

Shamara Wyllie Alhassan - Balanced Livity.mp3

Singing and drumming [00:00:17]

Singing and drumming[00:00:35]

Speaker 1: Dr. Imani Tafari-Ama [00:00:42] Rastafari is the concept that helped me to articulate the ways in which we were still internalizing oppressions in spite of being emancipated, in spite of being independent. And also, you know, the notion that you could have a cultural livity - a way of life – that could inform not only what you think about spiritually, but could also facilitate an everyday experience. So how you eat, how you relate to people – your entire lifestyle could be a statement of that alternative discourse, that alternative paradigm for defining who we are.

Speaker 2: Dr. Desta Meghoo [00:01:30,00:01:47,00:01:54, 00:04:09, 00:04:14] Africa is the future of Rastafari. Jamaica, what we went through in the Bronx, in Brooklyn, in Miami, Barbados, Brixton, wherever, that served a purpose –the activation. But now it gone wide. And here now is the other part of the puzzle, the other component – Africa. We called ourselves Africans in the 60s and 70s, even 80s. Now, I hear Rasta calling themselves Jamaican. Yeah, you born in Jamaica. I born in Jamaica. I know where I'm born. I know what my birth certificate say. But just because a kitten is born in an oven is he a biscuit is what Malcolm X said. Now, we who have come home, we have to make a choice at some point, whether we truly want to be integrated or if we're coming home again as a clique to go back to Kingston 10 or go back to 10466 zip code, or... you know. And that, I think, is a mistake. My, my mother mother, mother mother was taken away brutally from these shores through a door called the Door of No Return and how them lie, I have returned and I am a Ghana citizen. I have returned. We have returned, and we're here to stay. So, now, if reintegration is what we're about and even freeing up the borders because that's the other issue. Yes. We want to make sure that if you have a Jamaican passport or Trinidadian passport you coming home, you can free up. But I also want to make sure that a Kenyan can come to Ghana and a Ghana can go to Ethiopia without having these barriers –when you're going through the border and you see a Brit and a US passport and them free up... So these are the kinds of things that we can be addressing because it's one for all and all for one. Can't come home and keep it in a island state of mind. That's not what our elders fought for. That's not what our elders were thrown in prison and in insane asylums for. That's not what our ancients were beaten for when you look at Carol Gardens Incident. That is not what they went through so that we can come and isolate – it was Black man redemption. Bald head Black man, it don't matter-- Black man come out of her and come home. So this is a bigger calling and maybe not everyone is up to it, because everyone have a calling. But I can only tell you what Jah and my ancients have groomed me, seasoned me, prepared me to do. And if you have tools, you have to use them. Emperor Haile Selassie, after the establishment of the OAU, asked that August body in 1963: "Now that we are finished the job, what shall we do with the tools?" You still have the tools? I say sharpen them. I say re-engineer them, re-tool.

Speaker 3: Empress Imara Solwasi [00:05:06] You have more of a strategic advantage by application than by theory. And the theory part has been exaggerated and overcomplicated and male dominated and not actually implemented to evidence on a larger scale what we can do if we are at least consistent. There are so many short term goals that we still have to gather our wits and gather our resources and start them in a development process, even if they stop, they can still start. But we still have so many starting gates that we need to come out of, and there's enough left on the table in

development for everyone to come on board that claim that they are among the spiritual family of Rastafari and they hold the banner of His and Her Majesty up high, and that comes with action.

Speaker 4: Mama Ijahnya Christian [00:06:20,00:06:24,00:06:25,00:06:45,00:06:46,00:06:57,00:06:58,00:07:18, 00:07:20] For a long time, even Inl as a nation celebrated only the coronation of His Majesty. The sisters are very much aware, Proverbs 8 is one of our favorite passages of history. But there is this misconception that has taken deep strong root that somehow righteousness is a male preserve. I will not say anything more except that as sistren, as Rastafari women, knowing what it is to occupy that throne next to the I-majesty, and to have that crown placed on our head with the same rights and so on, but with different qualities. We know, but there is a gap in the conversation between us and our bredren about who we really are. Bredren, November 2, 1930 must challenge you to understand who, the sistren in your lives, the women, the mothers, the Empresses in your lives, really are. Iverstand. We know. We want you to know so that that throne -- when it becomes the throne of a mighty black nation. We cannot do it on half the fuel. Rastafari.

Speaker 3: Empress Imara Solwasi [00:07:41,00:08:47,00:08:48] To stand in defense of things that are not generally culturally and societally accepted, and to also go against the trends and grains and norms of not just a continental framework and stereotype --the boxes and compartments that we find that we put our religious and spiritual and color and gender boxes together—to have so many subsets of that and know that we're still supposed to emerge victorious—It, you would think that we have put so many impediments in front of us that it seems illogical, if not crazy, to think that there is any level of success at the end of it. And so, that's kind of hard to defeat naysayers. They'll always be able to come up and challenge every single solitary thing that you say and put words in your mouth and contradictions into what it is you espouse --and then some people live in the contradiction of it. So they create the patterns of people chopping us down and saying so many things that we are not.

Speaker 1: Dr. Imani Tafari-Ama [00:09:25] What Rastafari did for me was to also shift the paradigm of religion that came as an early socializing influence, because as somebody who grew up in the Seventh Day Adventist Church, you know, I'd always had a deep regard for things religious. But again, very early from age ten, eleven, twelve, I was questioning how it is that we have this white God, if we're supposed to be created in the image of God. I was very uncertain about that contradiction and Rastafari without apology by claiming Haile Selassie as God in our time, in our color, in our own reference to say not only do we have a Black King, but a Black Queen representing King Alpha or Queen Omega so I could then internalize the notion of my own divinity.

Speaker 5: Dr. Shamara Wyllie Alhassan[00:10:27] How did you begin to trod the path of Rastafari?

Speaker 6: Empress Yaa Kwabea: Oh back in 1995. My brother was a Rastafarian, my small brother. And he started introducing me to the teachings like different books and things and because I was an investigator and like to investigate things, I literally started investigating His Majesty and Empress Menen and Marcus Garvey, and I really took to Marcus Garvey more than anything. Come home to Africa. Repatriation. Look to the East for a Black God. And so that's what really sparked my curiosity because I'd never heard anything about Black God before. We, ourselves looked at as God. God is in flesh. It really intrigued me to find out that it was people actually worshiping a man from Africa actually as God. It was the message of go home, that America wasn't my home, that I was raped and

brutalized there, and that there is a place where black people could come and we could feel free.

Speaker 2: Dr. Desta Meghoo [00:11:35] The essence of the Rastafari movement: liberation, redemption, repatriation, and we certainly add reparations. And these are to be viewed, not just in a spiritual dimension or physical, but economic, cultural, social, political in many, many ways within the context of Black supremacy. And I say Black supremacy without any apology. This is not about racism and hierarchy. This about a natural development of civilization. It started right here on the continent and so flowing out of the continent is where we speak of supreme, something that is supreme, something that is the original.

Speaker 1: Dr. Imani Tafari-Ama [00:12:20] It is in attending Rastafari meetings and seeing the importance that Rastafari actually placed on Marcus Garvey as a prophet, as a philosopher, as someone who was very present, very advanced in his recognition, very early in life about the contradictions that prevailed in the society between the thought of Europe and the thought of Africa. And he was my inspiration in that discovery of how it is that we can re-invent ourselves in spite of the obstacles that we find ourselves beset with and create an alternative vision of how it is that we are placed in the society and how we actually can affect that placement. And when I read statements that he had made about where is the Black person's God, where is our continent? Where is our way of developing our own economics and advancing for our own liberation? And the notion that he also suggested about our self confidence that we had been so systematically disenfranchised as a people for so many centuries. And Marcus Garvey, to my mind, was the most inspirational leader when he said, "if you have no confidence in self, you are twice defeated in this race of life." So with confidence you have won even before you have started. Again, he, Marcus Garvey awakened in me the awareness that we should not be content with being described in an adjectival way as black people, but in a subjective manner to name ourselves as African without apology. The ways in which other races, even here in Jamaica got to be named without even a second guessing of that naming. So the Chinese and the Indians are named without apology. But we sometimes tiptoe and hesitate about being called African in that assertive manner. And Marcus Garvey was my inspiration even before I became a part of the Rastafari movement to say how we can create a sense of resistance by harnessing this discourse of race. And him being-- for me--the ultimate race man and him also being very gender aware because he involved women so actively in the struggle for black liberation. That, to me was the quintessential moment of epiphany in recognizing that we have agency and we can exercise it and have the confidence to do so without apology, in spite of the fact that to this day, the systems, the institutions of oppression have persisted. But as Frederick Douglass also said, power doesn't give up without this struggle.

Speaker 6: Empress Yaa Kwabea [00:15:34] I am not American living in Africa. I am an African. I have taken and adopted this lifestyle to the point where I call myself Yaa Mensah at this point. I didn't change my name at first because I was like at that point I didn't know anything about Africa. I knew that is where I belong, but I had to learn how to live here. A lot of people are not willing to do that. They feel as though because they're from Jamaica and, you know, Caribbean and they've been around trees and ate plantain and all that that they know the lifestyle. But no, this is a whole different, completely different lifestyle. You have to really know how to take it on and live it.

Speaker 3: Empress Imara Solwasi [00:16:09] Repatriation is a continual process because it also involves integration into wherever you are calling yourself landing or

anchoring or visiting or understanding. It's also a part of knowing more about yourself so you're able to find your way with all of the challenges of understanding where you are and how things are done differently, better, more efficient, and sometimes more on a challenging level. So it just doesn't stop by the landing.

Speaker 6: Empress Yaa Kwabea [00:16:54] Our ancestors are the reason that we are here. Their persistence, their longevity. It is only through the spirit that --they have come this-- that I am sitting here right now. It is because of spirit. If it wasn't for my ancestors, I wouldn't have that spirit to even come here. I've been through a lot here, you understand what I am saying, but I'm still standing strong and I'm still here almost twenty years later.

Speaker 1: Dr. Imani Tafari-Ama [00:17:14] When you're on a spiritual journey for regaining a sense of who you are and how you're connected with a land that happened to be there before, many other places were civilized in the world, and to me that was more profound than anything else. So, also to experience the physical geopolitics of space, you know, the larger spaces that you experience in Africa, the wider vistas, the ways in which persons on an everyday basis speak multiple languages, which forced me to have to go and learn at least Swahili. We haven't begun to develop our intellectual capabilities because if the average child speaks three languages, what memory you must have to develop in order to be able to encompass those language characteristics. You know, the M last verb, the what? And they do it so effortlessly. So we I recognize how we have been smallled up into a corner by this migratory-- forced migration experience and the ways in which we could enlarge our vista, enlarge our memory, enlarge our future vision of how it is that we could not only contribute to our own development here in the Caribbean, but how the networking could be possible, because I was able to make that journey because of networking with a number of persons on the continent. And so that vision that Marcus Garvey had of closing the gaps between Africa, the continent and Africa, the diaspora is what was made very clear to me in making that journey. And now when I think about Africa, it is not just a physical space. It is a metaphysical preoccupation so that we can actually translate ourselves into that African identity without having made the physical journey. But more so when you have the opportunity to make that physical journey, how much more profound your existence can be when you realize I can relate to an existence that pre-dated that horror, the pain of that separation and that enslavement process, which was not the start of our history. So for me, it was that, and Rastafari come and other experiences has opened up a whole new vista of epistemology and ontology. That to me, should be our everyday experience right now.