

# **Cultural Production and the Struggle for Authenticity: A Study of the Rastafarian Student Organization at the University of the Western Cape**



A mini thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology/Sociology, University of the Western Cape.

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## KEY WORDS

Culture

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Semblance

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University of the Western Cape

Performance

Rainbow nation

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the precarious nature of authenticity as it manifested itself in the activities of H.I.M. Society, the Rastafarian student organization at the University of the Western Cape. Ethnographic research was conducted, to explore the above mentioned issue, which involved observation of various activities and in depth interviews. I also inquired about outsiders' perspectives on Rastafarianism and H.I.M. Society in particular.

Authenticity, as it is conceived in this thesis, is about what a group of people deem culturally important. Three important ideas follow from this. The first is that not everyone in a group agrees on what is important. Put differently authenticating processes tend to be characterized by legitimizing crises. Therefore, secondly, social actors need to invest cultural ideas, objects and practices with authenticity. Lastly the authenticating processes are predicated on boundaries not necessarily as a means of exclusion but as fundamental to determining the core of cultural being and belonging.

As this relate to H.I.M Society I inquire into the activities and symbols used to authenticate notions about their culture. Following Meyer (2011) and Van de Port (2006) I focus on what media (for example dress code, pictures, texts etc.) members of H.I.M. Society use to make real-to authenticate-what is important. I focus specifically on H.I.M. Society's exhibitions (conceptualized as performances), discourses on what constitute a true Rastafarian and also documentaries which H.I.M. Society members deemed as important.

I argue that while authenticating processes can attain a degree of solidarity among H.I.M members it is sometimes the very same processes that lead to rupture amongst members. At the same time some activities (especially the exhibitions) also place Rastafarian authenticity under scrutiny from the outside and serve to distance themselves from others.

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that *Cultural Production and the Struggle for Authenticity: A Study of the Rastafarian Student Organization at the University of the Western Cape* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Alton Riddles



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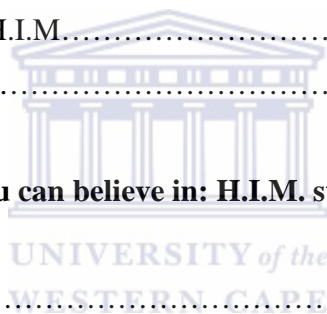
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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

One of the key signifiers of the South African socio-political landscape is diversity. This diversity has had a strange career and life. In the Apartheid era this diversity was seen as something to be contained or at any rate controlled to fit the political and economic agendas of those in charge (the awkward relationship between capitalism and racist ideology notwithstanding). With the demise of Apartheid and the birth of a 'new' South Africa our diversity was framed within a more celebratory and arguably more romantic discourse. Through this new image of diversity our country was dubbed the Rainbow nation.

Maudlin patriotism gave the Rainbow nation rhetoric an almost self deluding albeit emotionally invigorating tone. People celebrated their *uniqueness* with a new zeal or at least tried to negotiate the *essence of their uniqueness*. But diversity as it is conceived in the public imagination is a double edge sword. It is possible (if not more viable) to see this diversity in terms of divisions along the lines of for instance race/ethnicity, language and culture and how these translate into material inequalities (see Butler 2004 and Venter 2007). One can for instance observe how many of the Black and Coloured population of South Africa still live in abject poverty or how dominant political parties have an almost monolithic racial character about them.

This discrepancy between the ideological and the material leaves the project of South African nationalism in a credibility crisis. As with most things, however, the people's response to this credibility crisis seems to be ambivalent. But it is felt at all levels. Afrikaans speaking intellectuals feel that if we truly celebrate diversity in this country why is it that their language does not receive the adequate representation. At the more quotidian level Coloured people are disillusioned with a political system which they see as racially bias. This, however, just gives people the incentive to affirm who they are more, to perform their identities.

## 1.1 Background/Rationale

At the level of higher education this same dynamic has interesting manifestations. Student protests are no longer the only or necessarily the predominant means of approaching institutional and broader political concerns. The deployment of ethnic identities and cultural performances are also emerging strategies for expressing various issues. Sikwebu (2008) argues that the cosmopolitanism of Wits can create a feeling of estrangement for many students. This is one of the reasons for the emergence of cultural organizations at the university. These organizations' activities and performances with its emphasis on ethnic identities become a "haven of security" (Alexander 2001) for the students. In all of this there is a sense that people want or need to affirm and grapple with *authenticity* (cultural and individual). With these insights in mind this study focuses on the Rastafarian student organization at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), The H.I.M. (His Imperial Majesty) Society.

These shifts mentioned above are properly understood in the wake of the democratic transformations of 1994 which exposed many South Africans to opportunities and possibilities not available to them before this period. In the ideological and political arena there was a move from liberation politics to politics of human rights. The proliferation of issues of human rights extended to concerns over cultural rights issues. In South Africa nation building can thus be formulated as unity through affirmation of diversity. This nation building project also made groups more self-conscious about who they are whether this stems from instrumental reasons such as land claims or from more emotional ones such as claiming to be a unique hue of the Rainbow nation.

In higher education the political, economic and social changes in South Africa created new challenges. In line with the demands of globalization and the so called knowledge era, South Africa sought to promote and improve participation in higher education institutions (Visser 2008). The first step towards this goal was to tackle the racial imbalances which plagued these institutions for decades. Even though the doors to these institutions have been opened for the previously disadvantaged the intersection of race and class still poses formidable problems. It is for instance mostly

the more financially stable black and white population who have access to the previously white universities while those who make up the poorer part of the population only have access to the previously black universities with their limited resources (Marrow 2008). Another issue which faces the “historically disadvantage institutions” (ibid) is its inability to cope with the growing rates of enrolments (Visser 2008). We have recently witnessed certain universities incapacity to accommodate and accept large numbers of students in their establishments.

In these trying educational contexts it is only reasonable that students will react. But in what way do students react. Koen, Cele and Libhober (2006) point out that protest action is still alive and well in South African universities. This is contrary to the belief that this particular form of addressing grievances would have dissipated in post-apartheid South Africa. Institutional governance at universities now place more emphasis on student involvement through bodies such as Student Representative Councils (SRCs). The SRC’s approach to problem solving of participation and negotiations did not replace the student protest as a means of communicating discontent (ibid). In fact the SRC might itself become the target of a protest if it is perceived that they do not live up to their promises. Acknowledging that SRC and student protest approaches are still salient this study will focus on a different strategy, that of cultural performance. It hones in on how a particular student organization, the H.I.M. Society, uses different styles and cultural performances as a means of expressing and addressing issues of authenticity.

## **1.2 Aim**

The aim of this study is to understand how people use various material and symbolic resources to create a sense of collective identity. These resources can be used in many ways (symbols for one are after all polysemous) so emphasis is placed on how these resources are used to reflect collective identity. That is they should reflect an authentic image of the collective. But since these resources can be used and thus interpreted in various ways which would suggest that not everyone in a collective would agree on what is the best way to reflect and project an authentic image of the collective this study will also focus on the struggles for authenticity.

### 1.3 Literature Review

This literature review will briefly consider the concept of authenticity (a fuller treatment of the concept is given in Chapter 6). But I am dealing with the authenticity of a particular cultural identity/movement, Rastafarianism. As such I would first like to discuss the movement and academic approaches to Rastafarianism.

Rastafarianism is the product of various historical and ideological trends which have its centre in Jamaica. From the perspective of ideology “Rastafari was predicated on the identification of evil” (Chasmore 1983:13). Rastafarianism was an active response to perceived evils in Jamaican society during the time of its inception. Indeed as Emily Blatter (n.d.) contends Rastafarianism represents a different theodicy of suffering. Following the sociologist Peter Berger, Blatter states that theodicies of suffering help people to come to terms with a status quo that is not in the people’s best interest. The Rastafarian theodicy of suffering goes one step further by not just giving people meaning in hard times but also challenging the roots of those hard times. That is they challenge the status quo. Rastafarians share this spirit of resistance with other groups in Jamaican history most notably the Maroons.

It seems common place for historiography of Rastafarianism to mention or associate this movement with the Maroons (see Barrett 1988; Burt 1982 and Erskine 2007). The Maroons were the slaves left behind by the Spanish after they were defeated by the British for control of Jamaica in 1655 (Cashmore 1983 and Blatter n.d.). These slaves fled for the hills where they joined and lived with small communities. They have been a problem to the British colonist for more than eighty years only to be dissipated but not completely stopped by a peace treaty signed in 1738 (ibid). Both the Maroons and the Rastafarians resistances are fuelled by religion or religious sentiments.

Ethiopianism, as it would subsequently influence Rastafarianism, found its biblical inspiration in Psalms 68:31 which reads that “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God” (Fredrickson 1995:61). Ethiopianism as a philosophy or approach to black redemption had both spiritual and more practical (i.e. political and economic) manifestations. For instance Edward

Blyden, a nineteenth century West Indian born Presbyterian minister, emphasised the political and economic aspects of African redemption while his contemporary Alexander Crummell, an American born missionary, emphasized the religious and spiritual aspects (ibid: 68).

Marcus Garvey built on the foundation laid by Ethiopianism. A son of Jamaica born on 17 August 1887 is known as the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). This organization was established in 1914 in Jamaica but was subsequently moved to New York, America in 1916 because Garvey did not elicit much response from Jamaicans at the time (Cashmore 1983:20).

As far as Garvey's politics went he differed from other black nationalist in that he did not only attribute evil to whites qua oppressing black people but also to black people who accepted the definitions of themselves as inferior (Cashmore 1983:21). More importantly Garvey's teachings and philosophy were almost always stated in religious language. As such this resonated well with the already religious consciousness of black Jamaicans (Blatter nd.). Garvey's statement thus sometimes had a prophetic quality about them but none more than when he apparently said "Look to Africa when a black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near" (cited in Cashmore 1983: 21-22). When Ras Tafari was crowned as the Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930 and took the title Haille Selassie this seemed to confirm Garvey's 'prophetic' statement. The followers of Leonard Howell (credited as the first Rastafarian) who named themselves after the Ethiopian king's birth name took his crowing in conjunction with Garvey's statement as evidence of Selassie's divinity even though Garvey did not view him as a god and even out right criticized him (ibid). This section served as a brief history and background of Rastafari what follows is a discussion on how the movement is conceived in academic discussions.

### **1.3.1 Rastafari in academic discourse**

For a group which holds an ambivalent position in mainstream society, Rastafarianism has enjoyed a great deal of attention from the academic community. The theological literature (Breiner 1979, Clarke 1994, Oosthuizen 1989) aside most of the academic work on Rastafarianism gravitates towards a Rastafari-as-resistance

movement discourse. This section will consider this approach and will consider an alternative one.

With its ideological and historical roots in Ethiopianism, Garveyism and the socio-political conditions in Jamaica leading up to the movement's birth in the 1930's, Rastafarianism is typically and rightfully seen as a resistance movement. Rastafari resistance should not be understood as merely focused on political and social liberation but also cultural liberation "geared towards the reconstruction of the traditional Afro- Caribbean ethno-racial identity" (Singh 2004:19). Thus race and specifically blackness become an important resource in the process of this resistance. But not any conception of blackness will do.

In an article on the Back to Africa, Black Power, and Rastafari movements, Singh argues that "black cultural nationalists and the other elites and ethnic entrepreneurs have used historical myths, fictions and other related inventions to construct 'sameness' and commonality as a way of framing notions of difference vis-à-vis the Other" (2004:19). Blackness (or Africaness) is thus an innate quality, but the views of the above mentioned parties are not merely essentialist they are also romanticized and potentially chauvinistic. This can be deduced from the ideology of Negritude and the black supremacy rhetoric of Garveyism (ibid: 23).

Price et al (2008) has given the resistance movement discourse a new ring by conceptualising Rastafarianism and other groups as grounded utopian movements (GUMs). Arguing that all social movements have utopian qualities, GUMs "have been distinctive in that their visions of strong utopias have formed to counteract conditions of racist imperial oppression and have focused on group integrity and identity..." (ibid: 128). The grounded aspect means that "the identities, values, and imaginative dimensions of utopia are culturally focused on real places, embodied by living people, informed by past life ways, and constructed and maintained through quotidian interactions and valued practices that connect members of a community, even if it is a diasporic one" (ibid).



This approach differs to the resistance movement discourse in that it does not merely see culture and identity as simply reactions to certain structural conditions but as processes in themselves which interplays with the broader context. In the case of Rastafarianism a strong argument can be made that the movement did emerge because of oppressive socio- political conditions. While I agree with this I think that we should see it as a ‘cultural system’ (problematic as the term may be) worthy of being discussed on its own merits. I therefore want to look at Rastafarianism not only as a social/resistance movement but on how a particular group of people (in this case the H.I.M. society) who call themselves Rastafari communicate a mode of being through cultural performances (and styles). These cultural performances being one of the vehicles used to affirm authenticity

### **1.3.2 Rastafari and the idea of home**

All the above shadings of what I call the Rasta-as-resistance-movement discourse, while important and useful are still limiting. The fact remains Rastafari does not live of resistance alone. De Cosmo (2002) emphasized the importance of the idea of home for diasporic groups such as the Rastafarians. She asserts that the “Rastafari way of life can best be seen as a response not only to racial and class oppression but to the homelessness, rootlessness, and dehumanization that such oppression has engendered” (ibid: 151). Thus belonging and not just resistance becomes an important issue when it comes to understanding Rastafari. Belonging also emphasizes an emotional bond to place (Lovell 1998:1). This seems particularly true for diasporic groups and movements which tend to emphasize a back to home ideal (Singh 2004:24). Home in the Rastafari imaginary (and other Black Power/Consciousness movements) is Africa. This Africa is not just the geographical space but an Africa that is used to reframe history as Singh notes “the imagining of a mythical ‘merry Africa’ stands in sharp contrast to the experiences of the Middle Passage and the conditions of oppressive plantation social structures in the New World” (ibid). This statement also attests to the importance of the imagination in our modern world (Appadurai: 1991). This imagination of belonging to a place or landscape is reinforced through the process of symbolization. In an illuminating study, on displaced Palestinians, Abufarha (2008) shows how the cactus, poppies, the orange and olives trees respectively symbolizes different aspects of longing and belonging to place.



Discussions of belonging or rootedness and home also invite an investigation of solidarity of the groups concerned. Because of ‘theological’ differences in Rastafari solidarity, as with all groups, are not always automatic and given but they all share a common ground in their opposition to Babylon (Olivier 2010:24). Since solidarity is a potentially formidable achievement we need to carefully consider how groups organize themselves around symbols and practices they share.

This above mentioned organization around symbols and practices lead us into the question of cultural production. Cultural production is about the “many ways that people search for new modes of being, relating and thinking” (Price et al 2008: 135). It is about the process of making ways of acting and interpreting our various positions in this world. This means that to some extent elements of this process-such as tradition- are ‘invented’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992) or, again referring to tradition, selective (Williams, 1985). But this instrumentalist view is only part of the picture as many ideas and practices become naturalized (i.e. seen as the authentic way of doing things). This naturalizing or authentication is, however, not neutral or innocent, it tends to produce and reproduce unequal social relations. The authentication process and more broadly speaking, cultural production thus always entail hegemony (Williams, 1985). These issues of power allow us to realise the obvious point that cultural production is not merely an internal process but is related and in reaction to outside processes (Rastafarianism is a good case in point). Also important in the process of cultural production is that it needs to be (intentionally) communicated. The means of communicating culture is what we may refer to as cultural performance.

Like so many analytical categories the term cultural performance leads a very slippery existence. Askew (2002) distinguishes between two broad approaches to cultural performance, the one with its roots in language and communication theory and the other applying the concept to the ‘drama’ of social life. Briefly stated the first approach views performances as texts to be analysed and the latter approach views it as stabilizing and functional forces which masks the contradictions and conflicts of social life. To bypass the limitations of both approaches Askew suggests that we view performances as dialogic i.e. the distinction between performer and audience is fluid. All this considered cultural performances are important existentially and socio-politically because as McAllister states it “use(s) symbols that enable people to take

stock of who they are and what the nature of their society is...” (2008:178). It is also important to stress that cultural performances are not solely means to create solidarity. It is better understood as means to communicate the contradictions and contingencies of particular social realities (Guss 2000). These contradictions and contingencies experienced and expressed make the notion of authenticity more problematic.

## **1.4 On authenticity**

How did authenticity become such a major issue in the modern world? Lindholm (2008) traces the issue to the breakdown of face to face feudal relations. The breakdown of these relations led to a breakdown of the secure social positions the social world provided. This changing European social world also saw many people moving from the countryside to urban environments where they were exposed to more strangers (ibid:3). Also the freedom from prescribed roles translated into more social mobility which also made it possible to pretend to be more than they were. Protestant emphasis on self-reflection; the rise of scientific reason which also favoured introspection and the 15<sup>th</sup> century expansion of trade (which meant more contact with others) all played its part in making authenticity a serious matter of concern (ibid:4-5).

Lindholm also credits Jean Jacques Rousseau as the inventor of authenticity. Rousseau believed that humans are naturally good and that it is society that perverts the nature of humans (Guignon 2004:57). Rousseau called for an unrelenting honesty with oneself and to stay true to oneself even (or especially) in the face of societal resistance. He states that “most of our ills are of our own making we could have avoided nearly all of them by preserving the simple, regular and solitary lifestyle prescribed to us by nature” (Rousseau quoted in Guignon 2004:56). Rousseau could be said to have laid out the blueprint of the modern search for authenticity.

## **1.5 Outline of thesis**

**Chapter 2** is an exploration in reflexivity. It focuses on the dynamics and limitations of the fieldwork I conducted. The main focus of the chapter is on the importance of the self in doing fieldwork and specifically my fieldwork

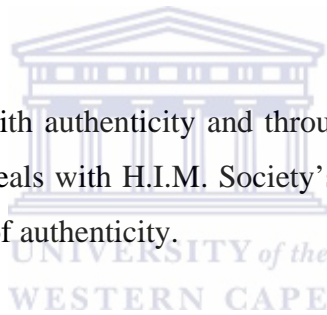
**Chapter 3** gives the context of the fieldwork. It considers H.I.M. Society's position at UWC. It also introduces H.I.M. and gives a more in depth look at three of the members.

**Chapter 4** explores the dynamics of producing identity as this pertains to H.I.M. Society. It focuses specifically how dress code, documentary screening and pictures serve to produce a sense of Rastafarian identity. To guide this analysis I employ concepts such as style, aesthetic formations and mediation. I also introduce the concept of semblance.

**Chapter 5** utilizes the concept of performance to analyse H.I.M. exhibitions. It also engages with some of the conceptual assumptions of performance as understood by anthropologists.

**Chapter 6** deals explicitly with authenticity and through ethnographic material also with the concept of race. It deals with H.I.M. Society's deployment of race and how this impacts on their notions of authenticity.

**Chapter 7** summarizes the findings and also makes suggestions on conceptual issues pertinent to this study and related ones.



## **CHAPTER 2: The research process reflectively considered**

*“The more you do it (research) the easier it gets...after a while you will get a sense of what to do and what not to do”*

*Communication with anthropology lecturer*

*The best laid schemes o’ mice and men/Gang aft a-gley  
Robert Burns*

*It is folly to imagine the informant carries the burden of anxieties, cultural values, and personal idiosyncrasies and that the investigator is exempt from them.  
(Obeyesekere 1981 quoted in Chodorow 1999:207)*

### **2.1 Introduction**

The three epigrams above set, as all epigrams do, the tone of the following chapter. Lest the chapter title be considered a misnomer, this chapter will take a reflective tone. I imagine a very vocal objection may now be made ‘This student is going to bore us with the usual postmodern self-indulgent nonsense posturing behind the more accepted notion of reflexivity’. Such criticisms do have their merit but I can only act (or write in this case), as Goethe would have it, in spite of such (hypothetical) critiques.

My first reason for taking this tone or stance is that most of the formal research techniques imparted on me by Methodology classes were rendered moot by the barrenness and subdued tumult of the field (more on this issue later). To be clear the field’s resistance to established research methodologies was not for lack of trying on my part and by my count (and possibly to my credit considering circumstances) I had about three ‘formal’ interviews, the type which would appease the academic minds who have to evaluate this work.

After the inevitable despair which research conditions such as those which I found myself in, I thought that I could report on the importance of *best laid schemes* going awry and on how psychological and emotional turmoil plays an important role in the research process. But would such an approach have academic merit? As it happens quite a lot has been written about the importance of the quality of fieldwork encounters, understanding the self and the hurly burly nature of fieldwork and how these impact on understanding and reporting findings (such works include Hammoudi and Borneman 2009; Coffey 1999 and Chodorow 1999 among others). These works

make passionate and persuasive arguments that our relations in the field and how we understand ourselves impact not only the outcome of fieldwork but ultimately how we represent what we encountered. I did not need much convincing from these works I experienced it myself but these works did convince me that my ethnographic misadventures are important methodologically. It is in this spirit that I'm writing this chapter not as an exercise of the much dreaded navel gazing but to show other novices that who we are and how we respond emotionally and psychologically in the field are just as important as those sophisticated research methods that our lecturers ram down our throats.

## **2.2 Gaining access**

This is probably the most difficult part of the research process since it usually entails strangers wanting to intrude into the lives of other strangers. I suppose I should call myself a relative stranger since I was a student who wanted to do ethnographic fieldwork with another group of students, and I was already acquainted with two of the members because we were all previously first year tutors. This of course did not make matters much easier but it is up to the fieldworker to forge relationships in the field (Coffey 1999) so I still resolved to introduce myself to a group of strangers.

On the first day I decided to walk over to the H.I.M office to ask permission for my research I was fortunate enough to get Thembani (one of the members I tutored with) along the way. He was at this time a second year tutor and at the time I got him he was waiting outside a class for his tutorial coordinator. I explained to him to the best of abilities (which it turned out was not really to my best) what the aims of my research project was. He seemed to be very amenable to my request and told me I had to wait awhile then we can both walk to the office as I had to ask and explain to the members what it was I wanted to do.

When we arrived at the office there were only two other members present. I was introduced to Joseph, who as I understood it, occupied a relatively high position in the organizational hierarchy of H.I.M. Society. To Joseph I gave a much adumbrated outline of my aims which basically went along the lines of "I would like to write a

research paper on the H.I.M. Society...” Also amenable to this request he told me that I had to of course come on another day when most of the other members were there so that I could ask their permission. I agreed and took my leave.

On the following occasion when I went to the office, still in attempt to gain access, I was greeted by more members (mostly female). The sisters (a common designation for Rastafari females) and Joseph were all seated at the table. One of the brothers was busy on the computer and two others were keeping themselves busy around the area of the table. I greeted everyone and Joseph asked if I could explain my intentions. Trying to avoid big words and an alienating academic tone I explained to them that I basically wanted to know how the members of the H.I.M. Society (that is Rastafarians) express their identity. I added that this could include anything from the way they dressed to the way they speak. With rather unconvinced faces and eyes that showed a hint of reluctance they said it would be fine if I proceeded. At that point I thought there was no way I could ingratiate myself so I decided that it would be prudent to leave. But return I did.

These initial uninspired ethnographic encounters left me despondent but of course I did not make a final assessment of the situation at that stage. I still don't know if this dispirited agreement by this initial group of participants may have influenced my subsequent encounters with the members of H.I.M. Society. As Coffey states “poor or difficult fieldwork relations can affect the collection of data, as well as our experiences and memories of fieldwork” (1999:39) and my relationships with the members were less than stellar. I think my then awkward disposition in the arena of interpersonal relationships may have precipitated the members' attitude towards me. Whatever the case may be we created an ethnographic reality through the specific nature of our relationships (Crapanzano 1980 cited in Chodorow 1999: 213). The specific nature of my and the H.I.M. members will be explored further below.

## 2.3 From persona non grata to Mr Researcher

*What is the point of all of this? Why would generation after generation of anthropology students put themselves through the hell which is ethnography? It does not make sense. The whole anthropological endeavour does not make sense. Why don't these students just open up and tell me about their lives? Do they even know what it is that I ask of them? Why can't I explain it to them more clearly? They must think I'm stupid but they for the most part seem like friendly and approachable people so they probably just think I'm incompetent. I think I might be in trouble.*

*(Excerpts from a fragmented field diary)*

*My first view of the Inuit interpersonal relationships...derived from that first field problem: how to figure out what was wrong with my relations with the Inuit.*

*Briggs 1987: 9 quoted in Chodorow 1999:212*

The diary extract above expresses but a few of my more turbulent emotions during the research process. It hints at, amongst other things, my awkward relation with the members of H.I.M. Society. The heading of this section would suggest that there was a clear evolution in our relationship but this was not really the case. I would like to state that at all points of my research there were always members that had a more amicable stance to my presence and members that were at best indifferent to my presence. What the heading suggests is that there has been a general shift in the structure of feeling (to use a nebulous phrase) towards my presence. Also as the quotation by Briggs point out I had to ask myself what was wrong with my relations with H.I.M. Society?

During the early stages of the research I felt that my position as relative stranger was still weighing heavy on my shoulders. So when my research 'officially' started I made shameless attempts at impression management. Fieldwork is obviously easier if amicable relations can be established (Coffey 1999). I would for instances make sure that when I sat at the table everyone would see that I had a notepad and pen with me to stake my claim as a researcher. This to a certain extent proved useful. A few of the members noticed that there was usually a student sitting at the table with a notepad and a pen and they would become curious and inquire about my presence. I would of course seize the moment and tell them what I was doing there. But this strategy did not always have the desired effect as sometimes it would make some members a bit



apprehensive and it seemed that they didn't act spontaneously. At other times it would invite a bit of a confrontational engagement.

The following is one such engagement. It was a Friday during lunch when I and a couple of the members were sitting at the table and I was as always sitting with notepad and pen in front of me. I also discovered that Fridays during lunch was the time that most members would be at the office. The conversation around the table was congenial even though I wasn't really addressed. In light of all this pleasantness I decided to make another ethnographic move. I decided to take down as many names of the people that were present at that moment. I asked the brother sitting next to me what his name was he gave it and I jotted this down (to show that this was serious business). Without me asking this brother, in the true congenial spirit of the moment, preceded to give me all the names of the brothers and sisters sitting at the table. I have to admit that I did not take down everyone's name since at that particular time the point was to breed researcher familiarity.

Since the friendly brother sitting next to me only gave me the names of the people sitting at the table I decided to ask one of the brother's that was busy in the kitchen what his name was. He looked at me then down at the page where I had scribbled down some of the names and then gave me a look that suggested that he did not want to play along. I quickly informed him that it was not necessary for him to give me his name. He nodded his head and then with smiling suspicion asked me why I wanted to know his name. I told him about my research project and like most of the members I had to answer this question to he seemed unconvinced but gave me what was clearly a nickname. He then returned to the kitchen.

After a minute or two he came to sit at the table. Eyes fixed on me. He clearly wasn't done with me. He asked me if I thought that ganja was a drug or an herb. In an embarrassing display (even though the intention was diplomacy) of pseudo-intellectuality I rambled out that technically speaking things like Panado and Disprin are also drugs. Clearly not impressed he stopped me mid sentence (and in a way I thank him) and told me that I shouldn't even have thought about it I should have just known that ganja wasn't made and therefore it's natural. I was told that it comes from God (or Jah as the Rastafarians refer to their deity) and God wouldn't give us drugs.



This line of thought led him to lament on how people moved away from their indigenous knowledge. He stated that people are always in a hurry to rush to the city away from the rural areas where they were close to the soil. After his point was done he wanted to know if I was writing down everything, eyeing my pen and my notepad lying on the table. I told him no and in a move of assurance closed my notepad and put my pen in my pocket.

Coleman (2009) suggests that it is common to think of the anthropologists as guest in the field but when one is confronted to submit, participate or reaffirm ideas or practices which one do not subscribe to that the anthropologists in a sense becomes a host and a host is more obligated to guests. I do not know about the notion of becoming the host but I certainly felt exposed as I knew the expectation was to reaffirm the theological conception of ganja that is it was divinely ordained. My 'this-worldly' analysis was seen as an offence although not a dire one I suspect since no one else at the table engaged in this discussion.

What this incident also suggests is that particular research techniques (if one may be allowed to call it so) are actually a double edge sword. On the one hand my conspicuous display of my notepad and pen created some curiosity and so allowed me to engage with a few of the members (and non members I should add). On the other hand there were times when the sight of these research tools either made some of the members uncomfortable or it made them a bit confrontational. But this incident amongst a few others also suggest that the general emotional tone towards my presence was not always welcoming (even though I have to stress again that at any particular point in my research there were also other members that were very welcoming).

But it seems familiarity breeds content. I do not know the exact moment when it happened but there came a point where more interest was shown in my research. Towards the end of my research or at any rate deep in my research when I came to the office quite a few of the members would address me as the "the researcher" or "Mr Researcher". This shift suggested to me that (and I suspect that you won't find this in a text on qualitative research methods) perseverance is also a helpful research tool.

## 2.4 The benevolent iconoclast and the staunch believer

*I wonder if they know that I have a hard time dealing with religious sentiments. I'm listening to them speak about how there is a divine plan when all I see is madness in this world. Sometimes cruel, sometimes beautiful, sometimes sad, sometimes amusing madness. I guess as an anthropology student it is not my place to state my unease with the worldview of those I study. I should just grin and bear it.*  
(Excerpts from a fragmented field diary)

If Rastafarianism is not a religion (and some of the H.I.M. members have stated that it's not a religion but a spiritual movement) it is definitely a movement with religious overtones. They are as one Rastafarian told me a form of African Christianity. I never envisioned when I decided to do a research project on the H.I.M. Society that my allergies towards religious ontology would be an issue of concern. It was in fact the furthest thing from my mind (which begs the question what was on my mind at the time). During fieldwork in Delhi, Coleman (2009) comments that his ethnographic training did not prepare him for the hatred he felt for some in the field. While I can honestly say that I hated none of the H.I.M. members I certainly felt at odds with most of their world views. As agnostic with sometime iconoclastic proclivities I tend to keep my distance from the religious minded. When confronted with the religious minded my iconoclasm usually takes the form of mild *reductio ad absurdum*s. But of course in my capacity as ethnographer I respectfully kept these inclinations at bay. Nowhere was my agnostic and iconoclastic sensibilities taunted more than with the H.I.M. member whom I shall call Doc.

Doc had consultations in the office where he did something akin to faith healing (this is the only way I can think of describing it). He did extend invitations to me to consult him not just in the interest of research but also because he sensed something physically wrong with me as well. I was of course interested to consult with Doc because my notebook at that point was starving for any piece of ethnographic sustenance. For logistical reasons, however, my first few appointments with Doc fell through. As time went on I began to doubt whether I actually want to go through a consultation with Doc. His never dissipating earnestness of the wonders he can do in his consultations became a bit worrying to the agnostic and iconoclast in me. I began to worry that during our consultation Doc might sense my doubt and even though I

could not imagine what punitive action Doc might take against my doubt I thought it best not to find out. But my curiosity got the better of me. We eventually set up an interview cum consultation.

On the day we had our consultation Doc was sitting in a chair waiting for me. This chair was at a 'shrine' containing fruits and portraits of Haille Selassie. What was a bit awkward for me was that this shrine was couple of centimetres away from the table in the main area of the office. And this day there were quite a few members sitting and talking at the table and one of the sisters was busy washing dishes in the kitchen, which though demarcated by a partition was still painfully in earshot of where Doc sat. I went over to Doc and took a seat next to him. We started with the interview that was supposed to be a life history with details of how Doc became Rastafarian. But Doc's answers were so quick and arcane that this interview did not last more than ten minutes. I guess Doc was eager to heal me.

He started off with reading a scripture from the Bible. I was so taken aback by this that I did not even hear the text. He then asked me to pray with him or at least close my eyes while he prayed for me. As I sat there I kept imagining the other members' eyes on me. It felt so awkward that I missed out on much of Doc's prayer. After the prayer he diagnosed me. I was told that he could cure my headaches, my bad eyesight the problem with my feet. I thought that since I suffered from headaches and bad eyesight because of long hours before books and computer screens I might give Doc a chance. But I was not surprised that he diagnosed me for something I did have because firstly I just assumed that was a common complaint of students and secondly I had no idea I had problem with my feet. Before administering his cure Doc asked me if I believed in Christ. I lied. He then poured a bit of oil on his index left finger and thumb and asked me to close my eyes. I did and he rubbed this oil over my eyelids while he was chanting something. What he said was inaudible over my concern of how I should act when he was done. After he was mercifully done he said that I will have no more problems with headaches and my eyesight (the feet had to be looked at another day) and ended off by saying "Don't doubt me". To satisfy the readers' curiosity I still get the occasional headache and reading for long stints without my glasses causes my eyes some discomfort.

According to Collins “the practice of reflexivity facilitates an exploration of the ways in which our various involvements in the field inform and transform our fieldwork and, inevitably, our ethnographic accounts of that fieldwork” (2010: 234). This incident described above did not so much transform the field for me as it solidified my alienation from the H.I.M. members. I do of course appreciate Doc’s concern both in my academic and physical well-being but I felt that my façade of sincerity might crumble at any moment. There are of course methodological and epistemological implications of such emotional responses in the field. I can only imagine that my attitude to the religious sentiments of the members made me reluctant to probe in to certain areas of their world views (interestingly one of the members whenever his talk became ‘too religious’ he would stop himself by saying “I don’t want to preach to you”). To put it differently I suppose that I would only question and *listen* to where my agnostic sensibilities would allow (and tape recording was almost never a viable option which meant I did not have the luxury of listening to conversations at a different time).

Constructing meaning is dependent on the encounter between ethnographer and informant; and the anthropologist’s anxieties colour the quality of the encounter (Chodorow 1999). I believe that an ethnographer with more psychological stamina would have read this incident with Doc quite differently. They might have made insightful academic revelations but all I experienced was a moment that I could not even remember most (or at least the academically important stuff) of what my interlocutor said. An important point to note is that theoretical orientation is not the only factor that influences our research topic epistemologically. I would like to suggest that our personal philosophical orientation (i.e. who we are) also plays a part in this. This means that deciding to do a particular research topic already potentially has epistemological implications. I can thus agree that “self-understanding is not just a by-product of intercultural experience; it is *the crucial tool of ethnography*” (Kracke 1994:211 quoted in Chodorow 1999:208 emphasis mine). If nothing else then my encounter with Doc should serve to illustrate that having a good understanding of who you are in relation to your informants will go a long way to alleviate some of the intellectual pains that a ‘clash’ of sensibilities may course (which of course means better research).

## 2.5 Of conversations and shared experiences

Structured interview, semi structured interview, focus groups; these were all research practices that were relegated to the domain of ethnographic fairy tales in my research. I understand that all research endeavours have their ups and downs so I don't want to make out my experience as something extraordinary but this is my story. One of the main issues that I faced with establishing rapport and through that gain interviews is that most members did not come to the office on a regular basis. Members showed they face in the office very erratically. When I did mention to make appointments for interviews life always intervened and these had to be cancelled or prospective interviewees just decided to withdraw.

Call it an aberration but with regards to this interview issue I did not really despair. It was informal conversations that came to my aid and it made me realise that “no matter how many specialised data collection techniques we might employ, it is talk that constitutes the ethnographic air we breathe during fieldwork”(Collins 2010: 231). Even though I felt that my ethnographic atmosphere lacked sufficient oxygen I had quite a few informal talks that helped me through my fieldwork (and thus academic) despondency. I did not know it at the time but apparently interlocution is a key factor to knowledge production in anthropology (Hammoudi and Borneman 2009). Not one to make virtue out of necessity I have to say that, in my case at least, there is something to this view. For one thing my informal talks with some members of H.I.M. did mitigate the tenuous nature of my rapport with them. In these talks the line between research and conviviality was also blurred. While not inherently a good thing in my case just being more social with the members was of course good.

All things being equal I did find that as ethnographers “we are so dependent upon the quality of our field relations that we may quite easily find ourselves engaging in conversation with people whose views we particularly despise, or participating in social activities which leave us feeling awkward or uneasy” (Coffey 1999: 41). While I can't recall being in conversation with a H.I.M. member whose views I despised the incident with Doc mentioned above shows that most conversations in my research were at worst a battle of endurance. As far as participating in awkward social

activities goes I can only say that doing the fieldwork was a social activity that left me feeling awkward and uneasy. Just to reiterate these conversations became the staple food of my ethnographic diet.

According to Hammoudi and Borneman (2009) shared experiences between ethnographers and research subjects should also be an important concern of anthropological method. Also shared experiences can make the self a valuable resource (Collins 2010). For the careful reader it should come as no surprise that I did not have much in common with the H.I.M. members which are also incidentally fellow students. At least this is what I thought initially. But these shared experiences did not extend to the point where my-self could have been considered a valuable resource. At least two of the members that I knew of were hip hoppers like me and although we had a few discussions on rap music I could never capitalize on this resource (but I enjoyed those few talks). With the Coloured members of H.I.M. I shared experiences just by virtue of being Coloured (one of the strange things of racial identification). I also went to the same school as one of the sisters and (maybe because of this) we had some nice conversations. For the novice ethnographer it should again be highlighted that who you are is an important tool in ethnography and if you share experiences with those you encounter in the field the value of this tool inflates.

## **2.6 The best laid plans**

Contingency is the bane of the meticulous. Serendipity is a blessing to the care free. I wonder if ethnography makes neurotics of us all. From my experience the idea of research design seems oxymoronic. When I started this research I went into it with the ambition of an individual who just graduated from university. I was going to study cultural performances of the H.I.M Society. The field was barren of this issue. Because of organizational issues what I conceptualised as cultural performance (things like poetry readings, hip hop shows which I heard the Society was quite popular for) was few and far between.

Hammoudi and Borneman (2009) asserts that serendipitous moments can be just as useful as when things go according to plan ethnographically speaking. Even though cultural performance still has its place in this thesis the shift to authenticity was not so much planned as it was something that fell in my lap (this will be explained more in Chapter 6). But serendipity is not always a happy accident that you realise on the moment it sometimes only becomes apparent in retrospect (Khon 2010). I certainly didn't realise authenticity as viable research topic from the start but when I think about it, it was there in the field all the time (I think). I am not saying that novice researches should go into the field like loose cannons just shooting it out as they go along. But with a research design and plan should be an enduring flexibility lest you want to carry the same emotional and psychological load that I did. There is also a very simple epistemological point here and that is that the social world rarely yields to our research expectations so serendipity and flexibility makes for better and more compelling academic insights.

## **2.7 Some notable research participants**

Surveying other Masters theses I realise that under this heading the criteria for research participants seem to be only those that the student had formal (i.e. structured or semi structured) interviews. If this was the sole criteria I would only have the three students I conducted life histories with. As mentioned above doing interviews was a formidable if not impossible task. Nevertheless there were a few people whom I frequently had informal conversations with and so I would like to include some of them along with the three students I conducted the life histories with in the this section (which I like to think of as my three research achievements).

### **2.7.1 Doc**

I first encountered (or at any rate noticed) Doc one Friday when he and some of the other brothers were sitting around the table talking and joking. This was a Friday so there was a certain gaiety in the office which you would not easily find on other days. Doc stood out not only for the jocular tone of his speech but also for (what I would discover to be his characteristic) Ray Ban sunglasses, white head wrap and white robe



which to a certain extent gave him the aura of a prophet. One of the brothers who I will call Moses in course of their discussion brought up Miriam Makeba. Doc considering this new topic wanted to know why she was called Mama Afrika if she had no children. Moses speculated that it might be because she was *screwed* by the white man and/or the music industry. His reasoning was that if you wanted to make it in the music industry as a woman somewhere along the lines you had to lay on your back and take it from the man. A sister sitting at the table did not appear to feel too comfortable with this statement.

This connection between Miriam Makeba and prostitution (or being *screwed* by the white man) prompted Doc to think about Sara Baartman or as he also referred to her “that witch”. According to him the white man liked big behinds and apparently Sara was asking for money from the white so they can enjoy it. I have my doubts that this was his real contention since the tone at that point was just about having fun. Nevertheless I was intrigued by this character.

But he did not yet know about my intentions at the office. This came on another Friday while I sitting amongst the bustle of the office. I was sitting at the table making notes and asking one of the brothers a couple of questions about Rastafarianism when a student (not a member) came out of the middle compartment where the Doc usually hanged out. Intrigued by the questioning and my taking notes she came over and asked me what I was doing. I explained. She courteously suggested that I should speak to Doc and I told her that I would eventually. With a slight but curious sense of urgency she insisted. I appeased her by telling her that I would do so after I was done with the current ‘interview’. She looked satisfied and took her leave.

Doc joined the table after a while. In a matter of seconds he addressed me. He obviously heard that in my ‘interview’ the issue of ganja came up. He stated that “smoking is man’s prerogative” and that people always made laws to keep man from this prerogative. He said that “I and I doesn’t really smoke” because they don’t do it for recreational purposes they do it for medicinal and spiritual purposes.

After this Doc always took an interest in how my research was going. He, as mentioned earlier, invited me to come to one of his consultations. He was in the



business of healing and as it stood it seemed liked a popular enterprise. I have seen not just students but also a caretaker consult with the Doc.

### **2.7.2 Joseph**

In many ways, even though he would never admit it, Joseph was my go between during my research. I have to admit his interest in my presence waxed and waned probably because he was in the midst of his own post-graduate research. Nonetheless in the early stages he showed a degree of interest to steer me in the right direction. He was concerned that I might misrepresent Rastafarianism (according to him so many *anthropologists* did)

His first guidance came when I was sitting at the table just listening and observing. This was still early in the research and he felt the need to give me a protracted introduction into Rastafarianism. I would discover that most of the conversations (valuable as they were) took this protracted form. On this first occasion I missed most of it. The novice researcher did not expect this. In consolation I told myself that it was like he said just a 'brief' introduction to the movement.

Even though short in stature Joseph had an almost Napoleonic assertiveness about him. By my estimation he was probably the most out spoken member of the organization. He liked to wear an army style beret, a concomitant jacket and cargo pants. This I surmise is to reflect his militant nature. As a History major he did not just pay lip service to the Society's emphasis on the importance of history.

### **2.7.3 Thembani**

If there is anyone as outspoken as Joseph in H.I.M. then it would be Thembani. He is respected as the/a priest in the Society. As I have mentioned earlier I knew him from the time that we tutored together. Contrary to what one would've expected this did not always make Thembani as amenable to my presence in the office.

His initial critiques of me wanting to do research on H.I.M. and blatant disdain of anthropology made him indirectly a good research participant. At those initial stages

his attitude towards me was capricious at best. At times he would greet me with indifference and at other times it would seem that I was an irksome character. I never figured out what would set him off.

The ebb and flow of human relations is a mysterious thing. Thembani eventually became more affable. During the second semester of the year we once again tutored first years together. I was a bit concerned. I did not know what implications this held for impression management because outside of my research with H.I.M. I was an almost totally different person. So at the first tutorial meeting I put up a civil and professional face. But after that meeting I could not contain myself anymore. At the second meeting I let my penchant for frivolous behaviour run loose. All was not lost in fact we seemed to talk more during the course of the semester. When I went to the office he would greet me more warmly and even on one occasion inquired about my love life.

## **2.8 The students behind my research achievements**

I also like to introduce three other participants which in a way were more notable than others in that they exemplified a research achievement of sorts. That is I conducted interviews (i.e. life narratives/histories) with these three students. Initially it appeared that I would have at least five narratives to work with but two students 'dropped out' of the study. The first student actually had to leave the university, for financial reasons, before we could complete our work on her narrative. One of the other students who gave me a remarkable account of his life and his rise to Rastafari later asked me not to include his narrative as he felt that some of the information in it would be detrimental to his academic standing. I was then left with three narratives that proved to be fascinating.

One of the students from who I eventually elicited a narrative almost presented itself as a pleasant surprise. It was one of those slow days when I was sitting at the table in the H.I.M. office. Doc and other students were having a discussion on the topic of ganja. I was sitting there thinking I have heard this before and then I heard someone call me by a name that I haven't heard in years. I turned around to stare into a

pleasantly familiar face. It was the face of someone I haven't seen since leaving high school. It was Candice. We exchanged the usual pleasantries and formalities ('the how are you' and the 'what are you studying' type of questions). I told her about my research and asked her if I could interview her. She agreed and two interview sessions were held at her home department. The first interview proved to be somewhat difficult probably because of my own awkwardness in interviewing (and by extension the more nefarious notion of studying) someone I know and her own feeling that she may not be that much help to my research. The second session had a whole different tone. Candice appeared to be more voluble, I actually remarked that she was very loquacious that day and she said that she liked that particular word.

The other two students (Gary and Fernando) being brothers came as a sort of packaged deal. Fernando was the first one that I approached. I use to see him around the office a few times and we greeted but did not really talk as he did not stay long on those first few times. But when we talked there was an immediate rapport. He was an easy going person and you could relate to him easily. I remember on that first occasion when we sat at the table he was commenting on Coloureds perceptions of themselves. As a long standing member of this group (i.e. Coloureds) I felt that I could also make my voice heard on the matter. This proved to be a great foundation for our subsequent relationship. The next time I saw him I outlined my research intentions and he was on board.

Gary also had an approachable manner about him the first time we talked. It was about our age. Because of his beard people always thought he was older than he was. He invited me to guess how old he was and I placed him at 24 or 25 years old. The revelation came that he was only 19 years old. I asked him how old he thought I was and he said that I looked 18 but of course knew that I was older. And that was how I build rapport with Gary. It was, however, not until I have interviewed his brother that I seized the opportunity to interview him.

All these narratives were recorded and afterwards painstakingly transcribed. The process of codifying followed suit. This resulted in the various categories under which I analyse these narratives in the next chapter.

## **2.9 (Some final) Limitations to the study**

It might be argued that this whole chapter was a statement on the limitations of this study but I hope the reader interprets otherwise. There is another issue to discuss under the heading of limitations. Trust stood out as another impediment of this research. At times it felt that I always had to account for the sincerity of my intentions. It felt as if some of the members of H.I.M. expected me to be a paragon of ethical conduct. Such feelings were not totally unfounded considering that some of them felt that anthropology (and possibly me being a representative of it) did not sit well with their movement. On more than one occasion I was told about Carol Yawney who did intensive research on Rastafari but in the end betrayed the cause. There was apparently an issue with not wanting to make available aspects of her research to the Rastafari community. The indiscretions of Yawney hanged over me. But I was not 'the enemy' in any absolute sense it was just many were careful what they told me and what they showed me. In the end I think that sometimes we just have to realise that ethnographers at certain points just become nuisances. I am still perplexed as to why anybody would allow me to observe them and to ask them in and out about their lives. If this is not a recipe for becoming irksome I don't know what is. I could certainly feel the weight of being the irritating ethnographer whenever I entered the office and some people would withdrew themselves from the company or stop talking or just flat out ignore my presence.

Since not all members were in agreement on what I am allowed to see and hear it could also create more frustration if I was involved were some felt I shouldn't have been. One short incident may clarify this matter. One Friday as I was exiting the university library one of the brethren caught me and told me that I should come to the office during lunch. The organization was going to have a guest speaker and it would be useful for me to be there. I thought I could not decline such a gracious offer and so I went. When I went to the office during lunch I was greeted with friendly faces but a few gave me stares that suggested that they did not appreciate my audacity to impose. I felt that the welcoming to unwelcoming ratio was in my favour so I sat down and listen to the speaker talk. I noticed that there were a few student who were not members (i.e. not Rastafarian) and I also noted that most of the members took video

recordings of the talk on their cell phones (one of the members also recorded this talk on a camcorder). It occurred to me that given the circumstances I could at least take a few photographs on my phone. Good so far. After a few minutes I decided to throw caution to the wind and also take a video recording on my cell phone (note I would have asked if I could use the footage afterwards but the moment demanded immediate action). A few stares in my direction. After about fifteen minutes one of the members came over to me (of course one of those that did not look to kindly on my whole research endeavour) and asked me if I got permission to record video. His interrogation was legitimate and I told him that it was not my intention to use the footage without their permission. This of course did not alleviate his vexation with me and I was told that I was at a private event and that I had no right to record it. He was of course justified in his response but my point is that not everyone felt the same. I apologised to some of the members the following week and they said that they didn't actually mind me recording the talk as it would be useful for my research.

Trust and being a nuisance were however not the only limitation to this study. This study forms part of a broader project dealing with issues of belonging, citizenship and cultural performance. My research proved to be a bit of an ethnographic wasteland especially with regards to cultural performance. When I started my fieldwork the H.I.M. Society suffered from a few organizational issues and even though the members do maintain a degree of harmony with each other (I think the Rastafari ethic demands it of them), H.I.M. also later became an embattled organization. More on these issues will be said later but suffice it to say they did not organize much events that would leave the broader project sated with regards to cultural performance. I did however attend exhibitions they held around campus and have video footage of an exhibition from a previous year.

## **2.10 Ethical considerations**

I followed the basic research ethical protocol demanded of the ethnographer. As intimated above I for instance gave participants the right to withdraw from the research (much to my chagrin). But I think my most vexing ethical concern is maintaining anonymity. Since I was doing this research with students at the same

university I attend this means that exposure is an especially pronounced concern for me. I try to keep descriptions of certain individuals vague if I feel that they need a degree of textual inconspicuousness. The problem is more difficult when certain individuals discuss topics that directly affect another participant. In these situations I was torn between feeling compelled to use ethnographically provocative information and protecting the integrity of the individuals and the group.

This particular ethical conundrum was especially salient in one of the themes that will be discussed in Chapter 6. But as I discussed the issue with some of the parties involved it became clear that it was not exactly a hush- hush affair. It was indeed a major bone of contention. That is opposing groups within this issue knew exactly where they stood with each other. I was relieved. The burden of representation, however, still needed to be dealt with. I still had to fight the temptation not to represent this (almost sensationalist) issue in the manner of a tabloid journalist. Writing that chapter became both a test of my character and my ability with the pen. But I think the anthropological/sociological motivations for writing on that particular issue far outweighs the more base motivations I might harbour to represent that issue.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

I hope that this chapter shows that the research process is far more than just applying research methods that you were taught in a class or religiously studied from a text. If my experience is anything to go by one would be tempted to say that said research methods are a reverie of romantic anthropological minds. But that judgment is both harsh and misleading. The various methods available to the ethnographer in all their sophistication are of course important tools to collect data. My point in this chapter is that we should guard from disillusionment by realising that sometimes these methods may not aid us much. In these situations you have to fall back on your-self. In certain ethnographic encounters you realise that your emotional and psychological response in the field are important indices of what you should or should not do. Understanding these responses of course facilitates an understanding of self. This self as was argued here is an indispensable tool of research.

## **Chapter 3: Contextualizing the field**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will situate the H.I.M. Society within the broader university community. This broader university community of course refers to the University of the Western Cape (UWC). I will also introduce the organization by way of its history and structure. A brief yet more in depth account will be given of three of the members so that the reader may get a sense of the type of people who occupy this organization.

### **3.2 Enter UWC**

In 1959 UWC was established to cater to the educational needs of the Coloured people. It was designed as an offshoot of the University of South Africa (UNISA). In 1960 UWC's doors officially opened with a mere 166 students enrolled. In 1970 the university gained official university status and could award degrees and diplomas.

UWC was marked as a university that could foster revolutionary fervour. Challenges from black staff and student protests paved the way for the appointment of the first black rector in 1975. The leadership of Professor Richard E van der Ross turned the university into a more intellectually invigorating environment which gained international attention.

In 1982 UWC drafted a mission statement that reflected their strong stance against the racist ideology of the Apartheid state. It also entrenched its commitment to provide access to education for the more impoverished sectors of the country. This was also reflected in the university's open admissions policy which allowed for more access of African students (Hendrickse 2002:37).

Over the years the university grew to an extent that would make it unrecognisable from its austere beginnings. The university now proudly offers degrees from seven academic faculties: Arts, Community and Health Sciences, Dentistry, Economic and Management Sciences, Education, Law and Natural Sciences. Student enrolments



have also greatly increased since the university's inception. (Historical information available on UWC website).

Year	Male	Female	Coloured	African	Asian	White	Other
2004	6210	8087	6996	4869	1364	758	310
2005	6178	8647	7471	4943	1485	763	163
2006	6025	8885	7337	5166	1303	689	414
2007	5854	8618	6925	5325	1211	642	368
2008	6141	9198	7195	5891	1154	657	458
2009	6494	9894	7769	6437	1109	666	420
2010	7280	10634	8395	7366	1093	755	306
2011	7392	11083	8682	7658	1064	805	267

**Figure 1: distribution of student enrolments by gender and race**

Looking at the male to female ratio the university would appear to appease any Gender Equity Bill. As far as racial distribution goes the Coloured enrolments are still the majority. This is merely a reflection of the predominance of this racial grouping in the province and not of the university's policy. Indeed the gap between Coloured and African enrolments narrows each year.

2011	TOTAL
AFRICAN METHOD. EPISCOPAL	98
ANGLICAN	657
APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION	162
BAPTIST	136
CALVIN PROTESTANT	54
CONGREGATIONAL	82
FULL GOSPEL	121
HINDU	91
ISLAMIC	788
JEHOVAH'S WITNESS	39
JEWISH	19
LUTHERAN	113
METHODIST	482
MORAVIAN	57
NEW APOSTOLIC	220
OLD APOSTOLIC	132
OTHER	430
PRESBYTERIAN	771
ROMAN CATHOLIC	517
SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST	136
UNITING REFORMED	305

**Figure 2: religious affiliations**



The numbers above show that the Islamic and Presbyterian faiths are in the majority on UWC. I point this out to show that the H.I.M. Society has a marginal position from the perspective of religious affiliation. In fact their numbers are show low in comparison to the other religious groupings that they are lumped under the category 'other' and not categorized on their own ( note: the numbers on this list seem to be incomplete if you compare it with student enrolments of the same year in figure 3).

According to SRC records there are twenty one registered student organizations on UWC. Thanks to the SRC's commitment to apathy I could not get any statistics on these various organizations. What I can say from observation and from general consensus on campus is that the four political student organizations (i.e. ANC Youth League, PASMA, SASCO and YCL) have the highest membership. The status and material benefits which these organizations provide for its executive members might have something to do with this. This stands in contrast to an organization like H.I.M Society.



ANC Youth League
PASMA
SASCO
YCL
DASO
Young Woman's Desk
Black Lawyers Association
Black Management Forum
H.I.M. Society
i-Care society
Konnect8
Students for Law and Social Justice
UWC Choir
UWC Debating society
GAYLA UWC
Differently Abled Student Association
UWC Drama society

Women Empowerment Society
Students for Uhuru
Young Designers and Film Society
Part Time Student Movement

**Figure 3: List of student organizations at UWC**

### **3.3 The Story of H.I.M. Society**

The H.I.M. Society was founded in 1997 and started out with a mere seven members. At this particular time they had no office in which to conduct their organizational affairs. In fact it was not until 2005 that this student organization got an office. Various run-ins with campus security precipitated the conferment of the office. The confrontation with campus security revolved around the ever controversial issue of ganja. I was told that numerous Rastafarian students (not all members of H.I.M) have been caught smoking ganja on university premises. Because UWC prides itself on its liberal attitude towards the diversity of its students, it was advised that the Rastafari students (especially H.I.M. members) should get themselves an office. Even though they received an office nothing definitive was said about the acceptance of certain Rastafari practices.

The office is not very spacious but is comfortable as a base for a student organization. There is indeed a pride in the office (or just having an office) as Joseph once boasted that they were of the few student organizations that actually had an office. The office is compartmentalized by partitions with various pictures on them (these partitions are the same one used for exhibitions which I will discuss in chapter 5). As you enter the office immediately to your right is the area which I call the ‘computer room’. In this area there is of course a computer and also a sound system which provides the occasional music. Adjacent to this room was an area that housed a small clothing and accessories business. Towards the end of my research this area was defunct. Straight ahead of you as you enter the door is the main area with a table where meetings are held and where members can do some work. To the right of this area is what may be called a lounge area where members can sit and relax. The kitchen basically forms part of the main area but is demarcated by two partitions. The walls of the office are

filled with pictures and articles on Rastafarianism and that denotes an Africanist stance.

In theory the procurement of the office would provide a base to recruit more members but by some of the members own accounts the numbers do not rate high. At the time of my research it was difficult to ascertain how many members this organization had. For one thing when I asked some of the more senior members, the question did not seem too comforting to their ears. The other issue was that not all members came to the office frequently and at times they have visitors which do not officially form part of the organization. One of the members also told me that there was unwillingness amongst the members to take up executive positions. I advanced the theory that it might be because H.I.M. unlike the political student organizations do not provide any material incentives for its executives and it might also have something to do with the low membership of the organization. The second part of the theory was actually a probe into a seemingly esoteric issue. But my journalistic cum ethnographic prowess was to no avail as I only received a rather languid affirmation of my theory.

As a non-anthropological aside I had the sense, during the initial phase of my research, that these students stopped trying. The members that did frequent the office appeared to come strictly out of a misguided sense of duty. There was a lot of talk about the missions for the organization but not a corresponding amount of walk. Lest these words seem harsh I will challenge anyone one to ask a member of the organization about what I'm saying here and provided he or she is not disposed to delusions or keeping up appearances there would in all likelihood be confirmation of my words. Having said that the organization was not totally inert otherwise I would have been totally out of business.

### **3.4 A closer look at some H.I.M. members**

In this section I would like to give a more in depth look (although nothing deserving the name life history) at three of the members of H.I.M. Society. These students who I want to consider in more detail are the ones whom I in the previous chapter called my research achievements. While it may be argued that these three students are not a

representative sample of H.I.M. all three being Coloured I feel that Gary and Fernando needs to be introduced as they play a pivotal role in Chapter 6. Candice deserves a mention because she provides a feminine voice as it were to that extent I represent a more diverse gendered picture.

### 3.4.1 Candice

#### *Beginnings*

I grew up in Mafikeng, that's the North West Province, up until the age of 13 then we moved. [What was your childhood like there?] I enjoyed myself it was very free, it was very different coming here. I think it changed the way I looked at people, because it was formerly Bophuthatswana, so for me there was no such thing as race. I knew what a black person was from a Coloured person but that was about it. There was no like we don't mix... You would see couples walking together and it would be like an interracial couple and it would be like a normal thing for me and I don't know it was a very small town I grew up in or it is a very small place.

It was very free I don't know how else to put it, I was a very adventurous child. I was very tomboy like. I had lots of friends, my friend had lots of friends and I was friends with my friend's friends and that's about it. That's how I knew people through her I was a very quiet child. I was the middle child... I was forced to go out, if my sister then wanted went out I had to go out with them. I would tag along basically they couldn't leave me at home alone. They would invite people over to the house, to drink and have crazy parties and stuff and I had to just sit in the corner watching them and just absorbing.

Candice's beginnings and specifically the (non) racial consciousness she grew up with is the stuff that our rainbow nation rhetoric is made of. Of course she is not totally romantic or idealistic with regards to this, as she does realize that people categorize themselves in different ways. It seems that at an early stage she already embodied the ostensible non racial sentiments of the Rastafari movement.

#### *Before Rastafari*

The following extract deals with Candice's move from Mafikeng to Cape Town. I started of by asking what the most difficult part was of this move:

I think it was losing all my friends and contacts because I was so used to my best friend being the contacted. She was usually the one I met people through. So she would be the out there one, the one who makes all the contacts and I would just happen to know you through her and then I would become your friend so know I actually had to make friends.

I didn't know anyone...and I experienced a lot of racism. When I walked into a shop there would be people walking after me almost as if I'm going to steal things and that I thought was so uncool, because if we go out, a group of Coloured girls and one white girl they'd follow the rest of us and she would walk freely. We actually like tested it and I was like shocked out of my mind and when I started working, I noticed people are very *vekramp* (backwards). There (at work in the predominantly white area where she lived) you must speak Afrikaans...'Are you going to speak Afrikaans or must I go to another shop'.

Relating a racist issue while at work:

I was selling beds and some came into the store and was like 'what do you know about beds because you used to sleeping on the floor and on the ground you hotnots (a derogatory term for Coloured people)'. I was like how can you say something to me like that, I'm the sales person, I'm actually the one who has information about beds here. But anyway it was just one of those things. I was so appalled I just couldn't ... I didn't say anything rude to him.

But I think the most the dramatic thing besides making friends was the fact that I gained weight. Me and my sister were very close and we both had the same body shape. We were both thin and tiny. Two months later (i.e. after arriving in Cape Town) I was very sick and very anaemic and they put me on a lot of pills, I was obviously very sick because of them. I like increased by three dress sizes I think. I felt it wasn't me because I felt I put on weight because of my parents. Besides the weather, it makes you eat more, but it wouldn't have been that bad if... I was throwing up and they thought I had bulimia and they would watch what I eat (what age was this?) 14. And if I decided, if they decided everybody is going to eat four slices of bread then I must eat four slices of bread. I can't like eat one slice or two slices they would be like 'No you will eat that'. Then they would watch you afterwards to make sure you don't throw it up.

Candice, understandably, found her move to Cape Town to be a harrowing experience. Moving can feel like being ripped from ones roots and then planted on new soil which initially feels like it's not conducive to ones growth. She was as *stranger* in Cape Town. Having no friends meant that she also had the corollary challenge of making friends. This was a daunting task because she used to rely on her best friend to make friends. Her sense of isolation must have been exacerbated by racism she encountered at her new area of residence.

## *Rise to Rastafari*

On asking Candice where her journey with Rastafari started she responded:

If I think back, it comes back to your remembrance, ancient things that you use to do. Or a way of life you have become accustomed to, or were designed to be or your influence of society and all those things. You started changing who you were to try to fit society's mould and what is fashionable, you know, what is good, what is in and all these things and its basically just removing them and removing them like the layers of an onion. Then you get back to yourself.

Actually when I started seeking Rastafari was last year that's when, I just found a lot of info but my parents didn't know what my thinking was until I stopped going to church. It came as a shock to everyone when I decided to stop going to church. They couldn't understand it because I was very active in the church as well, which I prided myself on cause I was living an illusion every day and hold onto something that was dead to me long before I was willing to admit to myself and admit to my parents. When I admit it to myself I had to tell my parents...I don't feel comfortable in the church anymore not that I don't think that I could get any positive inspiration from there. I was doing it or occupying it because I felt I would rather occupy my time with something constructive or positive than just be *laming* (i.e. chilling or hanging around) at home.

What I knew about Rastafari is only what I read, its only when I came to campus that I met Rastafari. But for me it was 'I will find out stuff from my boyfriend' he was interested. I was also interested but it was more of a curious thing and any culture for me I find fascinating that's why I think anthropology is so cool. So I was just like trying to know what this is actually about and the nice thing is they (H.I.M. Society) never just gave me answers, they made me go back and think about what they said and they also gave me references that I could go and consult. And that is the beautiful thing about Rastafari, is that you can find it for yourself...if you are willing to look because that's the thing you can actively go and seek information. The stuff that I eventually found out I can't dispute or I can't rewind my thinking to not think that way now. I also started experiencing things on a deeper level on a spiritual level and I've noticed a lot of changes in myself. At first I didn't notice because I was reading so much and I was thinking and I was trying to understand this thing ...but I had to realise that I had to implement it in my life and its not because I knew about Rastafari but this is the way Jah wanted me to be, so I'm just coming into alignment with that, so that all I'm trying to do, is I'm just always trying to get into alignment with myself.

### 3.4.2 Gary

#### *Beginnings*

I was born in 1992 in Worschester. The family I grew up in was like uhm the Coloured bourgeoisie you know. We were a well off family. I grew up in Worschester in a Coloured area, not like the ghetto, like an upper-class Coloured area. You know like just before you get the white area you not on the outskirts of town. My mother and father brought us up quite well.... My mother and and my father were quite busy a lot. They would come home late in the afternoon, so I, you know; your friends and the environment where you stay you know. Mostly, I can say they not good influences onto you. So in my case that happened.

#### On relationship with brother:

Me and my brother we were like brothers you know, like brothers. Also another thing I forgot to mention, we use to gym. I use to gym a lot. I lost like twenty kilograms I'm not lying you can ask my brother you know after I became Rastafarian because my diet changed. We use to gym together we actually had a gym at home, we had all the stuff there. We use to gym together, go the gym also, he would go there for basketball practice and I would gym. But since childhood me and my brother were like best friends almost. There's a three year difference but it's not a lot. We could still relate to each other, he was always a big brother for me, always looking out for me you know even though he was also quite busy. He had leadership positions at school, top basketball player...yes we were quite close very close. Only when I became Rastafarian that we drift apart.

#### *Before Rastafari*

I was into the wrong things. I was wrong path while I was in high school. I hanged out with the wrong friends, done drugs, you know and obviously it was behind my parents back and they never had a clue. My brother hinted to them about it but they never really thought about it like 'is it true what he's saying'. But you know until...there was like times when they caught me drinking [researcher: But dinking seems to be more acceptable]. Yes but they didn't realise at what stage I was at what level I was doing bad things. I even experimented with like other drugs but never got like addicted.

#### *Rise to Rastafari*

Gary rose to Rastafari relatively early and if you consider the activities he was involved with as a teenager it is quite admirable. Let us consider his rise:



One of my friends who I hanged out with at that time, his brother was a Rastafarian and I went to my friend, he lives down the road, and his brother was there for that specific time period. He's from Worchester but he stays in another town. Now the time when I went to my friend's house, when I use to go there regularly, his brother was staying there. That was like three months. Now during that three month time period I met his brother and I even sat with him outside and he started to talk to me about things you know. And I never believed what he said, you know, how can I say, coming from that thought pattern that you have or that way of thinking, that mentality that you have, you won't believe someone who comes with a teaching or a doctrine which opposes yours. You very stubborn and you...how can I say, you very dogmatic, you a Christian you know. You're Christian and nobody can tell you about these things you know how the Christians are, they watered down Christians. And I spoke to him, he spoke to me and he referred me to the bible that was very strange for me, because I never really knew what Rastafari was about. From there on my mind, you know the veils, the curtains just started to slowly disappear, to come of my mind. I started to see things differently; I started to understand things better. And I knew that this was something positive actually and I started to talk these things at home you know with my parents...and they were quite interested but when they heard it came from a Rasta then they flipped, 'How can you we like this family' you know that status, you know like degrading the family name.

But I stuck to it I just kept on seeking more and more. You know it's like tasting a bit of fruit you want to eat whole fruit, like taking a sip of water and then you keep on drinking it. And things started, I started *to become a new person* (emphasis mine). You know a totally knew person, my mind was different, I even looked different, the way I conducted myself was totally different.

### 3.4.3 Fernando

#### *Beginnings*

I'm from Worchester. I grew up in a predominantly English speaking household despite my parents being Afrikaans. My parents were both political activists, I grew up in the Christian faith, my father I think he said a couple of times he's an atheist, but you know he is about knowledge.... He always brought us national geographic videos, books, so we were always exposed to more, that's what my father aimed to. My mother was apolitical activist-you know her love for nature-there was this link, not that Rastafari is just about the political but *Rastafari was a fulfilment of who I always was as a child. I always loved nature I always wanted to be that type of person* (italics my emphasis). I never knew I would find what I was looking for in Rastafari, and my mother being a political activist I initially never had that Eurocentric



ideology or belief system. I was always very Afrocentric but at the same time I was also fooled by the education I received, I went to Worcester gymnasium.

I don't know whether it was from the phrasing of the question or just difference in temperament but it is interesting to note what Fernando emphasises in his upbringing from his brother, Gary. What is particularly interesting for me is that seeing that Gary developed a Rastafarian consciousness first, that he didn't once mention his mother being a political activist. I consider this an interesting elision since having a political activist for parent, this could be seen as a primer to the ostensibly revolutionary consciousness Gary would later adopt. In any case Fernando duly emphasised his mother being a political activist.

### *Before Rastafari*

I always liked playing sports but I actually first played chess. But then I started getting into weightlifting while I was playing but that was because there was this girl I liked. But I always liked playing chess, my father taught me chess, it was actually good, it helped me with my maths. But anyway I followed lifting weights then I started playing basketball. [...] I was able to develop my mind a bit, to some degree, you know my cognitive skills with chess. Then the physical aspect came in when I started playing basketball. Most of life I was moving around playing ball, being at home living under the *illusion* you know, having these dreams of having a wife and children, being self-sufficient, having nice Christmas dinners, you know all these *illusions* that I had. People say it's the basics but its actually destructive, because December is the time most people fall into debt.

I was on varsity for two years, got a girlfriend, got my first girlfriend. So my first two years I was basically thinking I had the right picture. Seeking success in the world, being prominent and things like that. I'm studying sport science even though I feel if I had the approach that I have now I wouldn't have went same way but it wasn't really my field I was more like trying to play professional basketball. Things don't really work out the way you want to but the Most High knows best. I think if things did turn out the way I wanted I would have been in a different place and I wouldn't have found the Most *I*. He kept me away from that lifestyle because I think I would've been lost.

But in those two years I got my first girlfriend. Second girlfriend, but this girl I felt that I would marry and stuff but it is all an *illusion*. But things fell apart when I rose to Rastafari. But you know her parents they were Catholic so they asked me a question. If you ask me a question I'm going to answer it. So that was a bit of a stumbling block.

As far as his adolescent years are concerned Fernando had what many would consider a productive youth. He was into sports and he played chess. These activities can certainly make one the poster child for the average youth development programme. Fernando himself does acknowledge that playing sports and especially chess did have positive effects on him. He is, however, ambivalent (to say the least) about his encounter with sports and particularly basketball. Without demonising sport (and specifically basketball) Fernando seems to suggest that while it was a productive part for his own journey it was at worst a detour.

University brought its own concerns. He pursued studies in Sport Science even though this did not really speak to him. At best he saw this as an opportunity to enter professional basketball. Not dejected by his decision Fernando stoically views it as one of the occasions where things in our lives don't go according to plan. In trying to understand the turn his life had taken he defers to the Most High. Divine intervention was a common theme in most of the 'cosmological' discourses of H.I.M. members I talked with. The knowledge that Jah's wisdom is supreme guides them through their existential and spiritual quandaries. Fernando can thus face his decisions with a degree of stoicism because having faith in the Most High, he will ultimately come to the path that is meaningful to him.

With studying came romance, twice. Fernando by no means considers having a girlfriend as a mistake (in an ultimate sense) nor does he anywhere suggest that having romance in your life is anathema to the Rastafarian path. It is the concomitant values that go along with having a girlfriend that unsettles him. He makes reference to 'logical order' that we think our lives should follow: find the right partner, get a high paying job and reach for success. He finds a spiritual folly in this 'order' as it represents '*illusions*'.

His sentiment of his second girlfriend as a potential wife is also regarded as an *illusion*. It is admittedly difficult to assess whether he considers this an *illusion* because this was an misjudgement; an misguided appraisal of the situation or if it was an *illusion* in the grander scheme of his spiritual journey (meaning that marrying this girl was not what Jah planned for him and also that marrying just for the sake of following the 'logical order' is not the path to true fulfilment). The 'confrontation'

with his prospective in-laws could also have been an indication that he needed to move in a different direction in his life.

### *Rise to Rastafari*

Fernando attributes his rise to Rastafari mostly to his brother:

It was through reasoning with my brother, and he started giving me documentaries. I started watching and my eyes, I was like yoh (this is an interjection denoting surprise or amusement) this is what I've been looking for. I always knew that something like this existed, this type of knowledge, this type of consciousness. I knew it existed but it was never presented to me. I was looking for salvation in the church and it was revealed to me that religious dogma only heals hypocrisy. You understand, that whole, Christian thing of 'who are you to judge me' and that you can be in your comfort zone. Life is good, have fun, and people generally have goodwill but we know that's all a bunch of illusions. Even when we thought our food was nutritious, at times we thought our politicians were just and honest, but it's all crumbling down before our faces. So the question is what is reality then? Through the light of Rastafari it is being revealed to me everyday.

### **3.5 The precarious visibility of H.I.M.**

Before concluding this chapter I would like to say a few words on an issue that might not have major ethnographic relevance but still incited some curiosity in me. On many occasions I was confronted by students with the question what my research topic was (this is of course after they discovered I'm doing postgraduate studies in anthropology). When I told them that I was doing research on the Rastafarian student organization on campus their first response was surprise because they did not know such an organization existed. Their second response was that it is an interesting topic (it seems that Rastas remain an exotic other to many).

This made me ponder on the H.I.M. Society's aim to spread knowledge and consciousness amongst students on campus. If so many students did not know about them surely this means that their methods of executing this aim were less than efficacious. The perplexity of this issue is exacerbated for me because they have a huge flag/banner hanging in the student centre. But maybe I am exaggerating the issue

there was of course a fair amount of students who visited the office during the time of my research.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter served to situate the H.I.M. Society in relation to other student organizations and the broader university context. It was also suggested that in terms of religious affiliation this organization is a marginal group. A brief history of the organization was also provided and a general ‘feel’ for how things are done at H.I.M. Society. I outlined three students’ biographies as I firstly felt that the reader could get a better sense of the type of individuals in the organization. But also with regards to Gary and Fernando, I considered it useful to introduce them at some length as they will appear as significant actors later in the thesis.



## **CHAPTER 4: An image you can believe in: H.I.M. style and semblance**

### **4.1 Introduction**

All identities and authentic expression of these are based on a set of practices and symbols. Two assumptions are involved in stating that identities are based on practices and symbols. The first is that identities are not given and are always in the process of being and becoming (Cooper 2005, Hall and du Gay 1996, Jenkins 1987). Secondly practices and symbols are open to multiple interpretations and use (a point tiresomely made by anthropologists overtly concerned with symbols see Cohen 1979, Firth 1973 and Turner 1975) which means that the stability of identities are always threatened. But stability in identities, or *semblance* of it, is what we need if we are to experience these identities as real. How do groups produce this semblance which sustains a sense of authenticity? The concept of mediation and Birgit Meyer's (2004, 2009) notion of style is helpful in considering this process. Before exploring these concepts I would like to briefly outline the notion of semblance.

### **4.2 Semblance**

The best way into this notion is by indicating that semblance is based on what the religious person calls faith but it might also be related to gambling. Construing faith and gambling as constituents of the same process may be considered blasphemous but these two ideas are not as incongruent as one might think. For one thing both faith and gambling are geared toward an unknown. The difference being that in faith the unknown is taken as a given (i.e. its existence/reality is not questioned at least not explicitly) in gambling the unknown has the duality of anxious contingency and thrilling suspense (suspense understood as that which keeps us at the edge of our seats in an *engaging* manner).

The differences between faith and gambling as outlined above seem to lead us into a deadlock as far as the unknown is concerned. This thought should wither if you think

of these differences as in dialectical relation with one another. The faithful givenness of the unknown if it is to remain so needs to be constantly reaffirmed (a point that will be clearer when style and mediation will be discussed). This reaffirmation is of course retained through symbols and practices. But since symbols are polysemous and practices can be interpreted in various ways we are thrown on the path of the gambling dual sense of the unknown. Because of the interpretive promiscuity of symbols and practices groups involved need to find ways to tame them. This taming involves a complex process but suffice it to say it comes down to investment or more appropriately (to the particular language I'm employing) commitment.

I think here de Certeau is helpful when he defines belief “not as the object of believing (a dogma, a program, etc.) but as the subject’s *investment* in a proposition, the *act* of saying it and considering it as true”(1988:178,emphasis on investment mine). Practices but (I believe) symbols especially in its capacity as crutches for commitment is what alleviates the anxiety produced by the contingency of an identity (it is what brings this aspect of gambling closer to faith). If as de Certeau states “there are now too many things to believe and not enough credibility to go around” (ibid: 179) than the impetus for commitment and ultimately semblance becomes stronger.

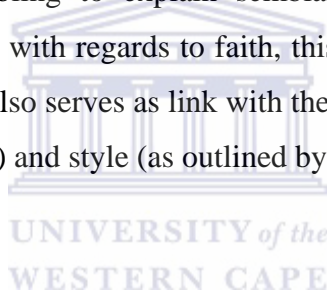
Here is where we come to meaning as it is understood existentially and anthropologically. What anthropologists typically refer to as meaning (or meaning making) is what animates our existence and the identities through which we live this existence. This animating function of meaning is what keeps us *at the edge of our seats*. Quotes by two participants should give you some sense of what I'm trying to get at here

That is the beautiful thing about Rastafari, is that you can find it for yourself...if you are willing to look because that's the thing you can actively go and seek information... (Cindy)

(Commenting on criticisms from his family) But I stuck to it I just kept seeking more. You know its like tasting a bit of the fruit you want to eat the whole fruit, like taking a sip of water and then you keep on drinking it. (Gary)

Granted that this is in the context of Rastafari and that these statements are made as these two participants rose to Rastafari the point of animation is still clear. It also

points us to a paradox that what keeps us on the edge of our seat is not just what we believe in as true (faith) but also through this faith we become who we are and more. Semblance is thus the synthesis between the faithful sense of the unknown and the gambling dual nature of the unknown. On the one hand it relates to what Bourdieu called a belief in the game or *illusio* (see Crossley 2005:159). On the other hand semblance understood as appearance is also characterised by its negation; by the chance that it might be destabilized. Interestingly Crossley in his outline of Bourdieu's concept of *illusio* suggests that it should be understood alongside disillusionment. The potential and pervasive frailty on which semblance stands only serves to make the drive towards it stronger. Semblance is thus the counterpart of authenticity. It is what invests authenticity with realness. It is thus not just a belief in the game it makes the game the only genuine game (Rastafarians may for instance recognize their kinship with other faiths but theirs is the true path to truth). The examples of faith and gambling to explain semblance is not arbitrary. On the ethnographic level, especially with regards to faith, this schema seems appropriate to a study of Rastafarianism. It also serves as link with the concepts of mediation (as it is developed in religious studies) and style (as outlined by Meyer).



### **4.3 A different style**

Meyer's notion of style is tied to her understanding of aesthetics. For an understanding of aesthetics Meyer insists that we return to Aristotle's notion of aesthesis which is defined as "our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it" (Meyer and Verrips 2008 quoted in Meyer 2009:6). The body in this framework is of central importance. Though not the only aspect it is the body and its uses which are important to what Meyer calls aesthetic formations. The concept of aesthetic formations emphasizes that our sensory experience of this world is both an entity and process (ibid:7). As this relates to groups or communities it highlights that although a group's expression and experience of the world is felt as fixed it is always in process. As Hobart and Kapferer put it "(the aesthetic process) constitutes both the reality and the emergent possibility of the worlds they come to live" (2005:7). Here we can paraphrase Sartre's famous dictum as 'Existence *conceives* essence'.



Drawing inspiration from Mafessoli, Meyer relates her notion of aesthetic formation to the concept of style. Style is (in close relation to Bourdieu's notion of habitus) a generating form of collective sentiment (Meyer 2009: 9). It is the form and the process of forming. A community is formed from the aesthetic which structures sensory perceptions of the world, the community thus revolves around "shared images and other mediated cultural forms" (ibid). Further, "this sharing...does not merely depend on a common interpretation of these forms and an agreement about their meaning but on the capacity of these forms to induce in those engaging with them a particular common aesthetic and style"(ibid).

Considering what I said about semblance I need to make a few amendments to this last statement while retaining the usefulness of the style concept. From my perspective style does not guarantee harmonious (or coherent) solidarity at a minimum it acknowledges that certain key symbols (Ortner 1973) and practices are the most viable way of expressing identity. Style as, it relates to semblance, does need a degree of coherence amongst members but the important thing is that the materials used (symbols and practices) have a wide appeal.

Important to this discussion is the notion of aesthetic style which "indicate the importance of bodies, things and images in bringing about new communities and even communion" (Meyer 2009:10). It is through the importance of bodies, things and images that style pays tribute to semblance. As Meyer also puts forth "style, by putting things in a certain way, speaks to, as well as evokes, emotions, Employing an ensemble of recurring key terms and conventions, style makes people feel at home in, as well as confident with, a particular discourse" (2004:95). Style seduces the subject to the aura of authenticity. These bodies, things and images are productively understood as media.

#### **4.4 The in between of things**

Semblance is about giving credibility to the unknown; it is about making what is not there yet in social space appear. There is thus a concern of mediation as Zito asserts



“a good deal of human life is about making the invisible visible that is, mediating it” (2008:77 quoted in Engelke 2010). As mentioned earlier the unknown’s (here interchangeable with the invisible) givenness needs to be constantly reaffirmed it needs to be mediated. Mazzarella defines mediation as “the process which a given social dispensation produces and reproduces itself in and through a particular set of media” (2004: 346). This definition resonates well with the process of semblance. Mediation is in other words the paths taken to semblance.

As far as the tools of mediation go “a medium is a material framework, both enabling and constraining, for a given set of social practices” (Mazzarella 2004). In this definition it is clear that emphasis is placed on the objectifying and transforming capacities of a medium. Media in their materiality (or form) does not determine but limits the frame of its use. One can for instance think of how the medium of radio highlights the voice and renders physical appearance useless. Since form is so intimately tied to content (see Meyer 2011) the blunted utility of the physical/visible in radio obviously limits what and how a message can be conveyed.

This line of thinking relates well to what Meyer (2009) in the context of religious experience call sensational forms. Sensational forms as I understand it are basically media but with an emphasis on how these influence and form how sensory experience of the world. As Meyer explains it sensational forms are “relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between believers in the in the context of particular religious power structures” (2009:13). Here I should hasten to add that sensational forms are not just about media shaping our sensory experience in the world but also how and when these media are to be used.

Semblance as the acceptance of the appearance of the unknown cannot be concerned with its own mechanics. We love the illusion but if we get to see how the magician constructs it, the illusion loses its magic in the same vain a punch line loses its edge when the joke needs to be explained. Stated more academically “all mediation involves the appearance of an ontological separation between form and content” (Mazzarella 2004:356) and in the sense that it makes the unknown appear; the invisible visible (making it immediate), “immediacy (thus) depends on mediation and

its denial” (Meyer 2009:12). This separation of form and content, and denial of mediation should not be seen as instances of self-deception (as a mistaken understanding of semblance might suggest) it points to what we call reality (and for our discussion authenticity) is based on faith (as I outlined it) and the investment of meaning. Without semblance social life would be impossible (the phenomenological concept of the horizon also speaks to this point, see Van Petersen 1972).

## **4.5 H.I.M. style**

As indicated above style depends on media. Media as implied is not confined to media technologies such as radio and television. In the context of religious studies Meyer conceives of media more broadly to include “substances such as incense or herbs, sacrificial animals, icons, sacred books, holy stones and rivers, and finally, the human body, which lends itself to being possessed by a spirit” (2009:11). With this mind the rest of this chapter will explore some of the media H.I.M. use.

### **4.5.1 Dress**

It would be misleading and analytically misguided to speak of a dress code among the H.I.M. members. It would be more appropriate to say that members dress is not so much prescriptive as it is proscriptive (and not religiously so). At any rate there is a dress style in the sense conceptualized above.

The female members favour long skirts. I cannot recall one incidence where I have seen one of the female members wearing a pair of jeans or sweat pants. More often than not their hair is covered by a ‘doekie’ (head wrap) but on few occasions I saw one or two of the females with uncovered hair. The organising principle seems to be modesty. As Candice, one of the members, stated:

...you should actually cover yourself because your body is actually something sacred. It is something sacred for God it is the vessel for the Most High. It is created by Him and it says ‘Honour God in body and spirit’. How I dress is going to tell me whether I honour God or not. So me covering is honouring

God and if you believe in God than you should cover up and not expose yourself and also not lead other people to sin through the way you are dressing.

As I'm writing I can recall the passion with which she made the above statement. This is obviously an issue close to the heart (and the body). Meyer asserts that "style is at the core of religious aesthetics exactly because the adoption of a shared style is central to the process of subjectivation, in that style involves particular *techniques of the self and the body* that modulate...persons into socio-religious formation" (2009:9 emphasis mine). It is clear from Candice's statement that Rastafari is a movement with religious overtones. More important, for this discussion, to consider is what type of persons this idea of covering creates. It most conspicuously creates the person with sexual modesty. This ethnographer can certainly say that there was nothing sexually provocative about the female members' dress even though some of their more colourful attire was pleasing to the eye.

In Candice's view dress *style* is not only important to a sense of being Rastafari it is also a prophylactic for sin. Thus the sinner might be out there but through covering I am not an element of his/her sin. Dress style as prophylaxis for sin directly flows into the idea of honouring God through this style. The covered body is sacralised through presentation of modesty. It seems that the "sartorial continues to signal moral qualities" (Tseelon 1995:17). In my time spent at H.I.M. no indication was ever given that men had the same responsibility in their dress. It appears that "the woman functions like a symptom: she represents a threat while being constructed as defence against the threat" (ibid:24). Candice's statements certainly suggest that the female body is a threat but in covering it, the threat is disarmed.

For the men there are also no hard rules in terms of dress even as signifiers of morality. What I noticed at H.I.M. is that jeans were also not visible among the males. What I have noticed were sweat pants but mostly cargo pants. Doc liked to don his white robe. As far as head covering goes it did not appear that this was a formal necessity. But certain clothing articles did give them cause for concern.

One day I decided to make a quick visit to the H.I.M. office to see how things were going. My aim was not to go with the intent to be ethnographically enlightened. But I

suppose I was to a small extent. I walked in greeted everyone present and decided to stand by the table in the main area. Them bani was standing there, another brother was sitting at table and a sister was busy cooking something. Suddenly Them bani read the inscription on my T-Shirt; *Lets get drunk and take advantage of me*. At first Them bani and the brother sitting at the table made light hearted comments about it and then in a non-serious manner the brother stated that the type of shirts that I had on was “wrong”. He said what made it worse is that these T-shirts are mass produced and he just shook his head. Them bani then countered by stating that this made it important for Rastafari to make their own T-shirts bearing messages that furthers the movement. All I could say at that moment was that the machines used to print on T-shirts are quite expensive. The point is, I highlighted the dress style of H.I.M. by showing what it is not. I am tempted to say that as far as the males go dress style is negative style. That is it is not so much defined by what they should wear but by what is not congruent with H.I.M. Society’s view of Rastafari.

#### **4.5.2 Rastafari ideology portrayed and pictured**

During my time spent with H.I.M. I noticed that members made much of documentaries that they felt everyone in the group should watch. Also as mentioned before the office is decorated with pictures that reflects an Africanist stance. These visual materials reflect what H.I.M. considers Rastafari. I had two occasions where H.I.M. screened documentaries ostensibly for the wider university community. The first one was part of an ‘official’ screening programme and the other was a more spur of the moment occurrence.

##### *Screening one*

I started my research with H.I.M. during the month of February. I discovered that this was Black History month. In honour of this H.I.M. Society had weekly documentary screenings which they apparently held every Friday of that month. I received this information just in time to make the last screening of the month.

On that particular Friday I went to the H.I.M. office full of zest. I told myself that I was getting the proverbial ball rolling. When I arrived at the office the screening had

already started. I was about ten to fifteen minutes late for the screening. The table was removed from the main area and replaced with seats for viewers. They had a relatively well turn out for the screening. By a quick count I estimated about fifteen people viewing the documentary. Because of my tardiness I had to sit at the back which made it difficult for me to see the television screen. The seating arrangements were spilt in two with three rows on each side. Each row had about four seats. My seat was the back row on the right hand side. Because of my less than ideal seating and my tardiness I did not follow much of the documentary. My viewing was intermittent, my attention wavering.

I did gather that the documentary was about the assassination of Lumumba (Patrice Lumumba was a Congolese Prime minister who served in this office for three months in 1960). Joseph was sitting at the back on the left hand side of the seating arrangement. He looked like he was surveying his flock to see if they were nourished by the food for thought this documentary provided. From where I was sitting it did not seem that everyone was interested in the documentary. In fact one of the brothers sitting in front of me fidgeted a lot in his chair. Moments later it looked as if he was a few steps away from a nap as his head was slumped a little. Not being able to fight the feeling any longer he eventually got up from his seat and walked out.

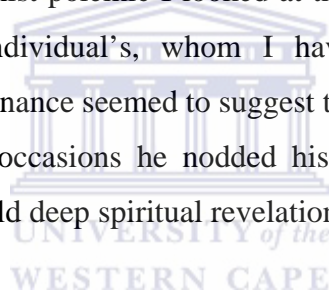
Not all of the members were watching the documentary. One of the members was busy preparing something in the kitchen but later sat down to view the documentary while he was eating. Others were in the computer room laughing and chatting, just having a good time. The occasional customer came in for Irie nuggets (i.e. biscuits with a Rastafari touch).

When the documentary was done Joseph took it out of the DVD player and inserted a live concert of the legendary Bob Marley but kept the volume low since it was time to reason (i.e. discuss). Joseph was about to have his moment. He started with an overview of the documentary and then lamented over the white man's brutality against the black man. He spoke with great indignation on the injustices of the assassination of the "great man", Lumumba. He proceeded to give a brief history on how the Belgians colonized Congo for the resources this country had to offer.

According to him during the Cold war Russia and America were not really enemies they were part of the same team.

He spoke about all the tools the white man had at his disposal to enslave the mind and bodies of the black man. He also criticized the racial hierarchy of UWC, “At the top there is a white. In the middle there is what is called the so called Coloured, our brothers, but because their skins are lighter the white man says they can stay. At the bottom is the kaffer (a derogatory word for black South Africans), the people cleaning the toilets...”

Among the above mentioned white man’s tools are eugenics, genetic modification of foods and television just to name a few (I felt somewhat dismayed about the demonization of Darwin being quite partial to Darwinian views). While Joseph was making his protracted Africanist polemic I looked at the faces of some of the people still seated. One of the individual’s, whom I have met before (a first year anthropology student), countenance seemed to suggest that he was deeply intrigued by Joseph’s oratory. On many occasions he nodded his head in agreement as if the content of Joseph’s speech held deep spiritual revelations.



### *Screening two*

This screening was not planned but happened as a result of the particular audience present at the time. It was an open day at UWC. The campus was thus littered with school goers eager to know what university life have to offer. How a group of students’ eagerness led them to H.I.M. Society was a bit puzzling (yet not overwhelmingly perplexing). As I entered the office on that day the first thing that I noticed about this group of high school students was the accompanying teacher. I thought that this teacher must be of the more liberal brand to allow her flock to consort with Rastafarians. I went to greet Thembani who was busy preparing a dish and when I turned around the teacher had left the office. The flock was alone with the Rastafarians. Interesting, I thought. Didn’t this teacher hear that Rastafarians were the ones who smoked ganja and just lay around? Apparently she was not fazed by such stereotypes. In any event Doc gave the students a brief lecture about the importance of education and how they need more children from the townships to further their

studies. As Doc was imparting these wise words (reflexive note: something about their facial expressions suggested to me they thought that Doc was being officious) another H.I.M. member was apparently preparing a documentary for them to watch on the computer. The five students were called into the computer room. They were going to have a show H.I.M. style.

This screening was speeches by the outspoken Khalid Mohammed (an African American activist who was associated with the Nation of Islam). As Khalid Mohammed was blurting out his Africanist and explicitly anti-white rhetoric I decided to stand by Thembani. As the office was not of commodious dimensions I could still hear the angry rhetoric of Mohammed. In places of Mohammed speech Thembani vocally agreed and urged the students to take heed of what this important man is saying. The students seemed to comply. After a few minutes Mohammed's acerbic anti-white oratory Doc wrapped it up for the students. He told them once again about the importance of education because as they have just heard from Khalid Mohammed they, as black individuals, would face almost insurmountable challenges in this world. A good education is a good weapon when they face these challenges. The students listened to Doc's wisdom for a while and then took they leave. I thought if nothing else, they were made aware that their blackness came with a huge responsibility. It was up to them if they will live up to it or go astray.

#### **4.6 Picturing rastafari philosophy**

The H.I.M. Society office is decorated with a wealth of pictures which reflect a particular attitude to blackness and Afrocentricity. The next chapter will explore (through the notion of cultural performance) what happens when some of these images are exposed to the wider university public. Suffice it to say the denotative message of the office décor is that Black is Powerful (and Beautiful of course). The images below should illustrate what I am trying to convey.





**Figure 4: Black supremacy**



**figure 5: Rastafarian contumacy**

The little *black* child raising his fist along with the caption No Compromise is particularly striking for me. It is a nice summary of the ideal (or should I say spirit) of Rastafarian contumacy. It is a reminder to H.I.M. members that the system they currently live in is Babylon (a common assertion at H.I.M.) and constructive defiance is one of their vocations (if not the ultimate one). Meyer asserts that “images are both material presences and figments of the imagination” (2011:1029). The phrase figments of the imagination should not be construed as what is contra reality but as inner products that are materialized in pictures. Images as material presences provide subjects (i.e. people for whom the images provides semblance) with referential assurance. That is if discourse and practice needs extra vitality the images can be pointed to, to affirm the message. Joseph was actually very fond of pointing to an image in the office to support his frequent speeches.

The visual aspects of H.I.M. Society’s style are very telling of the drive to semblance. The documentaries and the images are useful media to the H.I.M. members’ styling. It provides a useful tool for producing a shared, collective sentiments since it draws on ‘authorities’ outside the H.I.M. circle. It is the answer to a ‘don’t-take-my-word-for-it’ stance. Since these documentaries and (most) images are not produced by H.I.M. members (my rhetorical credibility might be challenged since the two images above were actually produced by H.I.M.) they purportedly mitigate the bias that can be so contaminating to semblance. That is the appearance of authenticity is not something



conjured up by us in a desperate attempt for *credibility*. The documentaries especially seem to validate the H.I.M. Society's view of the world faced with racial injustices (among other things). It puts, as it were, a little bit more faith to the gambling quality of semblance.

I have noticed certain documentaries (not just the two mentioned above) are uncritically taken as signifiers of truth. The members of H.I.M. would refer me and other students visiting the office to documentaries to support arguments they were making at a particular moment. The 'don't-take-my-word-for-it' stance is useful when the evidence for a particular argument seems a bit tenuous. For instance when they spoke about secret societies they would refer you to a documentary on the *illuminati*. I have never once heard them question the validity of these documentaries. An urgent point needs to be made here, I am not saying that the members of H.I.M. lack the capacity for critical thinking (they are after all students some of them postgraduate students in History and Anthropology). I have certainly heard them articulate their points very persuasively on many occasions. The drive to semblance is not correlated to a group's intelligence or rationality it speaks to a human need to keep our worlds together. As already explained there is anxiety involved in the process of semblance so we grab whatever tools we can to hold on to a picture of the world. These documentaries then do not assume the role of evidence in the legal or academic sense of the term; they are symbols which animate or vitalize the H.I.M. Society's view of the world or following de Certeau, Rastafari beliefs are transported to where its energy can best be utilized (1988:179).

#### **4.7 Contentious media**

Thus far I have considered how the various media H.I.M. Society employ's helps to assist in creating collective sentiment and semblance. But I have focused on the rather uncontroversial media such as dress code and images. There is of course a Rastafari medium which does not enjoy such a socially neutral status. That is ganja. I want to very briefly consider what is at stake with the use of such a medium.

In a draft of the city of Cape Town's Operational Alcohol and Drug Strategy: 2007-2010 drugs are defined as "all psychoactive substances, illicit or otherwise that change patterns of thought, behaviour and emotions. Drugs, which impact most visibly in the City of Cape Town, are methamphetamine (tik), heroin, mandrax (methaqualine) and cannabis (dagga)". Ganja or dagga (as it is called in this report) is thus lumped with other drugs (especially tik) which have an uneasy place in the social conscious of the Western Cape. Cape Town is especially seen as plagued by the presence of drugs as a spokesperson of the City of Cape Town commented "Cape Town has the highest formal incidence of alcohol and drug abuse of any city in South Africa..." (Times Live 12 January 2011).

This situation does not bode well for the Rastafarians in Cape Town. For one thing they are automatically positioned as drug users and lazy ones at that. As Fernando states:

I was anti-ganja. In the beginning I would agree with people about Rasta 'yes aunty these Rastas are just looking for an excuse to smoke ganja'

A few of the H.I.M. Society members also related personal experiences of police harassment because it was just assumed that they distributed ganja. It is indeed interesting that a medium or symbol that is core to Rastafari spiritual experience is at the same time contentious in the broader community. But considering the Rastafari ideology of contumacy these challenges against ganja just serves to intensify their identity and belief and also the drive towards semblance. H.I.M. members said as much stating that it is a God given right to smoke ganja.

## **4.8 Conclusion**

Our identities need to be built on a credible foundation. This credible foundation is what I called semblance. As explained in this chapter semblance is closely related to notions of style and mediation. I have therefore focused on H.I.M society dress code, pictures and documentary screenings as elements of style that fosters semblance. I also briefly considered how some of the H.I.M. Society (and Rastafarians in general)

media because of their contentious nature positions them as outside the conventional moral framework. In the following chapter I consider what happens when this image of Rastafari is actively related to other people



## **Chapter 5: Exhibiting the message: Rastafari ideology, its performers and audience**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the various resources H.I.M. Society members use to create a sense of identity or community. This chapter will explore the dynamics when these individuals *actively* and *consciously* express their identity to others. To execute this analytical task I will employ the concept of (cultural) performance. Since the central idea of my thesis does not hinge on the concept of performance I do not intend to or at any rate claim to give an extensive or exhaustive theoretical genealogy of the concept. My main aim is to draw on the notions of performance that I find particularly useful to understand my ethnographic material (said material focuses are what the H.I.M. Society calls exhibitions). I thus start with an explanation of the concept and will then apply it to relevant data.

### **5.2 The social world as stage**

The first issue we encounter with the concept of performance is with the word performance. It should be admitted that as far as social analysis goes the word has some unfortunate connotations. Not to mention that the word has a wide currency in the English language, one can for instance talk about a job performance which is of course different than a theatrical performance. But the word qua concept seems to have some utility for the social analyst trying to understand certain aspects of social life (or maybe not aspects but trying to understand social life in general in a particular way). We thus ask ourselves what is performance for the social analyst? Or stated differently what the important elements of a performance are?

Since these elements refer to theoretical ideas and not things with empirical veracity, theorists of cultural performance have outlined many elements. Some are of course more useful than others. As far as the more useful go I think as a starting point I agree with Schieffelin's emphasis that performance is more about action than with ideas

(1998:194). The implication here is that the focus should not be on meaning (as a final product) as such but on the process of meaning making. It is in this processual formulation that cultural performance presents itself, to the anthropological mind, as the panacea to all reifying and essentialising notions of culture. While it did cure the ailments of reification and essentialism it introduced the problems of intention and unintended consequences.

Schieffelin notes two dominant uses of the performance concept in social science, the one conceptualising performance as an *intentionally* produced event that is marked off from ordinary life and the other that does not focus so much on the type of event but on performativity (1998:195). Following Erving Goffman performativity is here understood as “the expressive processes of strategic impression management and structured improvisation through which human beings normally articulate their purposes, situations and relationships in everyday social life” (ibid). If this sounds like a mouthful it’s probably because it is but I would like to focus on the idea of *strategic impression management*. It seems to suggest an almost agonizing emphasis on intention on part of the social actors. This type of instrumentality is also suggested by Bailey (1996) in his analysis of a conflict between Untouchables and clean castes in an Indian village as a cultural performance. While I think the emphasis on intention is important the notion of strategic impression management takes the logic of social life as theatre to a point where it suggests that what actors portray is not real. Indeed as Kelly Askew has noted that the Goffmanian idea of social life as theatre does not fully deal with issues of authenticity and instrumentality (2002: 21).

The notion of semblance as I outlined it in the previous chapter can also be useful here. Intention and instrumentality on the one hand need not stand in opposition to a ‘belief in the game’ or with authenticity (although they are not necessarily always congruent). The one problem here is semantic in that intention and especially instrumentality is usually equated with coldly pragmatic if not selfish aim toward gain. But the end or gain does not necessarily have to be material or practical it can be symbolic. Since semblance is characterized by a lack of concern for how its produced, intention and instrumentality melts into it (the only time when instrumentality is a problem for semblance is when there is no belief in the game, in this case the concern is more with putting on a successful *appearance* for particular ends). Also as

Schieffelin states “if we strive for expressive control in everyday life and in special ‘performance’ situations, this is ipso facto part of our act of participation in the situation and our contribution to its determination, process and outcome-whether or not what other see us to be doing (or revealing) is what we intended them to see” (1998:197).

This last statement by Schieffelin leads us into the issue of unintended consequences. I am especially interested how this relates to what is in performance parlance called the audience. It was already suggested that what we perform and what the audience get from the performance is not necessarily the same thing. No matter how much we strive for expressive control we can never be certain of the outcome of our performance. This is so because the polysemous nature of a performance hampers the persuasive efficacy of its message (see Bailey 1996). Here we come to another notion of performance; performance as oratory or rhetoric (this notion is especially useful for the ethnographic material I will discuss later). To be truly persuasive you need to be confident to be truly confident you need to belief in what it is you are ‘selling’.

Semblance is what inspires confidence in a cultural performance. But not everyone who pays tribute to a semblance can relay *the* message convincingly. Richard Bauman emphasises a “display of communicative competence” in performance (1977:11 quoted in Askew 2002:22). Thus what is required is a deep knowledge of what it is you performing and also *rhetorical aptitude* (i.e. being persuasive). This resonates well with Schieffelin’s contention that “a performance is always something accomplished” (1998:198) or as Rostas puts it “performativity is a measure of the effort put into action” (1998:90).

Persuading the audience is an important aspect of analysing a performance but one also has to consider the role of the audience. The audience are not just passive on-lookers, they also communicate (see Abu-Lughod 2002, Hirsch 1998, Mankekar 2002). That is why Askew suggests that we need to look at the relationship between audience and performers dialogically (2002:22). There is a back and forth between performer and audience as it were. In Bailey’s (1996) scheme the audiences become performers themselves. Being a performer or a member of the audience is not so much fixed positions but points on a continuum. Thus the situation in which a

performance takes place forms as much part of the performance as ‘props’ and ‘actors’. The burden of the success or failure of a performance then moves beyond the competency of the actor to “the relationship between central performers and others in the situation” (Schieffelin 1998:198).

One aspect of performance not to be ignored is its apparent subversive nature or its potential for critique. I quote a few anthropological voices here:

Cultural performance both expresses and critiques social life.  
Victor Turner (1988:22)

...performance as readily constitutes a means of countering and destabilizing established power structures  
Kelly Askew (2002:6)

In addition to being set apart and framed, cultural performances are important dramatizations that enable participants to understand, *criticize*, and even change the worlds in which they live  
Guss (2000:9 emphasis mine).

And so on ad infinitum. The point is that we need to consider power when analysing cultural performances. Anthropologists celebrate the performances of those they study as an effective means of challenging the status quo. But...(let us consider some ethnography first).

### **5.3 The exhibitions**

In this section I will describe the events that occurred at two of H.I.M.’s exhibitions. What the H.I.M. members call exhibitions are basically a showcase of partitions (which they call boards) with pictures on them portraying a particular theme (slavery for instance). Both exhibitions were held in central campus in the plain nuzzled between the campus library, Main hall and administration building.

#### **5.3.1 Exhibit A**

The sun menacingly treaded on my head but some H.I.M. members must have thought the day only moderately warm as they wore jackets and their characteristic woollen



caps. They were not alone in this appraisal of the day it seems as many of the students huddled around the boards at the exhibition were wearing clothing that suggested that the sun may be out but it's not making its full presence felt yet.

I saw the bustle as I came out of the student centre. I was surprised to see that H.I.M. was having an exhibition as I was not informed. My popularity with the organization was confirmed. In any event I walked over to see what this exhibition had to offer. Fernando was passionately addressing a group of students who gathered around him. Doc was standing in the middle of the boards at a table displaying books on Rastafarianism and African history. He was wearing his usual white robe and turban and sporting his Ray Ban sun glasses. He seemed to be in *high* spirits energetically jumping around to address a student or to rearrange some of the books on the table.



**Figure 6: the infamous wall of shame**

Students were staring incredulously at some of the boards especially the one titled the Wall of Shame. What amused them was the picture of Jesus (i.e. white Jesus) on the board. Interestingly this did not seem to offend anybody. At least it did not do so explicitly. But as the exhibition went on some tension did arise around theological



issues. The board entitled Black God (previous title King of Kings) was the catalyst. As is evident from the title this board expresses the Rastafarians view that Haile Selassie is God. This did not seem to go well with the religious sensibilities of other students. As students listened to members' explanations why Selassie is God their tempers seemed to flare more.



**Figure 7: King of Kings**

Two female students in the crowd screamed “conspiracy theories” and one stated “I don’t debate the word of God” and they dashed off. This seemed to give the other students more energy to question the H.I.M. members. One of the students (a gentleman whom I place in his late thirties) saw me taking notes and came over to me, quite boisterously I might add, and asked me if I was a journalist. At first I thought ‘thank you for recognising me as something more glamorous and vocationally viable than an ethnographer’ but I snapped out of this transitory reverie and told him my true unglamorous, vocationally dead purpose. He didn’t care much for what I was doing he was just surprised that they, H.I.M., were a student organisation. Then he asked me

if I was buying what these Rastafarian students were selling (i.e. he wanted to know if I shared their beliefs). This is a question that will unsettle anybody who takes anthropology seriously.

It did not unsettle me but it did make me think. I must have repressed the answer that I gave him which in all likelihood must have been an unconvincing justification for anthropological relevance. I know he did not seem convinced (if he in fact listened to my response which did not deserve a hearing) and he felt the need to tell me that he was young too and that I will learn. There was something unnervingly portentous about this. He then dipped back in to the crowd to defend what he saw as an attack on his beliefs. But his question took me back to my first year anthropology classes when I was taught the virtues of cultural relativism, which my fellow students at the time devoured overzealously (probably a reflection of the uncritical democratic attitude of our Rainbow nation). This is not the place to discuss my philosophical position on this issue but suffice it to say I took cultural relativism with a pinch of salt. But here I was standing at the exhibition, not a Rastafarian, not even remotely religious, but anthropology is about taking people seriously (as the title of one of the discipline's texts goes) so I am justified in being there. This question made me conscious that I was also part of the performance but I was probably a social actor in a more insidious sense of the word.

### **5.3.2 Exhibit B**

The second exhibition I will focus on is one that was held in 2010. This was before I started my research but fortunately H.I.M. Society made a video recording of this exhibition. Having the video recording afforded me the chance to focus more on discourse which I couldn't really do at the exhibition I attended (my phone on which I recorded interviews, gave me very incoherent audio on the exhibition). Viewing through this recording it appeared that this exhibition did not arouse the type of passionate engagement as the one I attended. This is why I focus more on what H.I.M. members had to say. Another reason why I want to outline some of these discourses is that they are paradigmatic of H.I.M.'s views. The same arguments were made at the exhibition I attended, the same arguments are made at the organization's office and the same arguments are made with anyone who inquired more about Rastafari. One

can thus say that these arguments are embodied and therefore can be seen as performances in their own right.

### ***Christianity and white Jesus***

See the face of Jesus there (pointing to the wall of shame). That's not the real Jesus, the white Jesus.... That was painted by Michelangelo. The pope decided to make that the universal image of Jesus. The missionaries was sent out to Africa and the people thought that was the real Jesus.

Another H.I.M. member addressing a different student:

...the real Christianity was in Ethiopia, practiced in Ethiopia for a long time. That's why we Rasta come and say people must be careful of who they say...because when we worshipped our own image our own forefathers, they say its paganism. And now they put a white Jesus, isn't that paganism as well because they worshipping the image of a person as well. So now people must know that they must worship they own because the Most High-because he is created in his own image. So how can you say that you are waiting for a white saviour when you are black....this is not Jesus (pointing to picture on wall of shame) Jesus was not a white person

### ***Rasta and student in discussion on race***

Rasta: How can you tell me you don't want black supremacy?

Student: I don't want black supremacy

Rasta: But what about your mentality?

Cameraman: What do you want?

Student: What I want is for all nations to be equal, I want all of us to be equal, understand. Because for me the issue of blacks being superior, is pure racism, its Apartheid whatever way you might look at it.

### *An Africanist manifesto*

This was a statement made by a student who was not a member of H.I.M. but seemed to be sympathetic to some of their ideologies.

What surprises me is that people, they have a tendency to accept views that was validated by Western scholarship. Everyone, today agrees, that Africa is the cradle of humankind simply because it has been validated by those in the intellectual community. Now what we are saying is the beginning of wisdom is to call things by their rightful names. If we all agree that the cradle of humankind is Africa then it starts with the African people, that's what I is saying. In fact to our vocabulary the word race has no plurality. There is no black, white or Coloured race that is social construction. There is only one race on earth, the human race but that entire race comes from Africa. What does it say to you? Now the only thing we are asking is that people should think beyond A and Z. you know there is this alphabetic order of thinking from A to Z. everything that is created today, people they are limiting it to A and Z. Yet Z is not necessarily the last alphabet and A is not necessarily the first alphabet. The point in life is never to lower the truth to the level of the people but to rise the people up to the level of the truth. That is what I is saying

### *On AIDS*

At this particular instance Joseph had quite a gathering around the Wall of Shame. It seemed that some people were taken by what Joseph had to say because at this point of the video a student is talking about racial inequality and then asks Joseph about the issue of AIDS.

Student: What I want to know is this thing of AIDS, the background around AIDS, because I want to believe it's a thing created by man.

Joseph: (pointing to a picture on the Wall of Shame, everybody turns around to look) Dr. Wouter Basson, Dr Death, that what they call him, because ...in a laboratory. He was not alone. There was other doctors some of them was called Dr Gallow. He's the one that owns Gallow records that create Kwaito music to deceive the people (at this point some of the students gathered around him laughed unbelievably); spreading false gospel to the people. There were other doctors, there's an army base in America, my brother, that is called Fort Detrick. Fort Detrick is where it was created. It was requested by American foreign policy. A man named Henry Kissinger (once again moving to the Wall of Shame to point him out)...they own the newspapers, they own the TV, they own the Radio. They use that for psychological warfare, its propaganda basically, psychological warfare to control the minds of the people... Then there is biological warfare whereby they create disease for the sake of warfare. So AIDS was created as a biological weapon.

These few extracts serve to show some of the dominant views of the H.I.M. Society. I have called these views paradigmatic in that these were the same views echoed during the time I did my research. Each member was in effect a 'The-World-according-to-Rastafari' textbook. This is not to say that members agreed on everything (this thesis is based on that premise) but these particular views were hegemonic. These views then, along with the events sketched in Exhibit A forms a basis to discuss these exhibitions as cultural performance. But if these exhibitions can be considered cultural performances we need to ask ourselves what it is that H.I.M. Society wants us to take away from these exhibitions?

#### **5.4 The didactic or proselytizing imperative?**

At the end of the video recording one of the members states the aim of these exhibitions and by extension H.I.M. Society. The aim according to him was to educate the people, to make them more aware, more conscious and that can only be done by being truthful. H.I.M. Society is therefore the purveyors of truth, the beacons of light for the unenlightened (if the reader thinks I'm being flippant I can only say that some members have told me something approximating this at various stages

during my research). The aim is thus clear but I had to ask myself are these exhibitions merely didactic? I kept thinking how members always insisted that their way is the true righteous way (translation: the truth). This coupled with the observation that Rastafarianism is a movement couched in religious language (even if members insist that it is not a religion but a spiritual movement) made me ask if there might not be a proselytizing imperative behind all of this. If so were these exhibitions effective toward this end?

The H.I.M. Society certainly had a difficult task as far as expressive control went. One of the reasons for this is the nature of the themes on the boards. Interest and contention seemed to gravitate towards the Black God (formerly King of Kings) and Wall of Shame boards. The boards on their own conveyed a strong and clear message but at the same time invited commentary (from members and the audience/other students). When the commentaries are made this is where the message gains new life, in a manner of speaking. What the H.I.M. member brings to the board sets the tone of how the audience will respond further (since the board by itself already initiated some response from the audience whether this is vocalized or not). We are thus here concerned with the competence of the H.I.M. commentator (here for instance I noticed when one of the newer members made a rather superficial commentary on the Black God board the audience seemed unconvinced and did not engage much but when one of the more eloquent members entered the scene he was almost immediately engaged) but also the intention of the commentary. Here we can probably knock down McLuhan by saying that it is not the medium but the intention that is the message.

The H.I.M. members ostensibly present these exhibitions as dialogic. That is they claim that these exhibitions are a forum for debate. Logically then we can safely assume that the intention of these exhibitions are didactic. But considering the aim of these exhibitions as stated by one of the members above one has to wonder how much credence H.I.M. members give to the idea of debate. I think here we can recall one of the student's (audience) remarks that she does not debate the word of God. Since the H.I.M. members share an earnest attitude towards (their?) God it would suggest that they should not be willing to debate the issue either (this also made me think of something Themrani told me during the research, that he does not believe he knows).

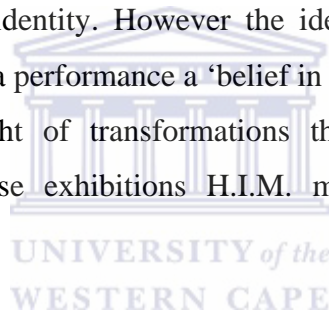
The intention is thus proselytizing. At least in the sense that H.I.M members want you to see that most of what you believe in are illusions (think of Fernando's words in Chapter 3).

The controversy around the Black God board can be better understood by employing Bourdieu concept of the field. Fields delineate areas of specific interest for instance the field of education, the field of politics etc. Fields are competitive as McNay notes "any field is marked by a tension or conflict between the interests of different groups who struggle to gain control over a field's capital" (1999:106). I propose that what we have around the issue of the Black God is the field of religion (more specifically Christianity). Religions (or movements employing religious language) tend to strive for hermeneutic closure (i.e. the religious groups interpretation is the most viable). The capital of this particular field is thus symbolic. The fact that H.I.M. Society firstly invalidates the conventional image of Christ is construed as a negation of other Christian's beliefs. The second point of contention was that H.I.M. deified a man (i.e. Haile Selassie) and that the blackness of this man should be given so much emphasis. H.I.M. Society has thus subverted some of the core symbols of Christianity. Some students did concede that it was not important that Jesus or God is white but then wanted to know why they (H.I.M. Society) insisted that God should be Black. The recourse was made (as on many other occasion when members where confronted by their overtly racial discourse) to Steve Biko's remark that "Being Black is not a matter of pigmentation-being black is a reflection of a mental attitude". This did not seem a convincing qualification to what appeared to audience as an overly racial discourse, because they insisted that H.I.M. should relax they emphasis on the racial character of God. But since the matter is not really open to discussion, as stated above, this particular instance was characterized by a stalemate. The only way for the one to impose their interpretation on the other it seems was through political coercion. Since this was not really an option I suggest that these exhibitions qua performances go even beyond the intent of proselytizing it comes back to semblance.



## 5.5 Our most enchanted audiences

I suggested above that these performances were caught in a stalemate since the H.I.M. Society asked students to questions something that H.I.M. members were not willing to question themselves. That is their religious beliefs. If their message is doomed to fall on deaf ears what would the logic behind these performances be considering their manifest aim (that of spreading knowledge) is rendered moot? Many anthropologists agree that cultural performances do not just reflect social reality but also creates it (Guss 2000, Askew 2002, Hobart and Kapferer 2005). While not disagreeing with this I feel that too much confidence is given to the subversive power (because when they talk about performances creating social life it is usually related to social critique) of performances (I will address this issue later). I contend that with the exhibitions the most important aim is semblance. I am not suggesting that these performances reproduce a same sense of identity. However the identity or sense of community might be transformed during a performance a 'belief in the game' is what is ultimately important (especially in light of transformations that might occur). I am also suggesting then that at these exhibitions H.I.M. members are their own most important audience.



Here we need to consider again the other students at these exhibitions. Their engagement provided the H.I.M. members with the opportunity to reflect. As McNay notes "reflexivity can emerge (therefore) only from distanciation provoked by the conflict and tension of social forces operating within and across fields" (1999:110). The contention around the Black God board thus served as a means to make their Rastafarianess more salient which provided impetus to affirm it more.

As they affirm their identity more the 'belief in the game' grows more, semblance becomes more entrenched. It turns out that these exhibitions are for the benefit of the organizations sense of community. The other students are thus both audience and 'props' in this cultural performance. If they are sympathetic to what H.I.M. presents than this appeases the manifest aim of spreading knowledge and consciousness and if they are critical it only incites H.I.M. members to invest more in semblance.

## 5.6 On the subversive capacity of performance

I have already intimated that I agree that performances have the capacity for critique and subversion but this should not be a priori assumed. In the context of feminist studies McNay argues that many of the research in this area “by eliding symbolic detraditionalization with social detraditionalization, some theories of reflexive transformation overestimate *the significance of the expressive possibilities* available to men and women in late capitalist society” (1999:106 emphasis mine). The same argument can be made for performances or at least H.I.M. exhibitions. While it is true that the boards and the discourses presented at these exhibitions flies in the face of many conventional ideas (symbolic detraditionalization) this does not necessarily make it subversive in any political or material sense. The world or the university, for that matter, was not fundamentally shaken by these exhibitions. I know that stating the point as crudely as this makes it seem absurd but the point remains that the reach of these exhibitions are limited.

One should also be wary of the H.I.M. Society’s ostensibly revolutionary position on especially the issue of race. From its inception the Rastafari movement was committed to a fight against white domination. The movement therefore took it upon itself to combat various injustices emanating from white domination. Their discursive strategy thus took race as a key symbol. In the next chapter I suggest this emphasis on race might not be as liberating for the H.I.M. Society as it appears. Suffice it to say at this point that while H.I.M. use the trope of race to expose injustices they are also interpellated by the racial history of South Africa.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter drew on the notion of performance to make sense of H.I.M. exhibitions. Specific issues of performance I focussed on were intention, unintended consequences, the subversive nature of performance and the nature of performers and audiences themselves. With regards to performers and audiences it was noted that at the exhibitions these categories are fluid. I also suggested that H.I.M. members are themselves their most important audiences. I also intimated that these exhibitions

might not be as subversive as one may think and that the impacts of the exhibitions are limited. Included in this 'critique' of the subversive nature of H.I.M. exhibitions is the contention that these exhibitions also contain the seeds of common strands of racial thinking in South Africa. This is an issue that will be taken up in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 6: Rasta=Black?: Authenticity and its discontents**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter gave some indication of the main current of this chapter. In this chapter I will discuss the issue of authenticity more directly. But every struggle for authenticity is predicated on various symbolic and material issues which are important at a particular place and time. One of the issues that reared its head in H.I.M. Society's struggle for authenticity is that of race. Whether you are liberally or conservatively inclined, race is on the consciousness of every South African. Thus I will firstly give a brief consideration of the life of race in South Africa and assess how this relates to H.I.M. Society's claims of authenticity.

### **6.2 The salience of race in South Africa**

Popularly understood the history of hitherto South African society has been the history of race struggle. Although stern historiography might disagree this is not a very misplaced assessment of the situation. Race has to various degrees held a prominence in most of South Africa's history. But racial and by extension racist attitudes did not come as naturally to South Africans as one would suppose. As European expansion brought white people in contact with people phenotypically different from them the point came where the white people had to justify their exploitation of these others. Since the physical markers were so apparent the white people could point to this. But the trouble was that the emphasis on skin colour (and physical type more broadly) was so arbitrary and Enlightenment ideals dictated that everyone was equal. Here science provided the justification posturing as evidence (Erasmus 2008: 170). It did after all put the stamp of objectivity on attitudes (i.e. racism) that stem from mostly political and economic reasons. This obfuscation of ostensibly objective race science with ideological premises is what Boonzaier (1988) refers to as the race paradigm. This race paradigm gave white South Africans the opportunity to gain political and economic power at the expense of non white South Africans while still placating the white conscience. Does this explain the full seductive sway of racial identification and racism?

From a materialist perspective one could argue that racial identification did coincide with economic and material interest and that white groups from various descents, in South Africa, had to mobilize to ensure hegemony (see Glaser 2001). Erasmus (2008) maintains that in the 1920's race did not have such a salient feature in South Africa (and this is debatable) and that it was mostly used to distinguish between the British and Afrikaner settlers. But in the 1930's (in the wake of the Depression) and the 1940's (with growing industrialization and urbanization) Afrikaner workers became threatened by the cheap black labour force (ibid). In this context it made sense to affirm racial solidarity (Glaser 2001). Race thus became more important to (white) South Africans as the material situation demanded it.

Materialist or instrumentalist thinking do not explain the whole range of racial identification. It might be in some instances appropriate to attribute racial identification to an instrumental logic but we may in the final analysis discover that this phenomenon grew a life of its own. People may identify because they may feel that they share experience or as Glaser puts it "shared histories multiply common points of reference, facilitating gossip, humour and reminiscence" (2001: 149). As intimated here experience is historically defined. Also Apartheid ideology with a good degree of success mapped material circumstances onto racial classification and identification. Thus if two black strangers meet each other chances were that their experiences of Apartheid South Africa coincided, which would in turn foster a racial identification. This may sound like a materialist explanation and it is to a certain extent, but the point is an experiential and thus emotional veracity arises which may not necessarily be reducible to the material source. As Erasmus states:

(A)partheid's race categories created clearly defined places for people in the material and social world and, at the same time, specific ways for people to be in the world. For the most part, people came to see themselves in terms of these categories, thus making them subjectively real. (2008:172).

Here one is also reminded of W.I. Thomas's illuminating words that "if a situation is defined as real it will be real in its consequences" (quoted in Andersen and Taylor

2004). The consequences (racial identification amongst other things) are real up to this day in South Africa.

Another point to emphasize with regards to race in South Africa is that the polity's organizing vocabulary shifted from race to culture, ethnicity or nation (Boonzaier 1988, Erasmus 2008 and Glaser 2001). These terms were for all intents and purposes thinly veiled allusions to race. But the terms do seem to have different symbolic utility for instance, as Mamdani (2001) argues, race united the beneficiaries of Apartheid while ethnicity divided the oppressed (that is black people in South Africa were divided into Xhosas, Zulus etc). Each ethnicity, according to Apartheid logic, had a clearly defined *culture* which for bureaucratic purposes could constitute different nations.

Cut to Post Apartheid South Africa. What is the fate of race in contemporary South Africa? Most social diagnosticians would say that race is still alive and well in South Africa. These diagnosticians, rightly, comment that doing away with the concept of race do not do away with the historical socio-economic inequities of using race as an organizing political principle (Alexander 2001, James and Lever 2001, and Terreblanche 2002).

The economic sphere seems especially recalcitrant to the constitutional and political changes of Post Apartheid South Africa. Alexander (2001) notes that economic power is still in the hands of those who possessed it during the Apartheid era. This does not mean that black people made no material advances after the Apartheid era. But the fact that black people became more upwardly mobile should be celebrated carefully. Progressive laws like The Employment Equity Act benefited only "the aspirant African petit bourgeois who have jobs and are members of trade unions" (Terreblanche 2002:47). The fact remains that the majority of blacks still live in abject poverty. In light of South Africa's economic and political challenges a too hasty expectation of non-racialism is unrealistic (Alexander 2001 and James and Lever 2001).

Since racial category and socio-economic position still largely overlap we still find some deeply entrenched ideas of racial identification. Racism might be publicly

decried but privately it is still prominent (James and Lever 2001:50). Indeed racism seems to have a more insidious existence in Post Apartheid South Africa but every so often it comes up to the public to breathe. The news jumps on these instances with sensationalistic fervour reminding us the everyday citizen that our old companion is still with us. It is also argued that well intentioned policies like Affirmative Action only serves to reinforce the notion of race (ibid). Thus although many well intended South Africans may not be racist in their day to day interaction our consciousness still remain very racial. To reiterate it is important to distinguish between racism (a prejudicial attitude based on a persons skin colour) and racialism (the consciousness where race plays an important role in how we think and interact with other people). Racialism, for our purposes, can be externally orientated like for instance when Coloured and Black people consider Golf to be a white person sport or it can be internally orientated like when black people call other black people, who act 'white', coconuts. All South Africans can thus be said to be interpellated by the South African racialism. Interpellation was a term used by the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser to highlight how ideology 'calls out' to subjects, that is people see the world through their acceptance of the dominant ideology (see Crossley 2005:153). It is with these insights in mind that I now turn to the case of H.I.M. Society.

### **6.3 Who are the real Rastas?**

It was a Friday afternoon; I have just finished my set academic duties for the day and I decided to make a casual visit to the H.I.M. Society. The visit was bound to be casual in nature since to my mind my 'business' with H.I.M. was done and it was all convivial form here. On my way from the Anthropology/Sociology department, and not even half way to the H.I.M. Society I saw Doc approaching. From the distance I gathered that on this day Doc had the amble of someday that was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. When he got to me he greeted me in the usual congenial tone. Brushing aside the usual conversational formalities-because on closer inspection he did appear to have the demeanour of someone who had things on his mind-I immediately asked him if there was anybody at the office. He said that there were a couple of brothers in the office but I might not want to go there then because the



situation at the office was heated, to say the least. What Doc laid on me after this warning made realise that my work might not be done. I still had 'business' to handle.

Doc told me that on the previous Friday there was a raid on the office and substances that would not pass the bar for legality was found on the premises. These substances did not belong to Doc but he nonetheless took the burden of conviction on him. He apparently had to spend the weekend in jail. According to Doc some of the other members did not appreciate his valiant gesture and the situation soon turned to other issues members had with each other. Doc told me that he was accused for various transgressions in the office, which of course he did not go into much detail (later two other members told me some of the allegations made towards Doc but to avoid a sense of sensationalism I will not recount them here). Then Doc told me the thing that was the germ of this chapter. As it happens some of the black members made the statement that Coloureds cannot really be Rastafarians. This is the honour and privilege of the black people. I think it's analytically relevant to state here that Doc is Black. Doc also told me that one of these members also claimed that the materially well off can't pass for real Rastafarians. But according to Doc's knowledge this very person who made this statement came from money. Doc was disturbed as he told me this account. I feigned disgust but was now more interested in H.I.M. Society.

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About two months after that I was taking a constitutional around the university when I bumped into Fernando. He was talking to another brother and greeted me matter-of-factly. I stood out of earshot but their facial expressions seemed to suggest that they were discussing matters of serious purport. After their conversation Fernando abruptly told me that he was on his way to the office to stand up to some of the members in the office. He frantically stated that he and his brother were accused of wanting to take over. Prior engagements precluded me from attending this confrontation but I had a good idea what it was about if Doc's account was anything to go by. My suspicions were confirmed later that same week when I got Gary. He basically told me the same thing Doc told me with regards to the race issue. Apparently the situation became so tense that H.I.M. Society had to call in elders to mediate this issue. But as Gary stated it was 'their elders' suggesting a racial bias. The arguments dwelled into South

African history but according to Gary they conveniently neglected the fact the Khoi-San were the original inhabitants of South Africa.

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About three weeks after this I bumped into Fernando again. He was glad to see me because he had an event that would interest me in my capacity as a researcher. He told me that they organized a talk on the fate of the Khoi-San during lunch time. This was indeed interesting and come lunch time I went to the lecture hall where this talk was to be held. I asked one of my friends to accompany me to SC 3 (i.e. the lecture hall where the talk was held).

When my friend and I arrived at the SC 3 building (15 minutes late) for the talk on the Khoi-San there was a short gentleman addressing the audience. He full-heartedly addressed himself as Khoi (no San) and commented that it was time for 'our people' to find out who we are. This theme of finding out 'who we are' was elaborated on for about five more minutes before he opened up the floor for speakers.

As I looked around the room I was stunned by the low turn out. There couldn't have been more than forty people in attendance. These were mostly comprised of Coloureds and by my count there were about five black students. Eight people were seated in the front row, all of them Rastafari. Four of them were H.I.M. Society members, one a student from another institution, an employee of UWC and two elders. What also caught my attention about the H.I.M members in attendance was that it was only the Coloured members there (to confirm my suspicions I asked my friend after the meeting if she noticed something about the H.I.M. members, she almost immediately replied that it was only the Coloureds).

A woman (Natasha) in her late thirties or early forties came forward to address the audience. She told the audience that she met Fernando (whom I at that moment realised was the organiser of this gathering) while she was fighting for residence on university. Confessing that she did not have any inclinations toward public speaking she decided to open the floor to the audience with a question. She asked 'why are we here, I know why I am sitting here but why are you here?'

Candice replied that we have gaps in our knowledge and platforms like the one they had now is a way of addressing these gaps. Natasha liked this answer and sort of abruptly concluded her oratory by saying “I’m just an ordinary woman living an extraordinary life”

The ‘Khoi speaker’ then went in to a brief speech about the importance of people and especially the Khoi-San people to reclaim their heritage. After this he opened the floor to one of the Rastafari elders.

The elders started by saying that we have gaps in our society and that people are not playing the roles that they are supposed to play. The results are chaos, endemic warfare and famine. Here he made reference to the Middle East. We are living in a state of affairs where there is no respect for human life. Then referring to the Khoi-San people he said that “we are the first nation of God’s creation”. He stated that it was international mother tongue day and that “every nation has a language. Language is important, if language dies it’s an unjust to the earth, earth needs all those knowledge systems to survive”. We as the descendants of the Khoi-San should apparently not despair if we can’t speak the Khoi language because “the language is already inside of you...it’s in your DNA...it is in your bones”.

So we have to “learn to start to embrace Africa”. He also mentioned that a lot of people ask where this Khoi-San issue came from all of a sudden. In response to this question he said that “in the struggle there was no time for this Khoi-San business. It was only Amandla”. But now that we all done with that particular struggle we should embrace our respective roots. In his cosmological scheme of things he said that the universe wants the Khoi-San to emerge because we are all part of it “we are all part of this constellation”

He remarked that “we never worshipped the sun, we respected the sun”. This is because the sun provides us with most of what we need. In spite of the Khoi-San’s position in society “many people come to us for medicine” they want what we have. Then at a quick turn he talked about our appearances “we don’t even have hair we have locks”. This point struck me and my friend as peculiar. Besides the Rastas in the

room nobody sported locks. The peculiarity of this statement was exacerbated since the 'Khoi speaker' standing next to him didn't have locks either.

To instil pride he said that "we used to be called the Gods of Africa...we should be proud of what Africa produced". We were then asked to stand for a prayer. The prayer was not overtly Rastafarian in that he did not refer to Jah but opted for a more generic Lord of Lords.

After the meeting at SC3 I went to the H.I.M. Society to get a feeling of how things would play out. As I entered African chant (drumming) music played at a generously audible level. It also appeared that my 'theory' was confirmed. I saw the two elders and the other gentleman (accompanying them) and three of the H.I.M. members (Gary and Fernando among them) sitting at the table. The first thing that caught my mind was that it was only the Coloured members of H.I.M seated at the table. What exacerbated this racial awareness was that immediately to my right, in the 'computer room' some of the black members of H.I.M were sitting, talking and listening to the music.

I greeted the members in the 'computer room' and then made my way to the table. Fernando was busy discussing something with Candice, who was about to dish up for everyone. Fernando offered me some but I politely declined as I just had lunch. A bit unfortunate too since the curry they served, although without meat, looked and smelled delicious. One of the elders was reasoning with Fernando and another member. To my right of the table the 'accompanying gentleman', Gary and another member were in their own discussion. I also noticed that the sisters for their part were all sitting in the 'middle compartment'. I decided to listen to the elder.

The elder touched on many topics ranging from numerology to the role of universities in the Rastafari cause. One of the fascinating themes that came from this range of topics was the idea that all institutions have some sort of illuminati connection. Sometimes the C.I.A. was specifically linked to an institution but they are also considered part of the illumanti beast. I was also to understand that if you take the name of some or most of the powerful figures in the world and if you use some scheme of numerical analysis (which was not explained) you will come to 666,

the mark of the beast. He specifically mentioned Reagan and also made reference to Nelson Mandela's popular prison number 46664 (I think the implication is clear).

The other elder then spoke about the role of universities. He lamented on the issue that many of the students do not use their education wisely. He stated that they tend to have a very individualistic outlook once they complete their degrees. They only think about their own prosperity and don't think of giving back to the community. He mentioned that the dominant oppressive power structure has a vested interest in universities (echoing Harvey 2005:43-44). This structure makes sure that it produces academics (which of course become the pundits) that will further their agenda. He suggested that we should have a counter academic approach that will challenge these dominant ideas that perpetuates the status quo. Thus students, myself included, had an important moral consciousness to attain to follow this counter academic approach. A sense of insincerity crept up in me as I nodded in agreement to this suggestion. At that moment I told myself that to a certain extent I am the student who will get his degree and then just fend for himself. During the two elders' discussion I also felt a bit concerned about the T-shirt I was wearing. The t-shirt had a bold inscription on it which read 'Lets get drunk and take advantage of me' (again causing trouble). I felt that this might be a bit disrespectful to the elders and to the tone of the discussions. If they noticed it-as I was trying to conceal it as best I can by putting my arms in front of the inscription- they seemed not to be deterred or offended by it as they also addressed me as they were talking.

When I decided to leave I asked Fernando about up and coming events and he told me that the 'accompanying gentleman' had a documentary he wanted to play the coming Friday. The gentleman took out the dvd that was about the history of the Khoi. Gary noticed that on the dvd cover that Khoi was spelt Khoe. The gentleman told them that this spelling was the correct spelling and then proceeded to give everyone a brief lesson on the correct pronunciation of the word. Apparently the K and the H are pronounced together to produce a sound like *kwo* (as in QWERTY). But you had to do it from the core. Gary and Fernando made several attempts at this sound and Fernando was favoured with the correct pronunciation. The *oe* of Khoe should be pronounced like *air*. Everyone at the table was fascinated by this new knowledge bestowed on them.

## 6.4 The pervasive racialism

The few ethnographic extracts that I have just outlined suggest, amongst other things, that race is an issue that cannot easily be abolished even for people who follow an ostensibly enlightened path such as Rastafari. But I would suggest as we start with this analysis that H.I.M.'s racialism has some of its roots in the Rastafari ideology. Rastafarianism historically was movement of the colonized resisting the domination of the oppressor. In more blatant Rastafari language it is the struggle of black against white. Race is arguably the dominant trope in Rastafari discourse. In this regard Rastafari is characterized by an overt racialism. Even in its providential stance the issue of black overpowering white is a main concern (see Breiner 1979, Clarke 1994, Oosthuizen 1989). It is this emphasis on race that made some of the students at the exhibitions, mentioned in the previous chapter; accuse the H.I.M. members of reverse racism. I am not here so much concerned whether the accusations of racism is justified but am focusing more on what it is race does for H.I.M. Society's notions of authentic Rastafarians.

If we recall one of the encounters at the exhibition on the issue of black supremacy it is of course evident that H.I.M. labours the concept of race quite heavily. I have to admit that H.I.M.'s stance on race is at times ambiguous. Doc always stressed that Rastafari was non-racial. You can see where this ethnographer is confused. The fog of confusion is cleared somewhat if we consider H.I.M.'s stance on race in the broader South African context which I outlined above. But considering the issue of black supremacy briefly, I want to suggest that there is nothing especially revolutionary about this stance. In the previous chapter I stated that the exhibitions are not as subversive as it may appear. The simple point I want to make here is that H.I.M. Society's exhibitions and its discourses generally are reproductions of racialism in the broader South African context.

The interesting aspect of H.I.M.'s racialism is that it has the added thrust of the Rastafarian racial ideology. Thus when Doc says they are non-racial, he is in effect saying they are non-racist (or at least against white supremacy) but racially conscious. This particular racial consciousness uses Black as key signifier (Singh 2004). I have

to reiterate that Joseph always made recourse to Steve Biko's statement that blackness was not a matter of pigmentation but a mind state. Whatever credence H.I.M. members might give to this statement the fact remains black has a strong symbolic presence.

In light of the comments made to Gary and Fernando by the black members I first of all contend that these members confuse the order of abstraction when it comes to their racial logic. That is they confuse symbolic race with race as a matter of pigmentation. From this perspective we can begin to understand the black members claim that Coloured people cannot truly be Rastafarian.

Black became what the official H.I.M. Society ideology did not want it to be. As argued above most if not all South African born citizens are interpellated by its racial consciousness. If we accept that at least symbolically Rastafarianism invests race (or more specifically blackness) with a sense of authenticity and that H.I.M. members are called on by South African racialism it is sociologically sensible that the black members could make the claims of Rastafarian authenticity.

## **6.5 The concept of authenticity**

Before we consider the H.I.M. case further it would be prudent to give a conceptualization of authenticity (as it was only briefly mentioned in Chapter 1). To start my discussion of authenticity I think it's worth quoting Lionel Trilling at some length:

“It (authenticity) is a word of ominous import. As we use it in reference to human existence, its provenance is the museum, where persons expert in such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked of them-or, if this has already been paid, worth the admiration they are being given. That the word has become part of the moral slang of our day points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existences” (1972:93)

Trilling refers to authenticity being a concern of objects of art, this is certainly one aspect of it as the anthropology of art and tourism studies would attest to. More



interestingly he suggests that the use of authenticity as part of describing our place in this world points to “our anxiety over the credibility of existence” which makes the issue an urgent matter. We all want to be our true selves but we are also concerned about the realness and trueness of the groups that we belong to and invest so much in. Authenticity, however, is not easily asserted especially in the field of cultural identity.

Charles Lindholm (2002) has observed that classic anthropologists had romantic and idealized notions of material products of distant cultures. These products were seen as authentic and valuable because they were considered untarnished by external contact. But as ethnographers began to realize the contingent nature of social reality all such unproblematic notions of authenticity were set aside by them. Anthropologists have instead opted to focus on the political and ideological dimensions of authenticity. The problematic nature of authenticity are not so easily set aside by lay people as “the stain of maintaining a crumbling foundation can (also) result in defensive fanaticism and xenophobia, punishing others for the doubts that are felt deep within” (ibid:335). This crumbling foundation also speaks to the fragile nature of semblance.

What we find ourselves in then are struggles for authenticity. These struggles can take various forms and emerge from various motivations. The struggle for authenticity can for instance revolve around something as mundane as food as was the case with salami in the Italian city of Bergamo (Cavanaugh 2007). In that situation the production of value (both symbolic and economic) of salami was caught in a contradiction between it being an authentic local product and a product with national prestige which means becoming standardized. Some of the actors in this field of value production and authenticity argued that authenticity can only be achieved through norms of production and adherence to the market which will bring it prestige. Others felt that authenticity can only be maintained if the salami is locally produced and linked with social networks (ibid).

Authenticity gains a particular salience in contexts where multiculturalism is a major political organizing principle (here South Africa and UWC are good examples). I contend that authenticity is ultimately predicated on difference. This difference plays a particular role in the production of value of cultural forms and commodities (Green 2007, Joseph 2008). The process of producing value also deploys specific features to

elevate the status of a cultural form or commodity's authenticity. For instance Joseph (2008), in her study of capoeira (a Brazilian martial art) instructors in Canada, shows how a Jamaican Canadian instructor, who is often mistaken as a Brazilian instructor, capitalizes on his blackness to gain authenticity in this cultural form. We would, however, be remiss if we do not remember that cultures are not bounded and that in multicultural contexts people (according to trends and politics) draw on different cultural sources. The problem for the authentication process is that cultural forms are circulated far from their original symbolic space. In the case of Rastafarianism, Price (2003) notes that the wide circulation and trendiness of Rastafarian symbols (such as the colours of the Ethiopian nation and dreadlocks) make it difficult to distinguish between who is a 'real' rasta and who is a 'fake' one.

Moving beyond the basic constructionist position on authenticity which views staged culture as inauthentic and 'everyday' culture as real (see Condevaux 2009) I would like to point out that authenticity is not given but negotiated and struggled for by various social actors with different interests (Bailey 1996). The actors occupy various positions with different degrees of power so it becomes a matter of whose definition of the situation becomes more viable. Recognition thus becomes an important aspect of authenticity.

## **6.6 Contested authenticity**

The racialism described above of course creates rifts in H.I.M. Society's notion of authentic Rastafarianism. Even though I suggest throughout the thesis (at least from Chapter 4 onwards) that race has a significant role in H.I.M.'s worldview I have to say that the antagonistic nature that their racialism took surprised me. I never saw one instance that would suggest to me that the black members would hold certain opinions of the Coloured members. It points to what I stated earlier that race in South Africa lives a more insidious existence (see also Sharp 1998). My ignorance and obliviousness aside according to Doc and Fernando (and to a lesser extent Candice) this issue has been looming there from the early stages of my research.

It is difficult to ascertain why this racialism became more visible at the time that it did. Another question to consider is why if this racialism has been there for some time did those who were not eligible for authentic Rastafarianism (i.e. the Coloured members) did not take their leave from the organization? In conversations with Gary and Fernando I was told that they considered the racialism initially as merely isolated incidents and later as minor obstacles to the truer purposes to which Rastafari was moving (Candice gave a similar providential logic when I asked her about the racialism in the organization). Interestingly in an interview with Fernando he told me that one of the members also assured him that Coloured people were not predisposed to the spirituality needed to grow in Rastafari. Whatever the deciding factors were Gary and Fernando (along with another brother) left the H.I.M. Society. They are still committed to Rastafari and now also pursue spiritual upliftment through Khoi-San history and identity.

With regards to authenticity we are first of all faced with a clash of primordialisms here. These primordialisms are forces to be reckoned with and as Sharp states that “the strength of primordial identities, of common race or culture, lies in the sense of a moral community, untouched by the vagaries of time and daily circumstances” (1998:249). In the H.I.M. Society case there is a black primordialism with regards to being Rastafari and as a result of this also a (counter?) Khoi-San primordialism. Gary and Fernando’s emphasis on Khoi-San identity is related to the broader Khoi-San revivalism in South Africa (see Besten 2009, 2011). In my view the moral community which Sharp mentions dictates what subjects *ought to be* if they claim to be part of this community. For some members in H.I.M. Society what you *ought to be* is black if you want to legitimately form part of the Rastafari community.

The interesting thing about the Khoi-San primordialism is that it is not seen as an explicit negation of the black primordialist claim on Rastafari. At best it can be seen as an amendment to it. The Rastafari elder’s speech at the meeting suggest some of this. The Khoi-San is said to be the ‘first nation of God’s creation’ which by definition makes us all part of this nation. What is also at stake here is the reclaiming of Africa since these first peoples were called the Gods of Africa. This is certainly a divergence from the common discursive strategy in South Africa which equates the term African with black. Africa in the elder’s cosmology is thus disentangled with its

automatic association with black. This discursive strategy should in theory be a remedy to the pervasive racialism not just in claims to Rastafarian authenticity as exemplified by H.I.M. but to most identity politics in South Africa.

As stated earlier recognition plays an important part in authenticity. Here I would like to distinguish between two sorts of recognition; recognition for credibility and recognition for distinction. Both have a role in constructing and validating authenticity but they do so different ways. The recognition for credibility is directly linked to semblance. That is the community we form part of should be endowed with an unquestioning truth. The recognition for distinction means that an identity or a community needs to be set apart from others. As I said earlier authenticity is ultimately predicated on difference. This predication on difference does not just demarcated outsiders from insider but can also create internal fissures. This can lead to contradictions. The Rastafari elder's speech indeed conflates an inclusionary cosmology with an exclusionary politics and primordialism.

Authenticity in the H.I.M. Society case becomes a veritable field of confusion. This does not bode well for semblance. The crumbling foundation needs to be defended. But how do you defend it? Race as a key signifier in Rastafari ideology has the dual effect of binding and separating this group of students I have been hanging out with. The bemoaning of a white Jesus and the cries for black supremacy which were made at the H.I.M. exhibitions speaks to the mental and spiritual liberation of the oppressed (i.e. black people). But in being interpellated by the racial consciousness of South Africa (it could thus be said that they using the masters' tools) the H.I.M. members obfuscated the goals of their movement, if only in brief moment of madness. If as I argued in the previous chapter that the exhibitions are important to semblance than I would also here suggest that these exhibitions veils the contradictions in authenticity. Especially the racial overtones these contradictions contain.

## 6.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored the complications, claims to authenticity can run in to. With regards to the H.I.M. Society race was the issue that complicated matters of authenticity. It was especially a clash between two primordialisms that caused contradictions in H.I.M.'s notions of authenticity.



## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

In this thesis I was concerned with how groups produce an authentic sense of themselves. I was also concerned what is at stake when groups make these claims to authenticity. I pursued these general questions with specific ethnographic focus on the Rastafarian student organization at UWC, the H.I.M. Society. It is my contention that some of the claims (or resources used) to authenticity, while working to create a sense of identity for the H.I.M. Society, can also at different points create divisions within the group.

With regards to the creation of a group identity I relied on a battery of concepts. Amongst the concepts that came to my aid were aesthetic formations, style and mediation (following Birgit Meyer) and semblance. I discussed how, through dress code, documentary screening and pictures H.I.M. Society attempts to create a credible image of who they are. This credible image is what I called semblance. Because semblance is so fragile the investment in dress code, the documentary screenings and pictures becomes more pressing.

In Chapter 5 I tried to show what is at stake when H.I.M. expresses their worldview to the rest of the campus. Because I was here dealing with exhibitions that H.I.M. held around campus, I found it useful to employ the concept of performance. I argued that in the final analysis these performances were not so much directed at an outside audience (although these have their importance) but at the H.I.M members themselves. These exhibitions/performances were ultimately a means for H.I.M. Society to re-affirm their worldview. I also suggested that the apparent subversive nature of these exhibitions (and Rastafarian ideology or at least H.I.M.'s articulation of it) can actually be viewed as specific reflection of the broader South African racial consciousness.

In Chapter 6 I argued that the racial aspect of the Rastafari ideology, along with the interpellation of the South African racial consciousness, resulted in an ambivalent attitude towards race amongst H.I.M. members. Blackness as a key signifier in the Rastafari ethos of black pride (and black supremacy) became problematic in the

rhetoric of the black members of H.I.M Society. This led to the contention held by aforementioned members that Coloured members cannot be true Rastafarians. Consequently two of the Coloured members left the organization and pursued an affirmation of Rastafarianism through a Khoi-San identity. I thus argued that this can be seen as a clash between two (ethnic/racial) primordialisms claiming authentic Rastafarianism. Because of its particularistic or exclusionary nature these primordialisms create contradictions in H.I.M.'s notions of Rastafarian authenticity. One the one hand H.I.M. members say that Rastafari is non-racial (meaning it is open to everyone) but on the other hand the emerging primordialisms speak to authentic membership of a select few (meaning that anyone can join the Rastafari movement but not anyone can become a true Rastafarian).

In relation to the ethnographic material I have also attempted make a few general (theoretical) statements about identity and authenticity. As analytical protocol goes I have to state that these two concepts are linked but can be separated for theoretical purposes. Identity is a concept that easily lends itself to essentialism, especially in non-academic discourse (i.e. from everyday talk to political rhetoric). This thesis followed the basic constructionist proposition that identities are not given they are made. They are made for particular purposes. This last statement gives a nod towards instrumentalist thinking in social analysis. My view of identity moves beyond instrumentalist logic firstly because of the case study I dealt with. The H.I.M. Society's making of identity had no explicit material or political aims. Theoretically instrumentalist logic does not explain why people stay attached to identities even though material and political aims are not met (or even considered).

I propose the answer to this question lies in what I call semblance. Identities if it is to be considered more than superficial, needs to be geared towards semblance. Semblance as I explained it is what gives truth and meaning to our identities. Without semblance we would have to face the inconvenient truth that our identities are arbitrary and contingent. This realization would make social life (as understood by social analysts) near impossible. I have to emphasize again that semblance is not about reproducing the same social logic or identities over and over again. It is rather a veil or denial of the inevitable changes our identities go through.



What was said about semblance explains why claims to authenticity are so prominent and potent. In South Africa the search for authenticity can be explained by the Rainbow nation rhetoric. This rhetoric asks us to respect and appreciate our diversity. Implied in this is the question how are we different, what makes 'us' so different from 'them'...as I said authenticity is predicated on difference. Another important point to make about authenticity is that even though it speaks to the veracity of the groups we belong to, it is not unquestioningly accepted. Chapter 6 attests to this point. On a more theoretical note authenticity is not just about the veracity of an identity or group but what particular people in a group consider to be authentic. The basic sociological assumption is that people in different positions and with different interests (or motivations) will make often competing claims about authenticity.

Chapter 6 also made a few statements about the life of race in South Africa. As my ethnographic material shows, this is not an issue that can be wished away by well meaning politicians or liberal minded citizens. Race is in your face. Where ever you turn in this country race may not always be the most salient feature but it is lurking waiting to be deployed. When it is deployed the knee jerk reaction is to call out racism (where people play the infamous race card). The suggestion I am making is that more often than not this should more aptly be called racialism.

Theoretically I explained this racialism by means of Althusser's concept of interpellation (if this seems reductionist to some I can only say that my views are open to interpretation). The point I am trying to make by way of this concept is that all South Africans have a racial consciousness but that does not automatically make all South Africans racist. My other aim in making these claims is to collapse the naïve dichotomy between being racist and being 'colour-blind' (a popular term in South Africans lexicon to denote that they don't see race they only see people). While racism is problematic for obvious reasons, colour-blindness is sociologically naïve. I would even venture to say that those who claim to be colour blind are the ones for whom the racial consciousness causes a great deal of anxiety.

Whatever else this thesis claims to say I would finally suggest that race instead of being treated like the symbolic bastard child of South Africa needs to be considered as a key symbol for how people affirm their diversity (in accordance with the Rainbow

nation rhetoric). Social analysts should also realise that when people appropriate this symbol they do not always do so unproblematically but they do so in ways which creates ontological insecurities, as the case of H.I.M. Society illustrates.



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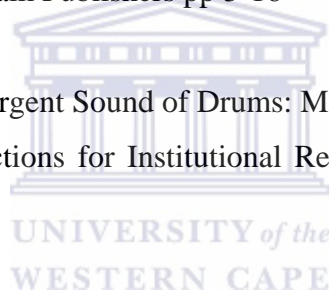
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