face further charges arising out of another bust in Maine last year involving some 20 tons of herb. Two years ago Jamaican police ripped up five acres of prime plants on Coptic property but charges were dropped for lack of evidence directly connecting Coptics with the patch.

The Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, not to be confused with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, is a fascinating example of herb power, profane and sacred united in one highly efficient operation, or, as some would contend, a white dominated attempt to draw off power from Rasta. Mainly because both Rasta and Coptic fight publicly to free up the herb, many Jamaicans with whom I spoke, in particular country people, confused the two, thinking them to be the same. The Coptics grew up in the thirties, like Rasta, in response to the teachings of radical black pride prophet Marcus Garvey. They believe in sacred herb, Africa for Africans, that the Jews were the chosen black people, descendants of the great black Kingdom of David and Solomon, that their church has inherited that lineage, and that the established white churches of the west, in particular the Roman Catholic Church, are Babylon incarnate, the devil come to rob black people of their most crucial spiritual heritage and aspirations. Coptics do not believe in the divinity of Haile Selassie, a great bonus when attracting white people to the sect, nor do its members grow locks, insultingly referring to the Rastas as 'ropeheads'.

The Coptics are fantastically rich, operating the largest container transport business on the island handling both government and

private contracts between Jamaica and the US, a furniture business, a large car importation and spares business which is a leading dealer, according to their advertising, for British Leyland, Toyota, Datsun, GMC and Volkswagen, and a large food supermarket. The latter is stocked with produce from their farms, covering at least 4000 acres on the island. Stateside, they also own a Florida farm, in concealed tunnels underneath of which 10 tons of herb were seized in 1977. In the same year they paid \$270,000 cash for a large mansion on fashionable Star Island in Miami. They employ over 1000 people in Jamaica, and are naturally popular with local politicians, enjoying a reputation for paying good wages and bringing wealth to poor areas. Visiting their Jamaican farm is akin to walking onto a different island, an island of shiny rich cars, new buildings, prosperous economic activity. During my visit, however, a large number of small tenant farmers were protesting at being turned off land by the Coptics with inadequate compensation and nowhere to go, land which they had farmed from hand to mouth for many years. The Coptics had just bought the large estate to which these plots were attached. As a further indicator of Coptic wealth, in March 1978 US Internal Revenue revoked their tax exempt status and handed them a bill, estimated on visible possessions, for \$2.3 million in back taxes. Customs are also claiming duties of \$15.5 million for one 20 ton ganja seizure alone!

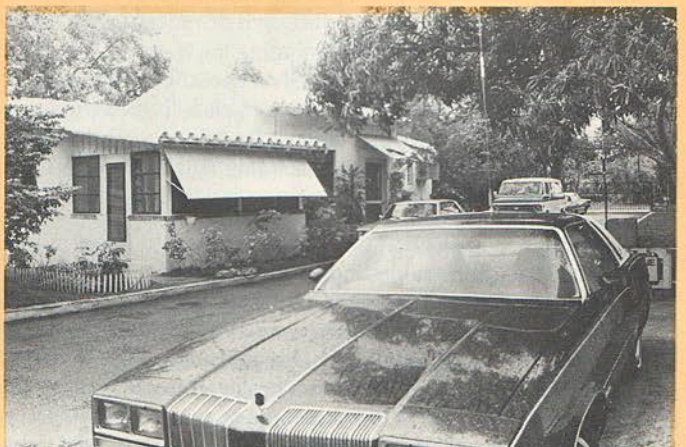
The Coptics are fighting in an extremely well organised and uncompromising fashion for herb liberation. Part of their defence against the importation charges, and one ground upon which they will be appealing conviction, is the clear statement that the whole prosecution is unconstitutional because the herb is a sacrament of their church, and to deny access is to deny freedom of worship as guaranteed by the constitution. Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark pleaded this case for the Coptics at their trial, so whilst their chances of success may be small, their legal representatives are the best, and the argument is not to be immediately dismissed. In Jamaica itself the legality of sacred ganja use is now being hotly debated in legal circles, a debate fired to some extent by Rita Marley's placement of a ganja stick in Bob's coffin.

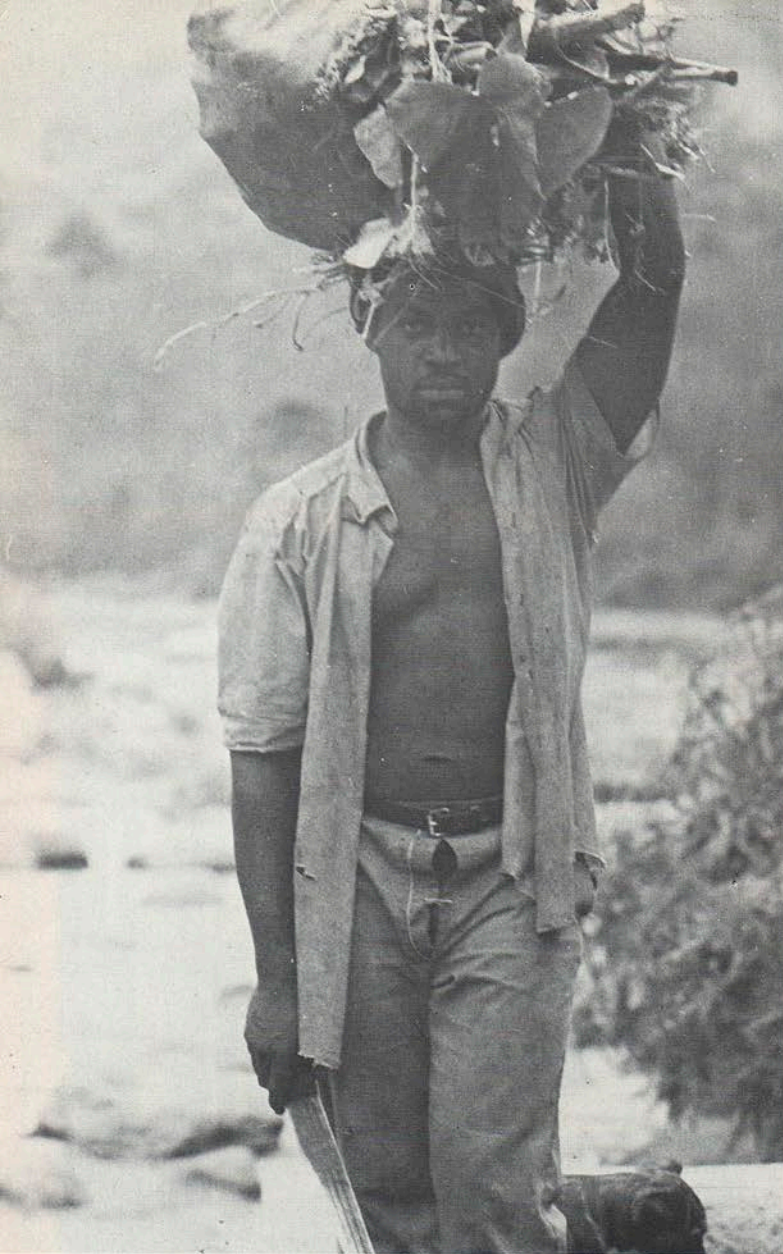
The Coptics are proposing one further constitutional ground for appeal, that the ganja laws are illogical and arbitrary, therefore unconstitutional. As evidence they are drawing on current research, such as the *Ganja In Jamaica* study which finds no significant health differences between user and non-user groups, as well as wide-ranging medical tests on ganja using church members who, as I can testify, smoke almost incessantly. They

“... some people can smoke marijuana in high doses for 16 hours daily for up to 50 years, without apparent psychological or physical harm”.

were found to be a remarkably healthy group of people. As one of the medical reports concludes: “even though the numbers we examined were relatively small, I think it is extremely important to make the observation that some people, at least, can smoke marijuana in high doses for 16 hours daily for up to 50 years, without apparent psychological or physical harm.”

Unlike Rasta, whose organisation is somewhat anarchic with a very loose leadership structure and many followers belonging to no organisation, the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church runs a very tight show, a highly centralised organisation led by Keith Gordon, a Jamaican whom I would describe, after one brief encounter, as





Photos by Tim Malyon

instance, in the recent Grenadan revolution. As Jabulani Tafari, a leading 'Twelve Tribes of Israel' member told me: "Ancient African civilisation was communal and socialist in nature . . . Rasta history has always been in the forefront of the anti-colonialist, anti-class struggle."

*We've been trodding on the
Winepress much too long
Rebel, Rebel.
(Bob Marley)*

***You drink white rum, you tumble down.
You smoke kali weed, you succeed.***

Herb Power

"They try to make me white. But from I start to smoke herb now, I start to read between the lines. Is like wool was removed from before my eyes. That is when my rebirth start, my reincarnation, when I start to smoke herb. The government knows from a man start smoke herb he be aware of some things. That is when he start to come off the brainwash, when he start to smoke herb. That's why them is against the herb so much." (Jimmy, a Rastafarian. From Dread by Joseph Owens)

"And the truth is, that the reality of ganja is related to its rebelliousness, its restiveness among the native populations of colonised countries, the fact that people use this and will disobey the ruling dictates of the time." (Dr Freddy Hickling, Senior Medical Officer, Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital, Kingston, Jamaica.)

"Dagga (ganja) breeds courage and clarity of purpose. Why do you think the whites decided to prohibit use? They knew it was the only way of taming us so that they can walk all over us, and we would be afraid to rise in protest." (Mr Gaza, South African ganja smoker, from Cannabis in Africa by Brian Du Toit.)

"Undoubtedly one of the highest rates of marijuana use for any population in the western world," is how *Ganja In Jamaica*, a US government commissioned study described cannabis use in Jamaica in 1972, estimating that "some 60-70 per cent of the lower section of the rural population, men, women and children, inhale, ingest or use ganja in some form." In 1980, Dr Freddy Hickling estimated that "perhaps 80 per cent of the population use it, middle and working class." Referring to an unpublished survey which he had conducted at the University of the West Indies, Dr Hickling noted that the ganja smokers "were all showing a shift from middle class religions into other types of religions which were more working class, notably the religion of Rastafari." The actual and symbolic associations in Jamaica between race, class and ganja smoking are very clear. The island enjoys one of the lowest rates of alcohol induced mental illness in the western world, but the heaviest drinking occurs amongst British residents and other members of the white and middle class black population.

The alcohol/ganja split is not simply due to economic factors. "Smokers unequivocally maintained that ganja is superior to alcohol." (*Ganja In Jamaica*). One popular rhyme I heard repeated runs:

*You drink white rum, you tumble down.
You smoke kali weed, you succeed.*

being 'worldly wise'. The people in key organisational posts handling money, both in Jamaica and the US headquarters in Miami, were white. Despite tracing their existence as a church back to the 1930's, the Coptics' immense wealth would seem to date from the early seventies when Keith Gordon took over leadership and white people first joined and assumed important positions. Having visited the Coptics myself, both in Miami and Jamaica, I am sceptical about the organisation despite their courageous defence of the herb and the fantastical vehemence with which they pushed their religious beliefs. Indeed, it was perhaps this vehemence, including an obsessive denunciation of 'abnormal' sex, which first worried me, reminding me uncannily of moonie rantings which I once had the misfortune of experiencing. It also concerned me that Coptic should level classic 'gutter press' accusations such as violence against Rasta. Certainly many Jamaican Rastas whom I met, including Rita Marley, are deeply suspicious of Coptic motives.

For there is an important political dimension to this strange crossroads at which ganja finds itself in Jamaica. Whilst remaining aloof from party politics, the Coptics are virulently opposed to socialism and communism. Rasta remains similarly aloof, but through the immense attraction which it undoubtedly holds for the youth, and through its music, reggae, it has played a leading role in the movement of black people to reassert their culture and throw off their chains. Rastas played an important part, for

The alcohol/ganja split, and its connotations of rising against oppression date from slavery days, where in one of history's greatest crimes, the 'glorious' British Empire traded a race and almost obliterated a culture, to work the island's sugar plantations and produce the 'national' drink, rum. To this day, some Rastas will not work the sugar plantations, so powerful is the association between them and slavery.

Ganja is smoked in Jamaica to aid relaxation, meditation and spiritual contemplation, and to assist in hard manual labour, on the sugar plantations for instance. Ironically, it was plantation owners and the white established church, enslavers of body and enslavers of spirit, which led moves to outlaw ganja, resulting in possession of ganja involving a mandatory, unavoidable one-year prison term between 1941-1972, and harsh police repression under the pretext of ganja control.

In 1940, one of the most influential of Rastafari's early preachers, Leonard Howell, purchased a large estate in the hills outside Spanish Town named Pinnacle. An estimated 600 Rastafarians moved there, determining to live a life independent of 'Babylonian society'. In 1941 huge numbers of police raided the community, arresting 70 people, 28 of whom were imprisoned on violence and ganja charges. Howell himself was incarcerated for two years. On his release, he re-established the community, which functioned in almost total independence, growing its own food and ganja, until 1954. In that year Pinnacle was once again heavily raided, and broken up. 163 brethren were arrested, the rest being forced to move to Kingston, from which time the most brutal harassment of Rastafarians dates, including police beatings, shaving of locks, and frequent prison sentences. Such harassment, using ganja possession and cultivation as a pretext, reinforced the plant's symbolic connotations of revolt and maintenance of black cultural identity against white oppression and ruling, white dominated, bourgeois morality. Such harassment continues to this day, from the streets of Kingston, Jamaica, to Brixton, London, or St Pauls, Bristol, where black and white youth, dissenters from imposed values, are stopped and searched, humiliated, their houses and clubs 'trashed', in the name of stamping out that little weed.

Herbal Roots

Between 1494, when Columbus 'discovered' Jamaica, and 1655, when the British took over occupation from the Spanish, the island's original population of some 60,000 Arawak Indians were wiped out by disease and brutality. Nobody on Jamaica now has roots there. When the British arrived, they first imported African slaves, then later after slavery was abolished, Indian indentured labourers to work for them. Africans now form 90 per cent of Jamaica's population, Indians 3 per cent, and are the island's two largest ethnic groups. Some 1 per cent of the population are of European origin.

Ganja is smoked in Jamaica to aid relaxation, meditation and spiritual contemplation.

Ganja has occupied a central role in this barbaric history of transportation. If the hemp plant is allowed to grow and reproduce itself in northern climes, it develops into a hemp fibre producing plant. It was this fibre which provided ropes and sails to power the slave ships and the Navy which protected them. Indeed, in the early 19th century Britain experimented with

growing cannabis for fibre in Jamaica, but failed. The fibre was apparently too fine for rough cordage. Indians and Africans, however, carried on their ancient traditions of cannabis use for sacred and medicinal purposes.

A young dreadlock approached me as I stood by the roadside. We talked, then he asked me to take his picture. His Indian ancestry shone through his features, it was important to him that this union, Africa and India, be recognised. As he spoke, this Rastaman of India, he evoked powerful memories of Indian Sādhus, holy men who follow an age-old tradition of cannabis use to help their meditation and break-through to enlightenment. This Indian tradition stretches beyond 2000-1400BC when the Atharva Veda was written, the sacred text which calls ganja "the sacred grass". It leaves its clearest mark in Jamaica in the vocabulary, 'ganja', 'chillum', 'kali weed'. Indian words with the possible exception of 'kali' which is Hindi for 'bud', Swahili for 'strong or sharp'.

Some researchers believe that cannabis did not arrive in Jamaica before 1845, with the first Indians, and that West Africa, from whence most Africans taken in slavery to Jamaica originated, did not see herb use until during and after the second world war. Whatever may be the truth of this, the African tradition in contemporary Jamaican ganja use is stressed the most strongly, and ganja use in Africa is age-old. The oldest hunter/gatherer tribe known to humanity, the 'Bushmen' of the Kalahari desert, have traditionally used the herb. Cannabis fibre 3500 years old has been found in Egypt, and more recently two 13th century ceramic water-pipe bowls were dug up near Lake Tana, in Ethiopia, both bearing traces of cannabis. In the original Hebrew and Aramaic versions of the Bible cannabis was an essential ingredient of Moses' holy anointing oil. (In Sanskrit, *cana* means *reed*, *bosm* means *sweet*).

"The cigarette of our forefathers," was how African ganja, or dagga users in Natal evoked the power of herbal tradition. (From *Cannabis In Africa* by Brian Du Toit.) "Cannabis was the smoke of the ancestors. It was smoked by all the great men who were fierce fighters and wise in deliberation. And since it is the smoke of our fathers, it is said, we must smoke it too." The Zulus are one of the many African tribes that use ganja, and have used it over generations. The following is an old praise chant for their holy herb:

*Burn machine of the mind
Burn shadow of the fowls
You remind me of the other side of the mountains
Where heroes have assembled.*

"Rasta Is Calling For A Spiritual, Internal Revolution. We See Herb Now As A Part Of That Process."

Streams of figures converge on the bank of a dry river bed, an isolated spot outside Kingston, enclosed by fence of wood. The atmosphere is Biblical, mountains glowing blue in the distant haze, dust, a determined, dignified assembly united in one purpose. Nowhere was this meeting publicly advertised, it happens by the power of that most irrepressible of telegraph systems, the voice of the people, an old network of friends, family and neighbours who pass the word.

Inside the enclosure, some thousand red, gold and green 'tams', the blood, wealth and verdant pastures of ancient Ethiopia and Africa, shine in the evening light. Whole families are present for this meeting, this 'grounation', this coming together of members of one Rastafarian movement, the 'Twelve Tribes of Israel'. As the only white person present, I feel in no way threatened by the

curious, yet friendly gaze of people who notice me, although it was clear to most that I had come in the company of a Rastaman, Jabulani Tafari who spoke the words above.

Rasta looks back with longing to a past age when humanity was more in touch with itself and surroundings, with sun, moon, stars and nature. Awareness bought a certain kind of knowledge, a blend of spiritual and scientific. Echoes of that knowledge are to be found in the Pyramids, or Stonehenge, or the intricate system of ley lines that many believe criss-cross this island. As selfish desire, the will to possess and oppress took over, that unity of knowledge was lost, and more materialistic civilisations arose, church joining with state to chain body and spirit, destroying all memory, cutting off all search for our divine inheritance. "The transparent myth of the recent origin of true civilisation is . . . destroyed by the evidence for the survival into recent times of the same tradition as that which inspired the builders of the Pyramids at the very start of our era and which they preserved from the ruins of a stricken world." (John Michell, *The View Over Atlantis*)

Rasta looks forward also, to armageddon, that time when we possess the ultimate in material power, the ability to obliterate ourselves from this earth, and to redemption. Babylon will fall, the Jews will escape out of Egypt, Noah's sons will survive the flood, destruction and redemption, myth and fact, history repeats itself, time is a 'recurring decimal'. The crucial symbol of Rastafari, a meditation image, is the lion, symbol of Haile Selassie, the manifestation of visible divinity, yet also 'God in Man, Man in God'. Every Rasta is a lion or lioness. Rasta youth are 'young lions'. We have only to realise this power and dignity in us all and direct it towards beneficial aims to be saved. This view is in direct contrast to the great god in the sky whose supposed existence is exploited to make life on earth more bearable. We hold the key.

Thus when material power reigns supreme, the seed of spiritual understanding sprouts once more, a seed already contaminated by the false gods of, for instance, the right-wing moral majority in the USA, which taps revivalism to build more bombs, heap up oppression. It is a seed, however, which can grow positively, tapping our human lineage, be it Stonehenge or the Pyramids, Glastonbury or Ethiopia, returning old heavens latent in all of us to reality. "The music of our heart is roots music, music which recalls history, because without the knowledge of your history, you cannot determine your destiny; music about the present, because if you are not conscious of the present, you are like a cabbage in this society; music which tells about the future and the judgement to come." (Misty)

Above the attentive crowd, the strong smell of ganja hangs sweet in the air, the herb of meditation, of dream and vision, the little plant which has woken many a dormant mind. Sacred and profane, we must deal with you wisely.

The 'groundation' starts, a moving blend of religious service and practical meeting, discussions, prayers, chanting, how to raise money for the 'Twelve Tribes' PA system, news from other areas of the world to which Rasta has spread. A sister from Birmingham, a brother from Vancouver recount their experiences. Whilst orderly and well organised, the meeting gives space for anyone to contribute.

Mind surrenders to the measured and dignified cadences of the voices, the meditations of many flowing together into one powerful river of thought. This is no unity created by leaders and mass media, but a communal will to reassert the rights, culture and spirit of Africa, of the roots of humanity, of *Logos*, the word at the beginning. Let me be clear. I am not a Rasta. I do not believe in the divinity of Haile Selassie. I find it impossible to reconcile my beliefs on equality of the sexes with those of Rasta. Yet here, on this night, I could feel the unity of the message, the striving towards the seed at the heart of humanity, the root beneath all and each of us. Look below the words to the images, mistake not the finger pointing to the stars for the stars themselves.

Haile Selassie is Jah incarnate, claimed descendant of ancient royal lineage, of David and Solomon, historical figures, kings of Israel who lived around the 10th century BC, and of the Queen of Sheba, the union with Africa. Lineage is roots, spiritual roots, blood roots. The vision goes back further, to Ethiopia as the cradle of civilisation. "The Ethiopians call themselves the ~~first~~ of all men and cite proofs they consider evident. It is generally agreed that born in a country and not having come from elsewhere, they must be judged indigenous. For it is likely that located directly under the course of the sun, combining with the humidity of the soil, produces life, those sites nearest the equator must have produced living beings earlier than any others. The Ethiopians also say that they instituted the cults of the Gods, festivals, solemn assemblies, sacrifice, in short all the practices by which we honour the gods." (Historian Diodorus of Sicily, writing in the 1st Century BC). Some archaeologists now believe Kenya and Ethiopia to be one of humanity's birthplaces, where homo sapiens started to develop. In the Bible, Noah's son Ham 'begat' Cush, Mizraim, Phut and Canaan, names which became associated with Ethiopia, Egypt and Palestine. Myth, history and image intermingle.

