

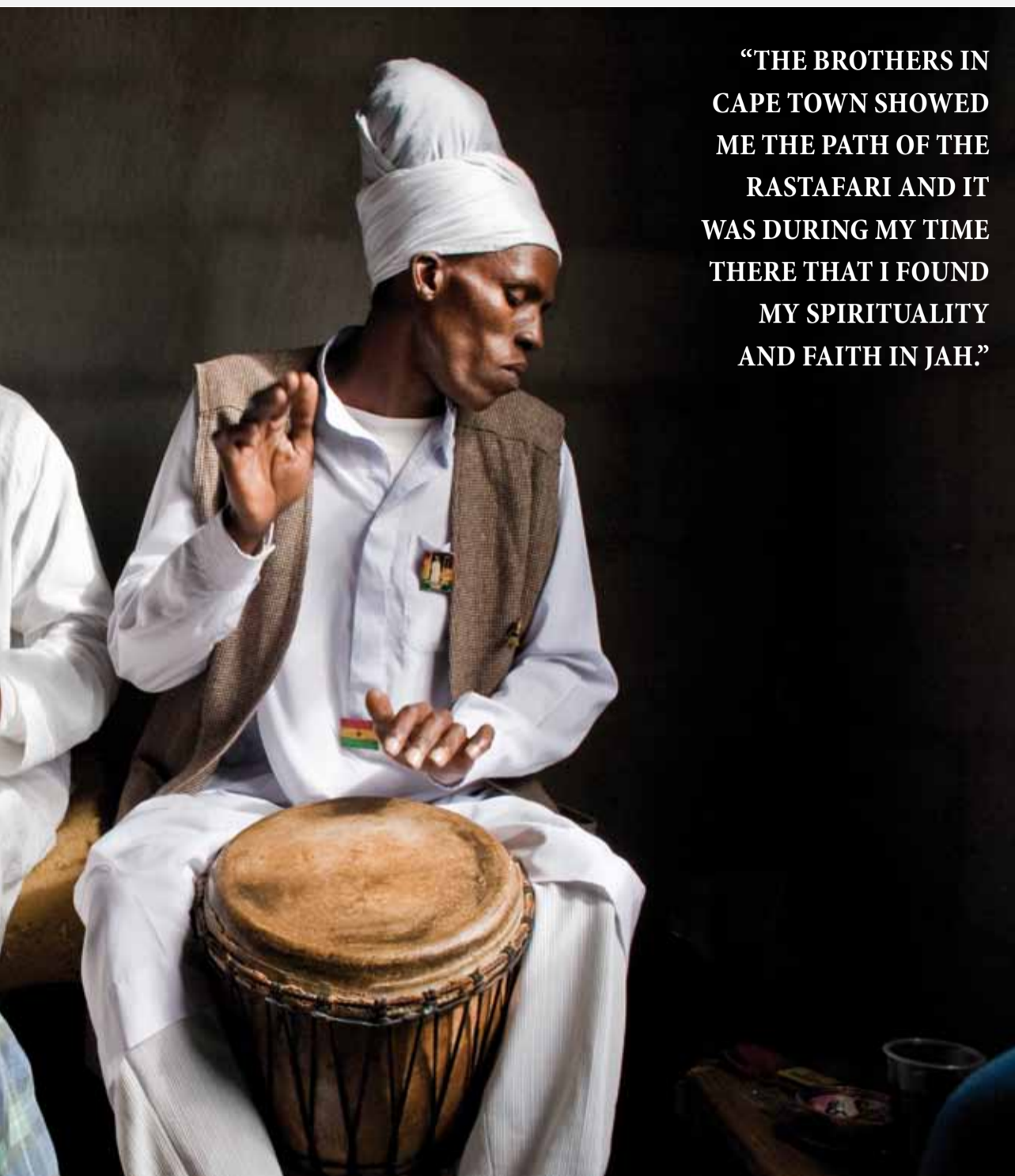
BUT IF I WERE A MARTYR IN SEARCH OF NIRVANA
I'D RATHER CONSULT MY HIGHNESS (JAH)
THAN THE GREAT GHOST OF YOUR HIGH,
YOUR UNJUST KING IN THE SKY

It was beneath the majestic mountains of the Mother City that Mtutuzeli William Mboto was born into Rastafari under the name of Joseph. "I used to smoke ganja when I was still in high school but that was when I used to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes. You know, I liked to party. Before, I had abused the ganja but after I found Rastafari I realised that it opens your mind and clears your consciousness and also makes one peaceful. It is not like the alcohol or drugs that cloud your sight.



This photo essay was produced as part of the third-year photojournalism curriculum run by Jenny Gordon at the School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University.

“THE BROTHERS IN
CAPE TOWN SHOWED
ME THE PATH OF THE
RASTAFARI AND IT
WAS DURING MY TIME
THERE THAT I FOUND
MY SPIRITUALITY
AND FAITH IN JAH.”



JOSEPH IS FREE HE BEARS THE NAME OF THE SPIRIT HE WAS REBORN INTO

He is free because he bears the name of the spirit under which he was reborn into Rastafari – Joseph, during the month of February. He is also sometimes referred to as Jah Manasseh by his Rastafari brothers. He tells me that under his isiXhosa birth name, he cannot be free because it comes weighted with too many earthly burdens. He believes that to be truly free, one must not live as a subject to the confines of the systems which man has built so superficially. As such, he does not vote for any other man to wield power over him or participate in politics in any way, he is a being sovereign over himself.

“The only time I voted was in 1994 for Nelson Mandela because it was the first time black people were able to do so. Normally, the Rastafari do not take part in politics because we believe we as people are not subject to the jurisdiction of man. Jah is the supreme authority.”





JOSEPH IS FREE HE WORKS FOR NO OTHER MAN

Joseph makes shoes and bags and various other things out of leather. His shoes in particular are individually crafted works of art, he makes both his own designs as well as custom jobs for people on request. He also does shoe repairs for members of his community. He sells his products at the National Arts Festival every year but says that this year he will not be having a stall. "I want to walk around with all my merchandise hanging from my body so that I can just move between places and sell things. It is too expensive to have a stall; I don't think it's worth paying all the money," he says. He also spends many hours collecting herbs and plants in the mountains and plains that surround Grahamstown. He has an extensive knowledge of the local fauna and flora and knows the plants which can be used for different medicinal and healing purposes. "Mountain potato is good for the skin and for back problems," he says holding a dark brown tuber, fresh from the fertile soil of the Eastern Cape.