In the Shadow of the Sheraton: imagining localities in global spaces in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Moyer, E.M.

Citation for published version (APA):
A Place of Peace:  
Street Corner Justice in the name of Jah

Every man got a right to decide his own destiny,  
And in this judgement there is no partiality.  
So arm in arms, with arms, we'll fight this little struggle,  
Cause that's the only way we can overcome our little trouble.

No more internal power struggle;  
We come together to overcome the little trouble.  
Soon we'll find out who is the real revolutionary,  
'Cause I don't want my people to be contrary.

To divide and rule could only tear us apart,  
In every man chest, mm - there beats a heart.  
So soon we'll find out who is the real revolutionaries;  
And I don't want my people to be tricked by mercenaries.

- Bob Marley, Zimbabwe
Mapping Zion

Among the young men from Maskani with whom I worked there was a general (though not exclusive) form of verbal demarcation employed to map out social space as either safe or unsafe. This process, which I call “mapping Zion,” allows young people to obtain and exchange information about the city through a vocabulary inflected and influenced by Rastafari beliefs. Most of those at Maskani learned about Rasta ideas through numerous sources, including recorded music, live performances by local and visiting musicians, radio talk shows and commentary, television specials, and conversations with other people, both locals and foreigners, interested in the subject. The young men at Maskani would readily employ the phrase “peace and love” to describe a place that they considered safe. They would say, “we have peace and love here, but over there, there is none. There it is Babylon.”

Differences between places, especially in reference to notions of security, were almost always expressed in the extreme. Places, and occasionally people, were either good or bad, Zion or Babylon. Although, in fact, the line between good and bad was rarely clearly defined and moral boundaries were continually being challenged and renegotiated, most of those with whom I worked generally spoke as if it were otherwise. Peace, a word that comes to stand for all that is good in society will be the primary focus of this chapter. What is peace? How is it conceived? And, perhaps most importantly, how is it maintained? As the title of the chapter might suggest, this last question will be answered in relation to the ways in which peace is achieved and maintained among those living and working in the streets, while the following chapter will shift its attention to examine manifestations of “Babylon,” the word most often used to define places, people and actions that contribute to the breakdown of peace.

My first official day of working with Mbelwa started out like most days we worked together. Sometime around mid-morning, after rush hour traffic, we met at the Sheraton Maskani. I had been there before to extend greetings or to leave a message, but this was the first time I visited in a formal capacity. On this day, I was there to work. The first thing Mbelwa did was to introduce me to a young man named Athumani, insisting that if I ever had a problem I was to go to him (Fig. 4.1). Once introductions were over, it was agreed that we would go for a walk to talk some more. We were headed for “the beach,” I was informed, where we could get a nice breeze. Somewhere along the line, jokes were made about the softness of my skin and me, as a mzungu, being unable to cope with the climate. We headed through the city, down Ohio Street, past the Sheraton, toward the seafront. Dar es Salaam’s streets are amazing in that traffic seems, for some reason, to become only congested on certain streets. While the cars and minibuses on Maktaba Street are at a virtual standstill on Ohio, one parallel street away there is only the occasional taxi or Land Rover. There is an ordinance against busses using this road, and except during the busiest times of the day when the occasional
driver feels that it is worth the risk
to jump to the head of the queue,
most comply. The road is wide
and lined with trees that must be
nearly as old as the city itself;
they provide shade for most of the
walk. We make our way quickly,
though we are careful never to
walk so fast as to break into a
sweat. Having always been a slow
walker, I delight when walking in
Tanzania where no one ever tells
me to pick up the pace. As we get
closer to the waterfront the side­
walks slowly become more crowd­
ed with merchandise. In this area
of the city where most of the big
international businesses and organizations are housed, the streets are lined
with vendors selling shoes, suits, ties, and suitable business attire for
women. There is a shoeshine/repair stand every 100 meters or so, the occa­
sional newspaper stand and a few middle-aged men here and there repairing
watches. In short, one is able to find all the merchandise and services nec­
essary to look the part of clean-cut businessperson. As we come upon the
recently opened Steer’s (a South African fast food chain opened in Dar es
Salaam in 2000) and the British Council, the merchandise abruptly changes
to accommodate the tourists and expatriates who frequent the area.
Makonde sculptures, beaded jewelry, second-hand books, and Hakuna
Matata T-shirts are the norm.

We keep moving, greeting others on the go. Mambo? Vipi? Poa. Hamna
We raise our right hands to our hearts and almost imperceptibly bow our
heads as we exchange greetings. Everyone wants to say hi to the mzungu,
to sell her something, to test her Kiswahili, to say karibu. “Welcome.”
Mbelwa looks at me and smiles, raises his eyebrows and says, “welcome to
Tanzania” in English, making sure my sense of humor and irony are intact.
Without it, he seems to know this simple walk can quickly begin to feel like
running a gauntlet of hassles and hustles. “Nipo fresh,” I say. I’m cool. This
is my first day, I’m loving every minute of it . . . the red wazungu wearing
shorts and sitting on the terrace of Steer’s, spending more on lunch than
most of these guys make in a week (the Africans sit inside in the air condi­
tioning), the smiles, the laughs, the heat, the noise, pedestrians being
squeezed between vendors and impossibly big Land Cruisers. Like well­
endowed women, these vehicles are called shangingi, and both are signs of
status. To see a fat politician and his fat wife (or girlfriend) pull up outside
of Steers in a car as big as a house (gari kubwa kama nyumba) is to witness
the irony of African development first hand. Why wouldn’t I be smiling? This is why I am here.

Finally, we reach Kivokoni Front, the road running along the waterfront. We cross the road, pass through an open space where vendors sit on cloths on the ground surrounded by their goods –mostly fruit, toothpaste, soap and small bags of water. Although I am sure the merchandise on sale here has been specifically selected for its profitability at this site, the logic of this particular combination, like so many other things, eludes me. On the other side of the this makeshift market is the beach, and as we near it I see a huge and improbable makeshift structure, which I soon realize houses tens of mama lishe eating establishments. Like a soft wave the word mzungu ripples through the area. People stop what they are doing and look up. Most smile a smile similar to the one that was on my face in front of Steer’s, perhaps shaking their heads a little. Karibu dada, karibu sana. Asante, asante sana. I smile back; mentally checking off a list in my head of all the places I had been warned about, warnings that I have so quickly disregarded on this walk. And, it is only just beginning. While I stand on display, Mbelwa and Athumani ask around for someone. I take in the view of the port and pretend I know what is going on, even though I have no idea. Breathtakingly blue waters envelop five or six rusted-out ships. On the shore people seem to be milling about, sitting under trees, passing the time. The air is thick with the odors of food being cooked and fish rotting. Underneath it, and occasionally overpowering it, are the odors of gongo, a locally brewed gin, marijuana, and a smell I will eventually come to know as heroin. Most of the people along this stretch of the beach come here every day to work, either operating small businesses, or searching for day work at the port; but there are some who live here, who eat, sleep, shit, and bathe here. Understandably, there are quite a few other smells to contend with as well. When Mbelwa and Athumani return they escort me to one of the rusting ships. We climb aboard and make our way below deck, out of sight, where the ritual of transforming a small packet of marijuana, or kete, as it is known, into a perfectly fashioned joint begins. I am told that I should not smoke here, that it is not safe, and I vaguely begin to realize that the guys are uncomfortable. They smoke quickly and we leave. We walk along the beach toward the ferry, past the fish market, and along Ocean Drive. They warn me that it is probably better for me if I do not come to these places alone. There are thieves everywhere, I am told. Just as it says in the Lonely Planet tourist guide I brought with me. But, why did they feel unsafe earlier at the beach? Would thieves have attacked us there? I get the answer a few days later when we hear that the police had shown up immediately after our departure and that they were particularly interested in the mzungu smoking marijuana. Apparently, we had been set up but my ever vigilant hosts saw the trouble coming and helped me to avoid what would have no doubt been an embarrassing, as well, as rather expensive, first day out. This lesson was the first among many to teach me that in most cases it was best to trust the street knowledge of my friends in deter-
mining whether or not I should consider an area or a situation to be safe or unsafe.

Unwritten Rules of Maskani

The places we visited that day were places that many of the young men from Maskani visited every day, either in the morning or the evening, and sometimes at both times. They would go there primarily to smoke, not wanting to be caught smoking near the places where they conducted business, nor wanting to be stopped by the police with cannabis in their pockets, which would most certainly result in paying a higher fee to avoid incarceration. Over the course of time, I gradually came to realize how important these places of leisure were for maintaining a peaceful working/living environment at Maskani. During the daylight hours, no one ever smoked at Maskani, nor did anyone sell cannabis or any other illegal substance. On one occasion, when a young man began selling at Maskani, he was almost immediately reprimanded by the other young men working on the corner. I was surprised at the time because it was the first time I realized that there were many unwritten rules for keeping order at Maskani, and that everyone wishing to work there was subject to them. The man who had begun selling at Maskani had set up a makeshift stand on the edge of Ohio Street, just opposite the Sheraton. He wore his dreadlocked hair tucked up under a red, green and yellow Rastafari style hat and was, at least publicly, busy selling small beaded trinkets, known colloquially (to the anthropologist's delight) as "culture," but there were rumors flying about that he had been selling marijuana to white tourists as well. When we walked by his stand one day, I was surprised to hear the generally soft-spoken Mbelwa raise his voice to reprimand him. "What are you trying to do," he asked him. "Don't you know that you can't do that sort of thing around here, across the street from the Sheraton? There are white people here and if you cause trouble, the police will start coming around and asking questions. There will be trouble. We want peace here." Several other young men echoed Mbelwa's sentiments, and within a few days this particular "culture" broker had closed shop and moved away.

Although this is a somewhat extreme example, efforts are routinely made among the people who make their living at Maskani to maintain a certain degree of peace and general civil accord. This is immediately observable whenever an argument or fight breaks out. Before the fight can get out of hand, someone else almost always stops it. In most cases someone a little bit older does this, or someone outside of the immediate circle of those engaged in the fight. If there is one person, in particular, who routinely gets out of line, the others may gang him up on, or they may refuse to help him when he is in need. It is almost impossible to be financially successful at Maskani if one insists on constantly causing fights and disagreements. Having said this, however, it must also be stated that arguments are an almost daily occurrence. Most often they are about issues of money.
At Maskani, there are generally three spheres of informal economic activity: food preparation and vending, the selling of new and reclaimed auto parts, and car parking/washing. Among these, the greatest attention is given to the last in this chapter, while Chapters Eight and Six respectively focus on the first two activities. Most of those who washed cars (kuosha magari) for a living also slept at Maskani and for this reason they made up the main social grouping of the corner. Those who slept at Maskani had the most to gain by instituting a peaceful environment there, as many of them would have nowhere else to go if the police began cracking down on their activities. Since they lived out a significant part of their lives at Maskani, disruptions could be extremely problematic. Maskani served as a center of both economic and social life for them, making their lives extremely precarious. Even though they were able to earn enough to survive at Maskani, they were acutely aware of how quickly their circumstances could change.

Despite constant insecurity, some had been successfully engaged in the task of washing cars for several years. There were others who had either returned home, had saved up enough capital to start businesses of their own, or were in jail. While there were particular individuals who served as core group members in each of the three economic activities, people were also constantly attempting to infiltrate and earn an opportunity to work at Maskani. In most cases, a great deal of social capital was required if one hoped to enter a particular enterprise. Specifically, it was important to know someone already working at the corner quite well because preference was given to those who were either related through kin networks or through social networks connected to one's home region.

No one just shows up at Maskani and starts working. Social connections do not always guarantee success, however. People are given access to work gradually and are tested. If they prove too argumentative, or are unwilling to follow the unwritten rules of the corner, they are told to leave. In one particular case, Haji, a young man living in the Tandale section of the city who was a social acquaintance of several of the other young men, as well as of myself, began hanging out at Maskani in hopes of picking up work washing cars. From the start, it was clear that Haji was seen as an outsider and not particularly welcomed; this, despite the fact that almost everyone at Maskani knew him in some capacity. The ultimate reasons given for rejecting him were economic. There simply was not enough work or money to go around to permit a new person to start working at the corner, regardless of his social connections. There were, however, numerous other reasons for excluding him as well. It was generally known that Haji was a petty drug dealer, and that he had been in and out of jail for this activity, as well as for stealing over the last few years. In addition, most believed that he had recently become addicted to heroin, a condition that is assumed to lead to people becoming thieves and generally untrustworthy. When I spoke with Haji about these accusations he did not try to deny them, but told me that he was trying to make a change in his life. His new girlfriend had just become pregnant with his child and he
believed it was time to try and make a more honest living. The other car washers did not match my sympathies for Haji's predicament. Haji was a member of the small group of people I worked with in Uwanja wa Fisi. I had visited him there often, had met his current girlfriend, and understood the difficulties of starting fresh in that environment. This was not enough to win him acceptance at Maskani however, and it was only a couple of days before he was accused of stealing. There was a big fight between him and two other car washers that eventually led to his leaving.

To a certain degree, social hierarchies are based on the length of time individuals have worked at Maskani, though age, physical size, and social connections to those with seniority certainly play a part as well. The person with the greatest policing power is the one with the greatest investment in keeping the peace, and in this case it was the owner/operator of the one permanent establishment at Maskani, Ras Masha. He owns two music stands in the city and has built a permanent structure at Maskani from bricks, cement, and timber and, therefore, cannot easily move his business away if there is trouble with the police, or with local (formal) business owners (Fig. 4.2). Next to his stand, he has also built a sheltered seating area where most of those who live at Maskani sleep at night. The safest place to secure one’s valuables is within his stand, and many young men keep packages of clothes and other personal belongings there, as well as merchandise for sale. In addition, Ras Masha serves as a banker to many of the men, who ask him to hold money for them that they wish to save. In return for the service, Masha is free to use this money as investment capital.

As Masha cannot be at both of his stands at once he must employ someone to help him. When I first met Mbelwa, he was engaged in this task but by the time I returned to begin my research, he had moved on to other employment. In his place, Masha had hired Mustapha to assist him (Fig. 4.3). One might have expected his main role to be selling music, “culture,” and cold drinks (assuming the electricity is working), but it seemed that he
was more often engaged in maintaining peace among those who wash cars immediately in front of the stand. In fact, regardless of who was in charge of the music stand, whether it was Masha, Mustapha, Mbelwa, or Rashidi, a night guard hired by Masha to protect the stand, he could be certain that his duties would also include policing those who chose to work and sleep in the immediate vicinity. When the fight between Haji and the two car washers broke out, it was Mustapha who stepped in to calm the situation before it got out of hand. It was also in this capacity that Mbelwa was acting when he reprimanded the young man for attempting to sell cannabis on the corner. The night guard, Rashidi, who was hired and paid by Masha to guard the area around his stand, also played an important role in maintaining peace at Maskani at night. He was in charge when it came to deciding who would be permitted to sleep at Maskani and also made sure that none of the young men who slept there stole anything from others who would store their merchandise with Rashidi in the evening in exchange for a small fee. Rashidi's authority at the corner was respected more than anyone else's. This was most likely the case because the car washers always remembered that it was because of him that they were working there since he had been the first car washer at the corner (see Chapter Two).

When someone who was connected with the music stand would become involved in policing the corner, he would most often be granted the respect this position accorded him, though at times, this was done rather begrudgingly. In short, hierarchies of power are acknowledged, but rarely are they unquestionably accepted. Those who occupy positions of power, regardless of how marginal, are expected to perform their roles with a certain degree of fairness in mind. When they fail to act justly they are almost immediately taken to task with reminders of the equality of all humans, the equality of access to public space, and the connections between morality and social justice.

Although it is difficult to prove, I would like to suggest that there is a connection between contemporary discourses regarding equal access to public space and the socialist rhetorics that characterized Tanzanian nationalist discourses from independence through the mid-1980s. However, I would also contend that discursive practices surrounding Tanzanian socialism have been recently transformed to accommodate the introduction of capitalist rhetorics, which have become increasingly dominant in Tanzania over the last twenty years. In most cases, demands for equal access to public space are marked with various invocations of the nation. It is common to hear people proclaim their right to conduct business in the streets based solely on their Tanzanian citizenship, and this was no less so among the young men at Maskani. From this perspective, all Tanzanians have an equal right to use public space for their own personal economic advantage. This argument, especially well heralded among those who come to Dar es Salaam in search of economic opportunities, contradicts Ujamaa visions of public city life, which were more in line with modernist ideals of urban space that held that city streets were to be
kept open for the common assembling and enjoyment of the masses, not for the economic advancement of individuals. In this sense, places like Maskani are themselves a contradiction to modern urban ideals; yet those who conduct business in such locales find little irony in invoking socialist visions of the city to demand space for their individual capitalist endeavors.

One could argue that for those who make their living in the streets, public space is most readily defined by the degree to which it is accessible for economic development. Every inch of public space, whether in the streets, on the sidewalks, or in public parks can serve as a potential market. The most important factor for guaranteeing steady and uninterrupted business and trade is a peaceful environment, which simultaneously serves to make potential customers feel safe, to keep police at bay, and to produce a relaxing atmosphere in which to work and live. While all the areas of the city that have been converted into public markets strive to achieve this balance, they differ in the ways this is carried out.

To the degree to which it served as a place of work and leisure, Maskani was like countless others found throughout the city. To those who worked, lived, and hung out there, however, it was preferred specifically because it was thought to embody a spirit of peace and love, a preference that was expressly mentioned whenever and by whomever I would ask the simple question, "Why choose to hang out at this corner instead of another corner in the city?" In part, I would ask this question because I was trying to locate a good scientific reason for focusing my research at Maskani, trying to identify the degree to which it could be considered representative of other maskani in the city. Familial and social networks do prove important when attempting to establish an informal business in a new area, yet I knew that most of the young men working at Maskani had extensive networks throughout the city and had they chosen to do so could have probably worked somewhere else. Income at Maskani was fairly stable. Usually one could make enough honestly to eat three meals a day and often there were opportunities to make much larger sums of money, some legal, and some not so legal.³ The spirit of peace that set Maskani apart was partially maintained through social pressures like those described above. Additionally, attempts were made by many of the young men working in the area to demarcate the space as a zone of peace. Almost all would do this through speech, peppering their greetings and vocabulary with various Rasta-fied expressions exchanged among each other, but in particular with potential customers. This allowed them to overcome possible language barriers with customers who did not speak Swahili — everyone knows "peace and love" — and it also gave them a way to reassure people who might otherwise be wary of engaging in business with street hustlers. Others would undertake to accomplish this by wearing Rasta-inspired clothing. It should be noted, however, that although these efforts may have worked to reassure tourists and expatriates who might equate Rasta symbolism with peace, many upper and middle class Tanzanians looked down on Rastafari culture, particularly the practice of
smoking marijuana. There seemed to be a strong belief among many Tanzanians that smoking marijuana caused insanity and irresponsible social behavior, a belief that was echoed by the Tanzanian scientific community. So while the decision to demarcate Maskani as a peaceful zone may have been good for business on certain levels, it also had the capacity to attract unwanted attention from the police. Since the police were mostly concerned that people should not smoke marijuana in public, however, much of this attention could be deflected by not smoking at Maskani.

The Art of Peace: The work of Ras Swedi and Haruna

Next to the Sheraton and across from Maskani stands the Nyumba ya Sanaa, or House of Art, a national art gallery and cultural center established by Nyerere to foster the development of Tanzanian art and artists. There are several artists and musicians who work in residence at the center, most of whom are graduates from the Bagamoyo School of Arts, the only art school in the country. At the time of the research, the art produced in connection with the Nyumba ya Sanaa was primarily tourist art, mainly crafts such as baskets, pottery and dyed cloths, and paintings depicting Tanzanian pastoral scenes, landscapes of Kilimanjaro, Maasai warriors, wild animals and the like, the majority of which were copies of postcard images. Throughout the year there would also be numerous performances held at the center, attended almost exclusively by expatriates and tourists and occasionally by members of the Tanzanian elite and public officials. When I returned briefly to Dar es Salaam in early 2002, the Nyumba ya Sanaa's name had been changed to Nyerere Cultural Center to honor him posthumously. In addition, very little art was on sale at the time. The gallery had closed and the performances had for the most part stopped. The former director of the gallery informed me that this was because so few tourists were making their way to Dar es Salaam in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, making it impossible to sell enough art to make a profit. Given that other art centers and markets in Dar es Salaam have continued to thrive and even grown in size during the same time period, however, I suspect that there are other reasons for the recent economic failures of the Cultural Center.

During the main period of research for this project, however, the center,
although rapidly degenerating, was still fairly active. As it was across the street from Maskani, it was a convenient place to meet and talk with people who were not particularly interested in hanging out on a street corner and eventually the café staff even agreed to allow me to hold interviews on the premises, an opportunity most appreciated given the difficulties of recording conversations held on the street. Whenever I found myself there, I would take the time to stop by the gallery to note what was being marketed as “Tanzanian” art. Although there were, on occasion, some quite accomplished pieces for sale, most fell into the category of tourist paintings described above. Although the subject matter of these works was unimaginative, the skills of some of the artists were quite impressive. One of the best painters of this genre was a young man who goes by the name of Ras Swedi. Examples of his work are given in Figures 4.4 & 4.5 and, while they certainly do demonstrate his steady hand and talent, they certainly do not work to demarcate spaces of peace in any way. Given that Swedi regularly referred to both the gallery and its manager as “Babylon” this should perhaps not be too surprising. He believed the commission the gallery charged for selling his work was too high and eventually he began selling his drawings and paintings at another gallery where the consignment fees were much lower. Ras Swedi’s working space, however, which was situated at Maskani, a stone’s throw from the Nyumba ya Sanaa, was an entirely different matter.

Ras Swedi (Fig. 4.6), himself a follower of the philosophies of Rastafari, is truly inspired by Bob Marley, by both his music and his countenance. Among those who were familiar with Swedi’s work outside of the context of the Nyumba ya Sanaa, he was best known for his meticulous pencil drawings of

Figure 4.5 Ras Swedi’s Maasai paintings on sale at Nyumba ya Sanaa. Dar es Salaam. (2000)
Marley. He also occasionally painted Marley on larger canvases. On the canvas paintings he usually worked together with Haruna, who would apply paint to the canvases after Swedi had sketched the image of Marley on it (Fig. 4.7). Although they would share the profits made from the sale of the paintings, they were readily recognized as Swedi's work because everyone knew that Haruna was learning from Swedi, but also because of the subject matter. Simply put, if you wanted a picture of Bob Marley in Dar es Salaam, you would do business with Ras Swedi, the recognized master of the genre. Generally speaking, people who saw him working were amazed by his talent. His superbly detailed pencil drawings, possessing an uncanny degree of verisimilitude reminiscent of photography or photocopy art, would take about a day to complete and were most often done on commission or as gifts for friends. Only occasionally would Swedi put his Marley drawings up for sale. When he did, however, they were always quickly snatched up (Figs. 4.8, 4.9). The large Marley canvases, like the paintings of Maasai, were primarily produced for the tourist market, as their prices put them out of the range of affordability for most of the Tanzanians who might desire them. My informal observations suggested that the Marley canvases sold much more quickly than did the Maasai paintings. Despite this, the Marley pictures and paintings were never accepted on consignment at the Nyumba ya Sanaa. Though they no doubt would have sold quite well, it would have been difficult to market images of a Rastafari saint as a representative of Tanzanian national art.

The place where Swedi and Haruna painted was sandwiched between several food vendors' stalls, a couple of small dukas selling sodas and cigarettes, and various other informal economy emporiums. Swedi's choice to set up his studio on this corner was hardly accidental. He chose it specifically because it gave him access to the several markets for which he painted. First, as already mentioned, he sold some of his works at the Nyumba ya Sanaa, which was situated directly across the road. Second, UNICEF occasionally employed him to design posters for various public education campaigns, and as UNICEF headquarters were housed just around the corner from Maskani it made for a convenient location. Many international development organizations employ local artists in an attempt to effect more culturally appropriate campaigns, but when they do, they often work with the artists who are most easily contacted. For this reason alone, setting up his workshop around the corner from UNICEF, as well as in the shadow of numerous other development organizations, guaranteed Swedi greater access to the markets they provided, as well as to the occasional artist training workshops they offered, several of which he attended during the time he was situated at Maskani.

A third group of his customers was made up of the tourists and expatriates who passed by his workshop as they went about their business in the city. Although there was a steady stream of foreigners passing by Maskani, it should be noted that very few ever purchased any of Haruna's or Swedi's works directly from them. Although they rarely sold for more than 50 USD,
Figure 4.6 Ras Haruna painting at Maskani. Dar es Salaam. (2000)

Figure 4.7 Ras Swedi working at Maskani. Dar es Salaam. (2000)
they were for the most part out of the range of low budget tourists looking for inexpensive souvenirs and neither original nor “naive” enough to be of any great interest to expatriates in search of an investment. The fourth, and final group of customers interested in Swedi’s work was made up of young Tanzanians, mostly male and middle class, though even those with very little money might commission a drawing of Marley from Swedi to hang on the wall of their room. From this category Swedi had a few patrons, a couple of whom promised to try to market his work abroad (Fig. 4.10). I suppose, despite my gender and nationality, I would have fit into this latter category in Swedi’s mind. When I did find him a potential foreign market, he did not show any great interest in it. There is no doubt in my mind that this ambivalence was tied to a certain resistance on his part to market pictures of Marley to audiences that he considered unworthy, specifically White people, non-Rastafari, and foreigners. We did become acquaintances, and there was a fair modicum of friendship between us. I also commissioned some of this works for both myself and for others, though he always kept me at a certain distance.

Swedi’s choice to set up his workshop at Maskani was certainly an economic one, but it also expressed his desire to work in a place relatively free from hassle. In this respect, both he and Haruna were not unlike the other young men working at Maskani. To a large extent the presence of his workshop at the corner helped to demarcate it physically as a place of peace. This was especially the case when his larger than life-size canvases of Bob were on display (Figs. 4.11, 4.12). When Swedi and Haruna were working their very presence transformed the space of Maskani. Their drawings and paintings provided visual evidence of the corner’s peacefulness, marking the area as a swathe of Zion in the midst of Babylon. In many ways their work — both their labor and the products of it — was the proud possession of the other young men nearby. When the two artists were working, small groups of people often gathered around to watch, and when a painting or drawing was nearing completion word would spread quickly so everyone could stop in to have a look. If there was a willing anthropologist in the area, they might even have asked to have their picture taken with a larger than life Bob (Figs. 4.13, 4.14).
Beatific Bob and the Search for the “Real” Followers of Rastafari

When people gathered to watch Swedi work there was no doubt that they were amazed by both his and Haruna’s talent, but more often than not they would marvel at the beauty and spirit of the man who was Swedi’s most popular subject. Swedi’s visible reverence for Bob Marley served as an inspiration for many young men who were searching for a role model who could provide an example for living righteously in a morally ambiguous world. When I asked Swedi why he drew the same pictures of Bob over and over again, he told me that it was a way of training, that he believed that if he could draw Bob’s face perfectly, he would become a better artist. Watching him meditatively produce these drawings day in and day out for almost a year made me wonder what it was about the image of Marley that was so intoxicating, for him and for those who gathered to watch him work, and, I must confess, for me as well.

I could figure out why rhetorics and imagery associated with peace and Rastafari philosophies were so appealing, but I had difficulty answering the question: “Why Bob Marley?” Why not Peter Tosh for instance? When discussions on music were held someone would offer the rarely challenged observation that Tosh was the better musician (Fig. 4.15). When I would ask, “why Marley,” most had no trouble answering. They almost uniformly agreed that it was simply a matter of aesthetics. “Bob is a beautiful man you see, and Peter Tosh is not.” The ambiguity and in-betweeness he embodies as a result, in part, of his mixed parentage makes him exceptionally appealing. The lightness of his skin influences this aesthetic judgment. More significant are his long, beautiful dreads —dreads, I was often told, which would be difficult to grow for someone of purely African descent. I am aware of many eloquent arguments questioning the relationship between a preference for light skin, good hair and internalized oppression that can result from living in racist societies; yet I contend there is more at work here. Tanzania is part of the world, and the world is a racist place. There is no doubt that racism
leaves scars on the psyches of many in Tanzania, but there is also a centuries-long tradition along coastal Tanzania of marriage between Africans and more light-skinned Arabs and occasionally Indians that would make it inaccurate to interpret the aesthetic preference many young Tanzanians show for Bob Marley as internalized racism. It is a commonly held belief among coastal Tanzanians that people with mixed ancestry are physically more attractive and Bob Marley fits perfectly into this aesthetic. There is more to people’s love and admiration for Bob Marley than just his looks though. People speak of him as a prophet or a saint of the Rastafari faith, while his lyrics serve as no less than a hymnal for the oppressed.

It is often said that Bob Marley is the third world’s first superstar, a true man of the people speaking on behalf of poor folks everywhere, whether in Kingston, Harare, London, or New York. His music and the philosophies it embodies are known worldwide. Images bearing his beatific countenance seem to smile down on us from every corner of the globe. He is truly a global phenomenon and no doubt much could be learned about processes of globalization by following the trails blazed by his music. Not since sugar has a commodity so highly valued, so powerful and sweet come out of the Caribbean. In his classic work on that topic, Sidney Mintz (1985) masterfully laid the groundwork for contemporary studies on globalization. The worldwide popularity of Bob Marley’s music and Rastafari-based philosophy signifies globalization of a sort on many levels, a topic that is itself worthy of a book-length study. But rather than examining the phenomenon that is Bob Marley from a global perspective, I attempt to do so from a much more localized one.

Dar es Salaam, in translation the “Harbor of Peace,” seems the ideal place to discuss Marleyan dialectics of peace and love, or “amani na upendo” in local parlance. Amani na Upendo, Peace and Love, Jah Guide, Jah Bless—these are routine greetings exchanged among urban youth in Dar es Salaam, greetings that carry currency throughout the world. From Johannesburg to Jakarta and from Athens to Amsterdam, people of all ages associate Bob Marley, dreadlocks, and the manifestations of Rastafari art with an atmosphere of peace and openness. In the seven years I have been working in the concrete jungle of Dar es Salaam, the number of people wearing Rasta-style dreadlocks and fashions seems to have grown exponentially. Rasta representations include both visual and sonic manifestations, and this is particularly true in regards to the imagery and music of Bob Marley. This chapter then, asks not only, “why Bob Marley?” and “why Rastafari?” but also and “why
now in Dar es Salaam?" Surely, Marley's popularity is indicative of very specific global forces. By focusing on the local, however, I hope to illustrate further how manifestations of globalization are readily co-opted into the production of localities. Much has been made in recent years of the dialectics between the global and the local. By now, I think, most cultural critics have recovered from the initial shock of what has become known as the McDonald-ization of the world, and most of us have managed to reassure ourselves that local cultures will not disappear in the face of such large-scale corporate onslaughts. Local cultures may transform and change as a result, but then, they always have.6

When I arrived in Dar es Salaam to begin research for this project, I had already planned to study local Rastafari communities as they related to my larger interests in the relationships between urban youth and popular culture. I had noticed the steady increase in the number of dreadlock-sporting Rastas in recent years, particularly among those young urban men whose efforts to earn a living brought them into close contact with foreign tourists. I was interested in exploring this interstitial space between locals and foreigners, insiders and outsiders. As far as I could tell, the young dreadlocked men with knowing smiles who called out greetings in Disneyfied Kiswahili — habari sis-tah, hakuna matata — from street corners throughout the downtown section of the city were the most likely ambassadors of this space. Such young men
are often, and with some derision, referred to as Beach or Cabana Boys by foreigners and locals alike, and it is generally believed that their kind can be found anywhere in the world where there are sun and wealthy female tourists. Many of those who work in Dar es Salaam have in fact found their way there from the Kenyan coast where they made an art of seducing foreign women, or from Zanzibar where they are only just beginning to perfect that art of seduction. The accessibility of these young men made them appealing to foreign tourists and, as I quickly learned, to foreign scholars. In less than a year’s time I met at least five different foreigners conducting research on the “Dar es Salaam Rastafari community,” although in most cases the studies were precursory and made the same mistakes I had made initially by assuming that the Rastafari “community” existed in some sort of cohesive way and that its members could be identified on site. Most of my initial conversations with those Rastas who worked the tourists of the city were spent discussing their foreign contacts, their foreign women, and whether or not I would be willing to help them get to the United States. In other words, I was being subjected to the same hustle to which foreign tourists were routinely subjected. As time progressed, I made friends with a few and even learned some things about their lifestyles, the ways they made money, and about their views of the West, particularly of Western women, but I was never really able to get past the hustle. They were good at their jobs, they were professionals, and they were hustlers — arranging all sorts of local forays for foreign tourists, whether it was a visit to the local markets, a trip to Zanzibar, a Safari, black market money exchanges, drugs, or sex. I found that their initial greetings of peace and love soon dissipated when they realized I was not going to be taken in by their good looks, and at the end of the day, their dreadlocks, Bob Marley T-shirts, and shallow rhetoric were more indicative of their commitment to capitalism than any commitment to Jah that I could discern.

Many of the predominantly non-dreadlocked young men at Maskani, who were themselves involved in other, sometimes competing, informal economy hustles had told me from the beginning that these young men were not “real” Rastas. They were merely “fashion dreads” with roho mbaya; meaning that their spirit was more focused on their own success than in treating people with respect. "Hamna peace and love," no peace, no love, Babylon. Fashion
dreads, locks that are grown for reasons of style rather than for spiritual reasons, are as common in Dar es Salaam as they are throughout the world. In Dar es Salaam, however, as is sometimes the case in other parts of the world, this style choice can result in routine harassment by local police. Young men with dreads, many of whom are directly involved in the tourist industry, are often targeted by corrupt police and pigeonholed as troublemakers, drug addicts, and thieves by the general public. Usually a small bribe is enough to escape the grip of the police, but when local officials decide to clean up the streets many young “fashion dreads” find themselves thrown into jail where their locks are sometimes unceremoniously shorn off. This act almost always guarantees a downturn in their economic status when they are released from custody. One gets the sense, however, that police rarely target dreadlocked individuals randomly. Conversations with other Rastas who are not involved in tourist hustles indicate that they are not often subject to police harassment. There are also numerous Rastafari in Dar es Salaam who hold fairly prominent public positions. Nevertheless, the choice to grow locks is in many cases an economic rather than a spiritual or political one. Even though it is often impossible to determine when exactly this is the case, the point I am trying to make through this distinction is that “fashion dreads” are rarely committed to the sort of revolutionary overthrow of Babylon power structures that is supposedly typical of the political agenda championed by many Rastafari. Growing dreads is certainly a fashion statement that does increase one’s social cachet among tourists, if not one’s social capital, and choosing to wear one’s hair in this style goes against the norm of Dar es Salaam street culture, which posits that the best way to succeed on the streets is to limit police attention to oneself.

A Brief History of Dar es Salaam Rastafari

Although I did eventually find “real” Rastafari and real Rastafari communities in Dar es Salaam — those who follow a Rastafari belief system and adhere to its tenets — I also found that they had very little connection to the popular rhetorics of peace and love that echoed through the streets. There was quite a lot of in-fighting and disagreement both within and among the various communities and there was an almost universal distrust of outsiders. The philosophies of the Rastafari faith have come to Tanzania in many and complex ways. Most are in one way or another tied to the increasing availability of reggae music in the region and its consequent rise in popularity. Until 1998 the only radio station available on mainland Tanzania was state-sponsored and very close-
ly controlled. Reggae was rarely if ever played. Cassettes were, of course, smuggled into the country, and those living in Zanzibar or near the borders with Kenya or Zambia were able to listen to reggae that was broadcast from those countries. Many older reggae fans I spoke with reported having heard reggae music and specifically Bob Marley in the early 1980s while also acknowledging how tightly the state controlled the music market at that time. The recent growth in popularity of Bob Marley, Rastafari rhetorics, and dreadlocks must be due to the fact that mass productions of sounds and images associated with Rastafari culture have only become available over the last several years.

Shortly after the airwaves were opened up, several FM stations began playing popular music —Clouds and East Africa FM being the most successful stations. In recent years, East Africa FM has demonstrated steady support for reggae music, both foreign and locally produced (Fig. 4.16). In 2000, the station counted three Rastafari among their selectors: Jamaican-born and repatriated Ras (or Baba)-T, Seychelles-born Emp’ress Gypsy, and locally born Gotta Irre, who is was a member of the politically important Warioba family. His father, a judge, faithfully served under Nyerere. Like many up-and-coming young middle class Tanzanians who are currently taking over the production and marketing of Tanzanian music, Gotta Irre spent a great deal of his youth outside of Tanzania nurturing a nationalist pride typical of exile elites. As such, many are at least rhetorically committed to promoting the development of Tanzanian music and musicians. In an interview with “Chris,” a selector from Clouds FM, he proudly proclaimed both his and the station’s power in regards to shaping the musical future of Tanzania, stating that he and his colleagues were responsible for “telling Tanzanians what to listen to, what to like, and what to dislike.” Though Chris may have been overstating his power, he may not have been too far from the mark. The music scene in Tanzania has been growing in leaps and bounds since the late 1990s, and emergent styles have more than a little to do with the opening of the airwaves.

Although transformations in national policies regarding the control of musical production and broadcasting have made reggae and other foreign music styles more readily accessible in Tanzania only in recent years, it has been possible to hear live performances for quite some time. As early as 1983, the band Roots & Culture, headed by Jah Kimbute, had registered with the National Arts Council. It would be difficult to classify Kimbute’s music as reggae, however, though it has certainly been influenced by it. Many Rastafari musicians in Tanzania feel that their music should display solidarity with those struggling in the streets of Tanzania, and that a reggae beat is not always necessary for such solidarity. When I spoke with Kimbute, for instance, he was quick to point out that he was the first Tanzanian musician to sing about the dangers of AIDS and the government’s failure to focus on the burgeoning epidemic in the late 1980s. According to him this was quite revolutionary given how tightly politicians controlled the production of
Tanzanian music at that time. By many other musicians, however, Kimbute is seen as someone who worked for the state. He had official support from the Nyumba ya Sanaa and he traveled with his band throughout Africa and to Europe as performers of Tanzanian culture. Kimbute does not deny that he benefited from state support but points out that his music, which often called on the government to assist the poor, was usually better received outside of Tanzania than within. His songs about AIDS, for instance, received a great deal of radio play in Uganda, yet were virtually ignored in Tanzania. By allowing and even funding certain musicians to travel as representatives of Tanzania, the state was to a certain extent able to control the image outsiders had of Tanzania, making it appear as a much more tolerant place than it actually was.

In addition to Kimbute, there are currently several dreadlocked Rastafari musicians—both Tanzanian and foreign born—who perform in Dar es Salaam. Justin Kalikawe is the only one who performs in what could be considered a reggae style. Kalikawe, who was born in Dar es Salaam, began performing publicly in the late 1980s and has released several locally produced cassettes over the last decade. Since moving to his family homeland of Bukoba several years ago he rarely performs publicly, reportedly in order to escape the corruption of the Dar es Salaam music business. Now he produces his own cassettes and while they are of poor technical quality, his music is among the most original in Tanzania, and his lyrics, always in Kiswahili or Kihaya, are among the most poetic and poignant. Following in the tradition of political reggae, he typically sings about issues close to the hearts of poor Tanzanians and holds local and national leaders accountable for the nation’s problems.

There were other Rastafari influences to be found in Dar es Salaam prior to 1998, of course, but they were not mass produced, and in many instances were tied to émigré Rastafari individuals who had repatriated to Tanzania in the mid-1980s. In 1986 or 1987, depending on who you talk to, the Tanzanian government, acting under the direction of President Julius Nyerere granted a parcel of farm land near Kigoma to a group of West Indian Rastafari based in London. 13 With financial assistance from the Marcus Garvey Foundation, this group aimed to repatriate to mother Africa— to Zion. Repatriation is one of the supposed aims of all Rastafari, though there are some schools of thought that believe that Babylon must be overthrown
before Zion can be achieved. The few Rastafari who eventually reached Tanzania had very little knowledge of agriculture, and even less of Tanzanian culture, and their utopic dreams of mother Africa soon faded. The land they had been given was never developed and the original funding mysteriously disappeared. Many of those who came returned to England, but a few of the original settlers remained in Tanzania laying the groundwork for contemporary Rastafari communities in which most continue to hold leadership positions. The sermons they offered, and continue to offer, were always in English, however, and the majority of young Tanzanians who joined them in worship could hardly understand their “speachifying,” let alone “overstand” it.14

The inherent irony of all of this did not escape the notice of most of the young Tanzanian men I interviewed on the subject. Here was a group of relatively light skinned and comparatively better off people leaving London and coming to Africa in search of Zion. What they found instead was poverty unlike any they had previously known and Africans who were more proud of their national and ethnic heritages than the mythical Kushitic15 one upheld by Rastafari teachings. As one young Tanzanian who had been disillusioned by so-called “real” Rastafari from the Atlantic world told me, “I’m not Mkushi (a Kushite), I’m Bantu.” According to the tenets of Rastafari, deliverance is realized through repatriation to Zion, to Africa (Fig. 4.17). But this form of deliverance is an infinitely less powerful motivator when you are already in Zion. If poverty and daily struggle are very real characteristics of Zion then is it wonder that many young Tanzanians would prefer to imagine salvation — at least economic salvation — in Babylon, the land theoretically left behind by those who repatriated? I say theoretically, because it was no secret that most of them eventually returned to the West and all of them maintained financial ties to London and the United States. The Zion of Rastafari signifies not only a place, but also a time not yet realized. After the revolution, the overthrow of the Babylon system, Zion may be realized, but for now it remains a plethora of lands and peoples struggling to find peace and stability. Those Atlantic Rastafari who view Africa as Zion are participating in a particularly utopian vision, imagining the possibility of a spatial solution for their problems —problems which, in this case, are intricately tied to capitalism. What Atlantic Rastafari have failed to understand is that Africa has also been made subject to global capitalism, and that the problems of poverty experienced in the Atlantic world pale in comparison with those suffered in Zion. Additionally, those who have attempted to repatriate have been forced in many cases to come face to face with the degree to which they themselves are implicated in Babylon power structures — their relatively privileged positions providing them with the opportunity to emigrate in the first place.16

Reworking Marx, Harvey reminds us that those seeking a “spatial fix” through emigration to a promised land are doomed to failure. They are “too infected with the errors of their education and prejudices of today’s society to be able to get rid of them in a utopia” (2000a:30).

What foreign-born Rastafari do provide, however, is a focal point around
which Tanzanian-born Rastafari can gather. At the Saturday gatherings, which leaders of the Rastafari communities organize, the faith is re-imagined and recreated to reflect local interpretations underlying its tenets. It is here that Tanzanians can learn the importance of His Imperial Majesty, Haille Selassie I, (Figs. 4.18, 4.19), about Ital eating requirements, and Biblical justifications for smoking cannabis. Informal discussions in Kiswahili among Tanzanians prior to, and following, the sermons are common. It is during this time that the sermons, which are often delivered in English by foreign-born or extremist leaders, are interpreted in accordance with more temperate local views. Peace, acceptance, and social justice become the central ideals of local Rastafari practices, while many of the racist and sexist elements of Atlantic-based Rastafari beliefs are discarded to a certain degree.\footnote{17}

When the young men at Maskani spoke of a “real” Rastafari faith they were not speaking of that which was most closely tied to Rastafari beliefs, but rather of a philosophical and spiritual commitment to adhere to a particular set of social norms, to approach life with justice in your heart and a generosity of spirit toward those who are down and out. This philosophy was often summed up to me after extensive conversations in Kiswahili with lyrics quoted from Bob Marley’s repertoire. Although some of the young men from Maskani did sport dreads and adorn themselves daily in red, green, yellow and black, this did not mean they were followers of the Rastafari faith in any strict sense. Still, for many it did indicate their strong belief in social justice and the rights of the poor man (Figs. 4.20, 4.21).\footnote{18}

Conversely, I found that wearing dreadlocks and following the tenets of the Rastafari faith were not enough to make a person a “real” Rasta, as the church of Rastafari, like all organized religions, is rife with hypocrisy and the path of righteousness is always a difficult one to walk.

**Inner Peace:**

| Achieving clarity through a gift from God |

Maskani bila dawa ni kama kilabu bila pombe
A maskani without “medicine” is like a bar without beer.

-Joke made in response to my questioning of the popular belief that people only visit maskani to smoke cannabis. Dawa, the Kiswahili word for medicine, is the word most commonly used to refer to cannabis.

The smoking of *Cannabis sativa*, or ganja, is one of the
central practices of Rastafari. Followers of the faith consider it divinely inspired, and on more than one occasion Dar es Salaam Rastafari offered to illustrate this point to me through the quoting of holy scriptures from the Bibles carried by many of them:

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 (Genesis 3:18).

Thou shall eat the herb of the field (Genesis 3:18)

Thou shall eat every herb of the land (Exodus 10:12)

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and the herb for the services of man (Psalm 104:14).

The Kiswahili word for cannabis is bangi (derived from Hindi), but Rastafari, as well as most young people who smoke it refer to it simply as dawa, or medicine. The renaming of illegal substances to conceal their identity from the police is a common enough practice and it was the reason most often given to me for using the word dawa. When people talk about their reasons for smoking, however, it becomes clear that cannabis is consumed primarily for medicinal reasons related to the reduction of psychological stress associated with living on the streets. The young men I worked with smoked “kupunguza mawazo,” roughly translated, this means to reduce confusion through a process of cooling off, or “kupata mawazo,” to get ideas. Several young men have explained to me how living on the streets brings about confusion. Every day one is confronted with difficult decisions that challenge their norms and morals. People say, “nimechanganikiwa,” a beautifully passive construction announcing, “I was caused to be mixed up,” a state that often arises from struggling to survive day after day in the hot sun. Mawazo are ideas related to abstract thought and it is believed that when one is overwhelmed with them it is difficult to make an intelligent decision. In this sense, ideas themselves are neither bad nor good, it is how one acts on them that is important. In order to avoid acting on impulse, or out of anger, people smoke dawa to clear their heads, to give them time to think through a problem or a situa-
tion, to examine all the possibilities and to foresee obstacles when possible. It is following the act of clearing the head, or reducing confusion, that one gets new, clearer ideas. Mawazo is a noun related to the verb kuwaza, to imagine, ponder and reflect. Smoking dawa then provides a method for opening the mind to new ways of solving complex social problems through imagination and reflection. Most of the time people choose to smoke in small groups among close friends and acquaintances and would use the occasion to discuss the difficulties that were confronting them, as well as to dream about the future (in fact, mawazo can also mean dream). Many regular smokers refer to these gatherings as “meditation,” borrowing from the English, or claim that smoking helps them, “kupata meditation,” to enter into a meditative state. In these contexts meditation doubles as a synonym for mawazo (or kuwaza depending on how it is used) while at the same time making a connection to Rastafari belief systems that also refer to smoking cannabis as meditation.19

One could argue that smoking dawa actually helps to bring about peace on the streets in Dar es Salaam, and that by providing an opportunity for thinking before acting, the consumption of cannabis actually decreases violent outbursts and impulsive robberies.20 In addition to fostering this outward peace, however, dawa also contributes to the development of a sort of inner peace among those who smoke in Dar es Salaam, by reducing their confusion and easing the anxiety they feel about living an extremely precarious existence. Much of this chapter, and indeed this book, focuses on the exterior worlds of those living and working in the streets as it is extremely difficult to examine the interiority of their worlds without resorting to an exploration of subjectivities bordering on the psychological, a skill that falls far outside of my domain. When I speak of suffering and struggling, economic or physical tropes are most often invoked. But, much of the suffering experienced by those who do struggle in the streets is psychological. Routinely subject to the humiliations of physical and verbal abuse, begging, rape, and hunger, the scars inflicted on their psyches are often difficult to fathom, let alone discuss or write about. For many young men, dawa provides relief from these daily humiliations, and a space, albeit an inner one, to contemplate the meaning of life and to find the strength to continue the struggle. In addition to smoking for the purpose of clearing their minds most also report smoking before going to sleep at night in order to ease their minds, to ease their
hunger, and to help induce a state of (un)consciousness that allows them to sleep through the night on the streets with little else to protect them from the elements, the mosquitoes, and the rapists. In this regard, it is easy to see why so many of them are quick to imagine dawa as a medicine sent from above.

I found that in the context of my work, it was an important ritual to smoke with those who agreed to participate in the research as a way of developing trust between us. By smoking together I was illustrating my trust in them that they would not set me up and they were able to recognize in me someone who would not judge them as immoral and degenerate. Nearly every group interview undertaken with young men began with the smoking of dawa. On several occasions I was assured that this was necessary if only because it would help people to tell better stories during our interviews. As one young man told me at the beginning of a group interview, "Kila mtu anafikiri. Tunavuta kupata mawazo." "Every person thinks. We smoke to get ideas."  

Chant Down Babylon: Roho mbaya as the root of all evil

There is a tendency among those who study youth subcultures and popular culture in general to gravitate toward politicized subjects of study, focusing on revolutionary ideas and projects countering the status quo. I must confess that one of my initial interest in studying the Rasta subcultures of Dar es Salaam was to ferret out local discussions on inequality, African unity, and social justice in order to inform my own scholarly views on these subjects. Such discussions seldom emanated from the “real” Rastafari communities, but rather from those who were struggling to make a life for themselves on the streets. They were far from being ideologically uniform, though, they were intensely critical of the various power structures —local, national, and international — that collaborate to keep the working man down.

We should not forget that Zion (i.e. Africa) was colonized and thus perhaps forever tied to Babylonian systems of global capitalism. Many Africans, peoples of African descent, and others with peace and love in their hearts, had great hopes for the continent as one African country after African country rapidly achieved independence throughout the 1960s and 1970s. As time passed, however, and the general air of optimism started to fade, there was one cautionary voice that could be heard above others; one voice aware that neither the “real revolutionaries” nor the real revolution had yet been determined. That voice belonged to Bob Marley. In his 1980 song Zimbabwe — a song composed and recorded out of solidarity with the freedom fighters of that country—he cautioned against internal divisions and power struggles in African countries. By 1980, the world had already witnessed the dire consequences of such struggles in many newly independent African states and, at least to Marley, it was becoming apparent that many so-called revolutionaries and independence leaders had been led astray following independence. At the time, Marley insightfully suggested that fighting for the independence of African nations did not necessarily make people revolutionaries. His song
was, in essence, an appeal to Africans, and especially African leaders, to become “real revolutionaries” and visionaries. He was the only foreign musician invited to perform at the national ceremony marking Zimbabwe’s independence in April of 1980, a performance that guaranteed his message would be directly delivered to the many African and Commonwealth leaders (not to mention Prince Charles himself) who had gathered to mark the last time the British flag flew over the African continent. Given recent events in Zimbabwe, however, perhaps Robert Mugabe is in need of hearing the refrain repeated a few times, as no doubt are many of the other leaders who had the privilege of being in attendance that day. It is arguable that Marley’s sustained interest and commitment to African power structures helped to guarantee his continued popularity throughout the continent today. It is certainly true in Tanzania. Marley’s thinly veiled criticism of African leaders at a time when unity was being almost uniformly and uncritically celebrated was truly revolutionary, and it was for this that he was most often heralded among young men in Dar es Salaam who are themselves highly critical of their own leaders.

Many of the young men with whom I worked felt that their parents’ generation had failed in their assigned task of being “real revolutionaries” and that, worse yet, they had through their corruption and greed colluded in the perpetuation of neo-colonialism. It was Marley’s song, specifically the lines concerning the real revolutionaries, that was on more than one occasion offered to me as an explanation for why Zion, in the form of modern day Africa, specifically the Tanzanian nation-state, has failed its people. This opinion was...
especially held among middle class youth whose parents had the benefit of international education and a steady flow of development support from liberal democracies throughout Europe who wanted to see Tanzania, "the shining example of Ujamaa, African socialism," survive. That first generation of leaders, for the most part, was guaranteed lifetime employment opportunities in government jobs. The country, indeed the world, had invested in them and according to most young and disillusioned people today in post-socialist Tanzania, those leaders let the nation, and indeed the world, down.

The contemporary rhetorics of peace and love were, like the visions of Atlantic Rastafari born out of the wreckage of a failed vision of utopia, though in this case a temporal utopia associated with post-independence imaginations. In discussions filled with post-colonial wryness, I came to understand that in accordance with local ways of knowing, neither Babylon nor Zion were geographical places or mythical places, nor were they unrealized futuristic utopias. Rather they had become concepts, and identities. A person with roho mbaya, or a bad spirit, is Babylon, the embodiment of everything wrong with society and the opposite of peace and love. Roho mbaya ni ugonjwa, or "a bad spirit is a sickness" (Fig. 4.22).

Roho mbaya is normally translated as either jealously or envy, but these translations fall short (Fig. 4.23). Both jealousy and envy are considered normal human emotions; it is only those with roho mbaya who act on such feelings. The degree to which an individual is considered a good person is determined by the degree to which he or she is able to refrain from acting on the feelings of jealousy and envy, which are bound to be everywhere in a society where scarce resources are so unevenly distributed. People with roho mbaya are described as if something were inherently wrong with them, as if they have not been properly socialized. Many people I interviewed in Tanzania championed the belief that an individual's character is formed in childhood and that once determined it is almost impossible to alter. Thus someone afflicted with roho mbaya is doomed to a life of inflicting social and economic injustices against those who are least able to defend themselves. There are also strong power and class connotations at work here that should not be overlooked. People generally consider it impossible for a wealthy person or a person in a position of power to be jealous or envious of the less powerful and feel, therefore, that ill will directed toward the have-nots by those with money and power is a particular result of their roho mbaya. Although poor people may be inclined toward roho mbaya, their lack of power makes it difficult to act on it. Of course, even slight power differentials, whether based on economics, gen-

Figure 4.24 Comic strip by Thabit "Kajanja" Maiga, a Maskani regular. Frame 1: "If you want to progress in this country it is necessary to have roho mbaya my friend." Frame 2: "Then why hasn't Mzee Gulogoja's wife progressed?" From artist's personal collection. Dar es Salaam. First published in Dar Leo. (14 April 2001)
der, age, or size may be exploited by those who are truly afflicted, though it is rare to hear references made to poor people's roho mbaya. Those I interviewed on the subject tended to base their analysis of another's roho on the degree to which he or she might capitalize economic inequalities, on the degree to which someone with money was willing to interfere with the earning potential of someone with less money (Figs. 4.24, 4.25).

It may be possible to argue that discourses surrounding roho mbaya at Maskani are similar to witchcraft discourses more generally.22 Rather than talking about witchcraft, however, or making witchcraft accusations, something most at Maskani were extremely hesitant to do, people chose to fortify their accusations of roho mbaya with Rastafari rhetoric. Calling someone "Babylon" was tantamount to saying they had roho mbaya and quite possibly calling them a witch. However, no one from Maskani ever reported having direct dealings with uchawi, or witchcraft. Surprisingly, no one reported having dealings with waganga, or healers, either, even though such a claim would have been considered much more benign. None of them visibly wore amulets to ward off the evil intentions of all those with roho mbaya who surrounded them (unless one were to count the Rasta beads nearly all of them wore). In fact, when my efforts to work with a particular mganga who had prepared an amulet for my protection were made known to those at Maskani, several of them made fun of my apparent lack of sophistication and ignorance. Although they did believe in the existence of both uchawi and uganga, most of them reported having very little first-hand knowledge about either.

After prompting from Mbelwa, I began to explore the opposite of roho mbaya, and was surprised to learn that it was not roho nzuri, or good spirit. Rather, it is roho ya kizungu, a phrase translatable as "white" or "European spirit" used to express extreme and to a certain extent inexplicable generosity toward poor people. I asked if it was possible that certain Tanzanians might also express the qualities associated with roho ya kizungu and was told that while it would be possible, it would be highly unusual since they would most likely be too embroiled in local power politics to treat a poor street hustler with any respect. And anyway, very few Tanzanians would strive toward the goal of having roho ya kizungu, a level of generosity toward strangers that, as I have stated, does not really make sense in local settings. I was provided with several examples of Tanzanians with roho ya kizungu, and interestingly, all of them had spent considerable time living outside of Tanzania, where it was likely that their character would have been influenced. Sizing up character and generosity was an almost con-
tinual preoccupation of those working at Maskani, which made perfect sense
given that most of them relied on tips to make their living. Wealthy people
who failed to tip well were considered to be behaving in a selfish and unjust
behavior. This standard that was even more strictly applied to Europeans
who were expected to express a certain tendency toward generosity. When
those who parked their cars at Maskani failed to interact with the young men
guarding their cars with sufficient respect or to pay them a sufficient tip they
were likely to find that their cars were not guarded as well as they might have liked. Stealing from the cars of wealthy people with roho mbaya was not con-
sidered particularly problematic morally, the only trick was to do it in a way
that would not bring the police to Maskani and disrupt the peace.

Philosophical views related to roho, or the human spirit, are central to any
understanding of the way that young people in Dar es Salaam interpret, trans­
form and co-opt Atlantic Rastafari beliefs. I have chosen to focus on an explo­
ration of the foundations of some of these local philosophies because I think
one of the main reasons that Marley and his music have become so popular
in Tanzania today is that the messages layered into his lyrics are already
reflective of local ways of knowing. The primary reason he is particularly pop­
ular among poor urban youth, I think, is that his music captures the spirit of
struggle that so many of them know first hand from their daily efforts to get
by. In short, Bob Marley is a floating signifier with enormous potential for
interpretation. His lyrics, when taken out of context, could be construed as
enormously banal. When interpreted in the context of one’s life experience,
however, they can seem quite profound. The struggle that Marley describes
is a difficult one. It is made worthwhile, however, because of the moments
of love, joyousness, and pleasure that are also part of it. Unlike many musi­
cians who describe and condemn Babylon power structures, Marley offers
possibilities, not just for the future, but also the possibility that a certain
peacefulness can be had today if one chooses to live with love in one’s heart.
Marley’s music is revolutionary in political and economic terms, but also
because it insists on recognizing the power of “peace and love” central to
Rastafari notions of “spirit.” Through experimentation with Rastafari philoso­
phies young people making their way in the streets of Dar es Salaam are able
not only to survive but also to thrive with a degree of passion, compassion,
and style that might otherwise be denied them.

It is my belief that many of those at Maskani who promoted social ideals of
peaceful coexistence, cloaked in Rastafari philosophy, did so to promote a
better quality of life in the context of their daily negotiations with others who
worked at the corner, as well as between themselves and those officially
responsible for policing the corner. In limiting the number and degree of pub­
lic altercations they were able to limit the attention they drew to themselves
and improve the likelihood that they would be able to go about their day to
day lives with a limited amount of hassle and harassment. Paradoxically,
however, the choice to demarcate the corner as a “zone of peace” with Bob
Marley and other Rastafari imagery and music, and the choice to wear Rasta
hairstyles, clothing and jewelry, virtually guaranteed that they would be seen as troublemakers by much of Dar es Salaam society. Though they rarely smoked marijuana where they could be readily observed, it was generally assumed by the public that Rastas of any kind were regular consumers of the drug. Many middle class people with whom I casually spoke about my work would condemn those who smoked marijuana, saying that it made them crazy and irresponsible. Though there were a few young men at Maskani who strictly adhered to the tenets of Rastafari belief (i.e. vegetarianism, not cutting hair, etc.), most observed the rules of the faith only nominally, giving precedence to philosophies that reinforced their own ideals regarding social justice and to fashions that resonated with their own aesthetics.

Writing about inner city African American expressive cultural forms in the United States, historian Robin Kelley stresses the importance of examining cultural forms that are normally referred to as popular, such as language, music and style, in a way that allows for the possibility that they serve a purpose that is more than simply functional:

[W]hen social scientists explore ‘expressive’ cultural forms or what has been called ‘popular culture’ . . . most reduce it to expressions of pathology, compensatory behavior, or creative ‘coping mechanisms’ to deal with racism and poverty. While some aspects of black expressive cultures certainly help inner city residents deal with and even resist ghetto conditions, most of the literature ignores what these cultural forms mean for the practitioners. Few scholars acknowledge that what might also be at stake here are aesthetics, style, and pleasure. Nor do they recognize black urban culture’s hybridity and internal differences (1997:17).

In this chapter, I have attempted to follow Kelley’s lead and I have tried to illustrate the ways in which an uncontested global phenomenon like Bob Marley can be localized through a process that infuses both his life and what he stood for with meanings that are often completely removed from who he was.23 At the same time, I find it important to focus on how choosing to become a Rasta in Dar es Salaam, whether “real” or “fashion,” is part of a set of choices relating to “aesthetics, style, and, pleasure,” as well as economics and politics. Reducing such choices in a way that would portray those who honor Marley’s philosophies through an embodiment of Rastafari culture as either blind consumers of Western-marketed music, or as people so subsumed by the daily struggle to survive that their lives have become devoid of inventiveness and pleasure is too simplistic of an analysis. Such a view would be a disservice not only to those dedicated to the task of trying to understand and perhaps “help” those who have been economically marginalized by society, but also to those who have found in Marley someone capable of representing the complexities, both banal and profound, of living and working in the streets.
notes

1 Sisi tupo na peace and love, lakini uko hamna. Uko Babylon.
2 I have first-hand information from two separate people of European descent falling into this same trap. Each of them ended up paying over 200 dollars directly to the police officer in order to avoid being charged with possession. I was told that after this fairly routine transaction would be completed, the police officer would give a portion of his proceeds to the dealers who had sold the marijuana (at a much-inflated price) in the first place.
3 On a good day a car washer could earn 2000 – 3000 Tsh. just washing cars and three square meals could be bought for under 1000. At other maskani where people earned less it was not uncommon for people to pool their resources to buy the necessary ingredients to prepare a meal. In this case, 1000 Tsh could feed four or five people quite well. Most car washers considered 500 Tsh. to be the minimum they could make and still survive. With this they could eat one large afternoon meal and still have enough left over to smoke a little marijuana to stave off hunger in the evening. Though most of them did have savings with Masha, the store owner, I never saw them dig into this money to meet daily expenses. Instead they would either borrow money from someone else working at the corner who had done good business for the day, convince one of the food vendors to give them a meal on credit, or try to beg money from passersby.
4 Dr. Sylvia Kahaya, personal communication with the author (2000). Dr. Kahaya, a psychiatrist at Muhimbili Hospital in Dar es Salaam, reports unusually high numbers of patients being admitted to the psychiatric ward with “cannabis induced psychosis” and over one third of all patients being admitted with high THC (the active ingredient in cannabis) in their blood stream. She also reports that it is not uncommon for parents to commit children they suspect of cannabis use to the psychiatric ward for treatment. She suggests that it was possible that some forms of Tanzanian cannabis had exceptionally high levels of THC, making it more potent that cannabis in other parts of the world. Clinical tests to verify this are currently underway.
5 For more on tourist art in Africa see Kasfir (1999) and Phillips and Steiner (1999).
6 See Mintz for an especially succinct summary of these views (1998:117-133).
7 The shaving of dreads is a practice much more common among police in Zanzibar where the number of both tourists and “fashion dreads” is much higher. See Weiss for a discussion on the relationship between hairstyles and police harassment in Arusha (2002:116).
8 Special thanks to Ras Simba who valiantly attempted to convince the Brethren of his church to accept my presence in their midst. I know this caused a great deal of social discomfort for him and respect his decision to maintain the moral high ground.
I had several insightful discussions on the history of reggae in both Zanzibar and on the mainland with the producer of Bongoland Recordings — a label devoted to producing bootleg copies of hard to find reggae classics. “Teacher,” as he is fondly known at Maskani, now lives in Dar es Salaam, but grew up in Zanzibar and worked as a music selector for reggae gatherings that were commonly held there in the 1970s and 1980s. Clearly, it was people like him making copies of reggae music throughout the socialist period who fueled underground interest in foreign music. Other notable sources of foreign music that were reported by those I spoke with in the music world were university professors and Tanzanian diplomats working abroad.


Repatriation refers to the return of all Rastafari to Zion, Africa. Repatriation is one of the primary tenets of the Rastafari faith.

Changes can be particularly noticed in regards to the growing popularity of Kiswahili rap and the growing acceptance of Taarab, a music that was formerly considered immoral because of its association with homosexuals. In Chapter Seven I discuss the recent emergence of “modern Taarab,” which has been heavily influenced by the increased radio play Taarab has received over the last several years.

From independence, Tanzania, and specifically the University of Dar es Salaam, served as a center for debates on pan-Africanism and possibilities for repatriation, thus it is not surprising that Nyerere would have lent his support to this re-settlement scheme. Correspondingly, most of the repatriated Rastafari who I interviewed demonstrated an almost unquestioning support of Nyerere, despite knowing very little about the particularities of his policies.

Within the Rastafari traditions of Jamaica conscious efforts have been made to purify the English language by transforming the existing lexicon, as well as by introducing entirely new words. Thus “overstand” comes to replace understand and “speechifying” to replace preaching. These linguistic variations have been spread throughout the Rastafari world primarily through reggae music. See Campbell (1985:188-190) and Pollard (1994).

According to the Rastafari faith all peoples of African descent can trace their ancestry to Ethiopia, therefore, making them all Kushites.


See Lake (1998), Rastafari Women: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology, for a discussion of the subordinate and even slave-like roles to which many women are subject in the name of a Rastafari belief system in Jamaica. In Tanzania, there are very few women who consider themselves Rastafari, though an increasing number of young women are dreading their hair. Emp’ress Gypsy, a radio selector for East Africa FM, publicly proclaims herself a Rasta woman, but this identity is often challenged by her
male counterparts for her refusal to submit to conservative doctrines that would transform and limit her involvement in public life. Generally, those with whom I worked seemed to express a great deal of acceptance toward White Rastafari, while limiting simplistic generalizations connecting notions of Babylon to “White” power structures. Oppression was recognized as resulting from differences in power, which may or may not be related to race, and depictions of Babylon were often connected to power structures much closer to home than those connected to the Atlantic slave trade.

Most Tanzanian Rastas think of Rastafari as a set of cultural norms rather than a religion and neither Muslims or Christians reported finding the tenets of Rastafari at odds with their own religious beliefs. Although I had initially expected religion to play an important role in my research it was rarely a subject of discussion among any of the groups with which I worked. All of the groups consisted of members who were Christian or Muslim, but most had working knowledge of both faiths. The women I worked with were more likely to discuss how their faith figured into their lives than the men were, but there were no discernable social tensions based on religion that I could discern.

There are striking linguistic similarities between Wamaskani discourses on the relationship between thought and action and Fabian’s (1974) discussion of genres of Jamaa discourse. Both speak of being inspired by mawazo (dreams/idea) and of the importance of exchanging these ideas through a mode of counseling, or advice giving (mashaurii). Of course, few Wamaskani viewed the smoking of marijuana as a religious experience, or of divinely receiving mawazo. There were, however, undeniable tendencies to ritualize cannabis use by associating it with Rastafari beliefs (see next note).

The idea that cannabis produces a calming influence is hardly new. Fabian provides the following observations made by German explorer Hermann von Wissman in 1881 when travelling trough central Tanzania: “I am convinced that hemp has a domesticating effect on the negro, that the narcotic weed mitigates their restless savagery . . . It makes the negro more approachable and more useful for culture and civilization” (2000:171). If nothing else Wissman’s observations provide evidence of ritual use of cannabis in Tanzania as early as 1881. Some of the young men at Maskani would talk about older men (wazee) in their respective home regions smoking cannabis when working in the fields or at the end of a long day of labor. None spoke of the ritual use of cannabis in rural areas, though they did tend to ritualize their own use of it and to place high value on Rastafari beliefs that regard cannabis as holy. In an interview with the author (2000) Dr. Gad Paul Kilonzo, a physiatrist at Muhimbili Hospital, suggested that cannabis is sometimes used by rural laborers to relieve the boredom that agricultural work sometimes entails. Mbatia recognizes ritualistic use of cannabis in some rural areas of Tanzania but stresses its consumption was regulated “traditionally,” though it is not clear what he means by this (1996:25).

Fabian suggests that if we are to accept the notion that we, as Africanist
anthropologists, are participants in the struggle to carve a place for Africa and Africans in the present then we must make present “our knowledge of what people think that thinking is and accomplishes” (1998:105-6). It is to this end that I enter into a discussion on mawazo and its relation to the consumption of cannabis.

22 Several early readers of this text pointed this out and I believe it is a comparison worth further comparison even though the data I have been able to gather to date do not support it.

23 A similar argument is made by Savishinsky (1994) regarding the ways Senegalese Baye Faal have both incorporated and transformed Atlantic Rastafari cultural practices that already resonated with their own beliefs and practices as followers of the teachings of Sheick Ibra Faal (1858-1930), who quite independently of Rastafari influences also dreaded his hair and smoked cannabis for religious purposes. See Roberts and Roberts (2003) for further discussion of the popularity of Bob Marley among Mourides in Senegal today.