Spiritual hair: dreadlocks and the bodies multiple in Rastafari

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Abstract

In anthropology the body is theorized, manifested and experienced in multiple ways that impact medical practice, social life, biopolitics, and spirituality. This paper considers the role of 'dreadlocks' (matted hair) in the Rastafari spiritual body and, guided by the 'body multiple' concept, explores how the symbolic and performative nature of hair articulates with age and gender. Ethnographic data from the UK suggest the ways dreadlocks are groomed and/or covered vary widely, revealing diversity and changing meanings attributed to matted hair. By focusing on the spiritual aspects of hair our work shows that dreadlocks and baldness are outward (visible) and inward (hidden) manifestations of a covenant with *Jah* (the Creator), rather than contrasting social or psychological statements. The hair symbolism debate in anthropology reveals limitations of universalist and reductionist approaches to understanding the human body. Our Rastafari material suggests the body multiple provides a better framework for interpreting (African inspired) spiritual hair.

Key Words: African diaspora, embodiment, spiritual body, body multiple, hair symbolism

Introduction

In anthropology and other social sciences, the body is theorized, manifested and experienced in multiple ways that impact medical practice (Mol 2002), social life, biopolitics (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987), etc. Building on Mary Douglas' (1970) distinction between the individual and social bodies, Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) propose a way of approaching the body as both naturally and culturally produced, by conceptualising it as

'three bodies.' The individual body is understood in a phenomenological sense. However, the idea of a highly individuated self appears to be uniquely 'Western' and in many societies the individual is fused with the social body, i.e. the use of the body as a symbol to think about nature, society and culture. The body politic refers to regulation, surveillance and control of bodies. Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) also describe the mindful body as the overlap of the other three bodies (individual, social and political). In contrast to the multiple bodies defined by Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), Mol's (2002) concept of the 'body multiple' shows us how bodily phenomena (in this case atherosclerosis) are manifest and enacted in manifold ways in a hospital setting. Such a perspective challenges the assumption that biomedicine is reductive, as it involves patients coming to know their bodies as they are affected by cells, organs, microbes, etc. (Latour 2004). Work on the body multiple has also applied the concept to obesity, which is constantly enacted and reconstituted outside (as well as within) the medical context (Throsby 2012).

This paper aims to both add to the multiple bodies proposed by Douglas, Scheper-Hughes and Lock, etc. and test the applicability of the 'body multiple' beyond the realm of disease, by addressing a long-standing anthropological debate on hair symbolism. Specifically, we explore hair as part of the 'spiritual body,' which MacPhee (2003: 57) defines as an embodied state of heightened sensory awareness. By interrogating the role of 'dreadlocks' (matted hair) in the Rastafari spiritual body, we seek to understand how the symbolic and performative nature of hair articulates with issues of age and gender. Ethnographic data from the UK suggest that growing dreadlocks is an important, although not necessarily essential, Rastafari spiritual practice. However, dreadlocks can be enacted in multiple ways, revealing diversity within Rastafari cosmologies, as well as changing understandings of and meanings attributed to matted hair. More broadly, the hair symbolism debate in anthropology reveals the limitations of universalist and reductionist

approaches to understanding the human body. Our Rastafari material suggests a concept of spirituality that proliferates and unites multiple dimensions of somatic experience.

There is an historic association between hair and sexuality in anthropology. For example, based on ethnographic evidence from India and Sri Lanka Leach (1958: 156) equated long hair, short hair, matted hair and shaven heads with unrestrained sexuality, restrained sexuality, neglected sexuality and celibacy, respectively. Similarly, Hershman (1974) shows how the sexual power of Sikh men lies in their uncut hair, which is a phallic symbol kept in check with the comb and turban. Thus, while Sadhus wear their long hair matted, symbolizing the divine power that is retained by avoiding sex, Hershman concluded that the long, combed hair worn by Sikhs is associated with a latent spiritual power, more appropriate for temporal lives. However, citing examples from the Bible, in which hairiness is associated with physical strength and spiritual power, Hallpike (1969) challenges the conclusions drawn from the South Asian material. He argued that as a personal symbol, long (and matted) hair may signify being outside and/or rejecting mainstream society, rather than unrestrained (or neglected) sexuality. That is, long and short hair represent being outside and inside society, and hair cutting/shaving is symbolic of social control and discipline, not castration.

The foundation of Leach's (1958: 160) argument is psychoanalytic theory, which led him to conclude that the association between head hair and (male) genitalia is universal and that it is a private symbol with no cultural significance. In contrast, Obeyesekere (1981) suggests that hair is symbolic on both cultural and psychological levels at the same time. His work attempts to reconcile the argument that hair is symbolic of unconscious sexual drives with evidence that symbolism is about the world, not the subconscious (c.f. Hallpike 1969). Work on female hairstyles in Samoa suggests that sexuality and social control are linked, in this case as reflected in the hair of young girls. Before contact with Europeans, unmarried

Samoan girls wore their heads shaved, apart from one long, bleached tuft of hair. This reflected a sexuality that was free and circumscribed at the same time. Since contact Samoan girls have grown long hair that is generally bound in a bun and those who choose to wear their hair down are using a public symbol to express unconventionality (Mageo 1994).

Likewise, Chevannes (1989: 116), describes the adoption of dreadlocks by the Rastafari movement in the 1950s as a complete break with mainstream Jamaican society. However, he also considers dreadlocks to be a phallic symbol of total male hegemony (at this time independent women disappeared from Rastafari public life). Perhaps because of its association with asceticism and exotic religious practices, matted hair in particular is generally invested with great symbolic power. In fact, the inspiration of Obeyesekere's now classic 1981 treatise was an emotional reaction to seeing a woman with matted hair in ecstatic trance. While Obeyesekere interpreted his reaction as a primal castration fear associated with Medusa (and suggested that matted hair is symbolic of snakes as well as genitalia) he acknowledged that such symbols can also have meaning on a conscious personal level. Sometimes this is related to sexual reproduction, i.e. matted hair is a symbol of fertility and well-being to women who 'marry' the goddess Yellama in South India (Ramberg 2009). However, matted hair as a conscious, personal symbol may have completely other meanings. For example, to the *Ngakpa*, a class of non-celibate Tibetan Buddhist monk, their long, matted hair symbolizes naturalness and the uncontrived mind (Bogin 2008: 101). Moreover, although Chevannes (1989) focused on the sexual and social symbolism of Rastafari 'dreadlocks,' they can also communicate the divine self to others (Frank 2007: 56) and be symbolic of natural, healthy living (Montlouis 2013: 128), as well as rebellion.

Because the cultivation of consciousness is fundamental to the spiritual practice, Rastafari people strive to be mindful of and masterful over psychological drives and

emotions, regardless of their hairstyle or cultural background. Thus, in our exploration of Rastafari hair as a spiritual (rather than magical, religious or social) entity we focus on dreadlocks (and other hairstyles) as a conscious, personal symbol rather than on any underlying psychoanalytic meanings. Olivelle (1998: 12) theorises hair symbolism as having a grammar (as in language) that can change as different individuals put it to use. That is, while individuals can't give hair entirely new symbolic values from their own subjective consciousness and still be able to communicate with the rest of society, such individual uses will change the grammar of a symbol over time. We propose that the spiritual body and the multiple enactments of dreadlocks that it gives rise to are important influences on the grammar of Rastafari hair symbolism. We use a Rastafari inspired definition of 'spiritual,' which refers to phenomena that fall outside/across both religion and secular science. This definition resonates with that of Bubandt and van Beek (2012: 9), who describe the spiritual as other worldly events, practices and concepts that are not contained easily in the categories of either religion or secular politics. In the UK, Rastafari spirituality is a non-secular science in which the body is an important spiritual tool that allows the self to shape the world (Waldstein 2016: 83) by multiplying and bringing together various dimensions of bodily experience.

In African ontologies, spirit may be the same as nature/matter. For example, Morris (1998) maintains that Malawian thought is not spiritual or mystical but instead emphasises a life-world that precedes the spirit/matter dichotomy. This resonates with Ingold's (2006) descrption of animacy as ontologically prior to the differentiation of spirit from substance, in which beings are interwoven and entangled into what is conventionally called 'the environment.' African environments are populated and animated by a diversity of life forms, some of which humans can detect in any state of consciousness and others which may be perceivable only in certain states (e.g. dreams, ecstatic trance), if at all. These African

ontological principles are present in Rastafari and other expressions of spirituality in the African diaspora (Waldstein 2020; 2016) and contrast with the Cartesian division between spirit and matter (mind and body) that underpin biomedical science (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987), including psychoanalysis. In contrast, the body multiple, with its focus on the many expressions, experiences and presentations of bodily phenomena can better accommodate African spiritual perspectives on hair, which encompass natural phenomena that might otherwise be thought of as emotional, historical, political, biological etc.

In this paper, our focus on the spiritual meanings of hair shows that dreadlocks and baldness can represent the same thing (i.e. a dedication to Rastafari) but are outward (visible) and inward (hidden) manifestations of it. While dreadlocks are an important if not essential part of the Rastafari spiritual body, both hairstyles and their symbolic meanings are enacted in multiple ways that change over time. We begin with a brief look at the history and biopolitics of hair in the African diaspora, followed by an overview of our research sites and methods. Our findings, centre around three themes; the role of hair in Rastafari spirituality, the importance and diversity of hair grooming practices in Rastafari, and the connection between dreadlocks, visibility and gender. Moving beyond older debates about symbolic meanings of hair, Rastafari dreadlocks show how their different manifestations have shifted the grammar of hair symbolism over the generations. Our work also suggests that theories of the body (including the multiple bodies and the body multiple) will benefit from greater attention to spiritual aspects of embodiment, which are grounded in sensory experience and interaction with other beings in the environment.

The Biopolitics of Hair in the African Diaspora

In Rastafari, both the sociality and the spirituality of hair must be understood in relation to its biopolitical context within the African diaspora. (Black) hair was once symbolic

of the alleged degenerate character of Africans that was used to justify slavery, and after emancipation people of the African diaspora continued to develop ideals of beauty inspired by their European oppressors (Dash 2006: 28). Coarse, kinky hair and traditional African styles were stigmatized, and an industry was developed to simulate European hair texture, length and style (Kuumba and Ajanaku 1998: 230; Montlouis 2013: 35). This includes straightening the hair with harmful chemicals (Dash 2006: 29), which has been perceived as a form of cultural genocide (Kuumba, and Ajanaku 1998: 230). Lake (1998: 106) suggests that all people of the African diaspora distinguish between good (i.e. straight) and bad (i.e. kinky) hair and that European beauty standards are applied to women more closely than to men. While this generalization may be less true today due to the influence of the Black power and natural hair movements, Rastafari journalist Barbara Blake Hannah (2010: 134) concurs that many black women engage in arduous processes of hair straightening without really being conscious that they are doing so to imitate white beauty norms/ideals.

In raising Black consciousness Marcus Garvey, who was one of the founding fathers of African Nationalism and considered to be a prophet by many Rastafari people, advocated that Africans (on the continent and in the diaspora) should wear their hair naturally (i.e. kinky). The 'afro' became a symbol (for men and women) of the Black Power movements of the 1960s and like dreadlocks, draws on intrinsic qualities of curly, African hair (Dash 2006: 31). As Blake Hannah (2010: 135) describes during this time '…hair was indeed the central emblem of the political and social battles of the world. First the hippies had defied society by growing their hair long and free, now the Black man and woman was using their natural hairstyle to demonstrate their attitude of Black Power to the startled world.' Afros and dreadlocks have become culturally and politically constructed as part of a wider contestation of white dominance (Kuumba and Ajanaku 1998: 230), although Tarlo (2019: 337) cautions

that the celebration of such ‘natural’ hairstyles can reproduce ideas of racial difference based on biology.

While the introduction and spread of dreadlocks in the African diaspora is generally attributed to Rastafari, which popularized the hairstyle (and the movement more generally) through the Reggae music scene (see Kuumba and Ajanaku 1998), hair has long been a source of division and dispute. According to Chevannes (1989: 99) from the movement’s inception in 1930, the first Rastafari brethren (e.g. Howell, Hinds) were clean shaven and before 1950 Rastafari men were identified by wearing beards, not dreadlocks. The original religious rationale for wearing the beard was because it was thought to have the power to 'part the sea' and facilitate repatriation to Abyssinia. Growing a beard is also related to the Nazarite vow, which was incorporated into Rastafari. During the 1950s some Rastafari men began wearing their hair long and matted. The adoption of this practice has been explained by images of Mau Mau revolutionaries in Kenya being broadcast in Jamaica, as well as the influence of Hindu holy men on the island and a desire to be viewed as deviant (Lake 1998: 108). Dreadlocks are also part of a larger, Rastafari social project to ‘restore the African body’ (Montlouis 2013: 97) after slavery and colonialism.

By 1960, there were three readily apparent categories of Rastafari brethren; ‘Locksmen’ with matted hair and beards, ‘Beardmen’ with beards and short and/or combed hair and ‘Baldheads’ who were trimmed and clean shaven. The latter category tended to be employed while the others experienced high levels of unemployment. While Baldheads argued that beards and long hair barred Rastafari from employment, the beard was considered the precept or cross for Rastafari to bear (Smith et al. 1960: 26). Thus, began an internal struggle between ‘Combsomes,’ who wore long hair, which was manageable only with combs marketed to women and ‘Dreads’ who threw the comb away (Chevannes 1989: 116). Rastafari was founded by men and much of its symbolism is male (Lake 1998),

including an association between dreadlocks and the (male) lion's mane (Chevannes 1989). Accordingly, much less has been written about the adoption of dreadlocks by Rastafari women, but as a 'natural' way to wear African hair they are considered to be a more politically conscious alternative to straightening it (see Blake Hannah 2010).

Tarlo's (2019) study of (detached) hair and race includes a discussion of the natural hair movement, which draws on earlier Black Power movements but appears to be centered on women. Tarlo (2019: 337-340) explains that although the natural hair movement is a way of combatting hair prejudice and escaping harmful hair practices, it also reproduces ideas of racial difference based on biology and obliges women to define themselves through a bodily feature that must remain in a natural, unaltered state. Moreover, although afros and dreadlocks are iconic of the natural hair movement, hairstyles on the African continent are much more innovative, diverse and cultural. However, while Tarlo's informants discussed the sensorial pleasures and haptic qualities of flowing hair, as well as an appreciation of the ease and flexibility of wigs and weaves, Rastafari women have a more spiritual perspective on what it means to wear natural hair. For example, Blake Hannah (2010) describes how after she first grew her hair out naturally, she combed it and reveled in its beauty. But realising the vanity of this behaviour, she wore her hair completely covered for a long time, before growing locks and experimenting with different ways of styling them. There is a strong ecological ethic in Rastafari that stems from the different spiritual systems (e.g. Ethiopianism, Biblical fundamentalism, Hinduism, indigenous American traditions) that have influenced the movement (Sibanda 2012). While both involve a sense of black power, everything that distinguishes Rastafari dreadlocks from those of the natural hair movement is spiritual. We will show that this includes their role as a covenant with *Jah* (the Creator), the sense that they should be subject to minimal intervention, and the conscious rejection of

commercialised hair practices/products that pollute the environment, as well as the body and mind.

An archived letter to Queen Elizabeth II from 1966 defines Rastafari as multiple 'movements' that share four basic core values; 1. Divine reverence of Haile Selassie I (formerly Ras Tafari, the groups' namesake), 2. A commitment to pacifism, 3. The growing of uncut hair and in the case of men, beards, and 4. the use of cannabis for spiritual purposes (Shilliam 2013). However, just as there are many prominent Rastafari authorities who eschew the use of cannabis, Rastafari movements/groups are so diverse that many accept members who, for a variety of reasons, do not wear dreadlocks. Moreover, some Rastafari people wish to be baptized in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewhedo Church (EOTC) because it was the Church that Haile Selassie led. The EOTC expects its members to discard any belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie and to cut off their dreadlocks. In the UK, this led to the establishment of new Rastafari churches with more accepting attitudes toward hair (and the eventual acceptance of dreadlocks in the EOTC). There is evidence in the Bible that is used to justify growing dreadlocks and beards (Barrett 1977: 137), as well as Pan-African rhetoric as validation for the dreadlocked Rastafari appearance (Cashmore 1983: 159). However, considering the spiritual aspects of matted hair suggests that its popularity lies in a variety of practical uses and 'ecological friendliness,' as well as the emotions it can evoke in the self and in others.

Researching Rastafari Hair, Ethnographic Sites and Methods

Our ethnographic study was conducted in the UK, where various branches of Rastafari have been established for over half a century. There are representative organizations of the three main 'Mansions' of Rastafari: Nyahbinghi, Twelve Tribes of Israel and Boboshanti, as well as a variety of Rastafari churches. To try to capture some of the

diversity within the UK Rastafari movements we conducted multi-sited research. Our first field site was Fairfield House in Bath, which was the residence of Haile Selassie and his family while they were in exile in England during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. On having returned to his own country, Selassie left the house to serve the local elders and it continues to function as a centre of care for Bath's elderly citizens. However, the (ironically) Italian style villa, also serves as a meeting place for a diverse cross-section of Rastafari people in the UK. There is a monthly Nyahbinghi drumming service in reverence of Haile Selassie on the first Saturday of the month and the house is also appropriated by Rastafari during special holy days of the year, and for cultural and fund-raising events. Waldstein attended six Rastafari events at Fairfield House between 2012 and the end of 2014 and Glace attended two events in 2015. These visits allowed us to observe, meet and *reason* with a cross-section of Rastafari men and women from around the world.

At all of the events we attended, the Nyahbinghi order of Rastafari had the largest presence and most men and women in attendance more or less conformed to Nyahbinghi dress code (covered hair and for women, covered shoulders and ankle-length skirts), even if they don't normally dress in this manner. Coverings make it difficult to actually observe hairstyles, but large tams and turbans, etc. appear to conceal long, if not matted hair. However, dress code was not enforced strictly (as long as clothing was family friendly) at Fairfield House and we observed various hairstyles on women who did not cover their hair. We were also able to observe the hair of men during Nyahbinghi drumming sessions, because for spiritual reasons it is important that men uncover their hair in this context. Most of the attendees that we met at Fairfield House were not residents of Bath (many resided in London and other UK cities) and enjoyed making semi-regular pilgrimages to the former home of Haile Selassie.

Reasonings are semi-formal discussions, whereby Rastafari individuals come together to reflectively exchange ideas and propose interpretations of those ideas, in order that through rationality and reason (hence the term) they will eventually reach a conclusion that is logical (from Rastafari perspectives). *Reasoning* is part of the Rastafari protocol of oral tradition, and there are internal power conflicts and hierarchies that may or may not arise during such discussions. The number of participants in a *reasoning* can include as few as two to more than 20. There are also ritual practices involved, which make note taking inappropriate and impractical. Nevertheless, with proper preparation and prior informed consent, *reasoning* can be an effective source of ethnographic data (Congo-Nyah et al. 2013: 267; Waldstein 2016: 74, Waldstein 2020: 907). Although the topic of a *reasoning* is co-constructed by the participants (rather than led by an anthropologist), we both took part in *reasonings* on the topic of hair at Fairfield House with small groups of people. In a few instances the topic of hair arose spontaneously during *reasonings* and on other occasions we introduced the subject ourselves. Main discussion themes related to hair were recorded in field notebooks at the first possible opportunity (usually within 24 hours of the event). In addition, during 2014 Waldstein conducted a few more conventional interviews about hair in London, with participants who had attended events at Fairfield House.

The second field site was the Lion of Judah House (a pseudonym), in North West London. Glace had attended services at the Lion of Judah House, for four years before making it the focus of his MA dissertation (supervised by Waldstein) on hair and embodiment. Not only are a variety of hair styles and head coverings (for both men and women) seen at Lion of Judah services, but the Church was established in 1985 as a response to directives from Ethiopia that Rastafari wishing to be baptized into the EOTC had to cut off their dreadlocks. Feeling unable to relinquish either the divinity of Haile Selassie, their hair, or the Orthodox Church lifestyle, the Lion of Judah Rastafari syncretized their 'Orthodox

Christian faith' (a term they themselves use in their creed) with the Rastafari traditional belief that Haile Selassie is the second coming of Jesus. There are also Evangelist influences, such as a focus on 'the Holy Spirit' and its capacity for intervention, empowerment, glossolalia, and healing. Enthronement is the unique ceremony that is conducted to initiate believers into the group fully (emulating King Tafari's transition to King of Kings Haile Selassie), with Christian baptism immediately preceding for the non-baptized, as it is also a requirement. This process of initiation from neophyte to full-fledged Lion of Judah Rastafari can take anything between sixth months of expressed interest to several years (mostly due to lack of funding for regular access to baptism pools). According to the Lion of Judah House 'house rules,' there are no directives related to hair; men and women are free to decide whether or not they want to grow and/or cover dreadlocks.

At the time Glace did his fieldwork (April-July 2015) there were over fifty 'enthroned' members of the Lion of Judah House, as well as three prospective converts, numerous family friends and several non-Rastafari people in attendance at services during the study period. The predominant ethnicity of Lion of Judah Rastafari is African Caribbean, however there were also European Lion of Judah Rastafari, and marriages and non-marital partnerships of mixed ethnicities including African-Asian and African-European unions. The Church ethos being a Universalist approach to God allowed for such diversity. There is also economic diversity within Lion of Judah Rastafari. Although the majority are 'middle-class' professionals such as academics, doctors, teachers etc., there were also unemployed individuals as well as people from higher-earning professions, such as musical entertainers and sports team members. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Church *Guardian* (a title equivalent to Pastor or Vicar) and prior, informed consent was obtained from individual research participants.

In addition to observing hairstyles while attending services, Glace conducted interviews with and collected 'dreadlocks life histories' from seven members of the Lion of Judah congregation. Some of these interviews were one to one, but a few consisted of small groups. These interviews were conducted with recording equipment and note taking and focused on how people felt about their hair in relation to themselves and the broader Rastafari community. Additionally, 'dreadlocks life-histories,' are specially tailored life-history exercises, whereby participants were asked to reminisce on the whole experience of growing dreadlocks in relation to time and place. This provided an overall sense of the different motivations for growing and keeping dreadlocks according to people's varying social characteristics. The dreadlocks life histories generated some interesting data that was missed in interviews and *reasonings*, by allowing participants to speak about aspects of their experience that we hadn't anticipated.

Heads and Hair in Rastafari Spirituality

In various West African cultures head hair is recognized as the closest part of the body to the heavens and thus it is considered to be able to channel communications from the gods (Byrd and Tharps 2014: 4). The head is also important in Rastafari as it is the seat of the intellect and contains a critical mass of the body's sensory organs. Moreover, according to Blessed (a performing artist, political organizer and spiritual specialist in his late 30s with shoulder-length dreadlocks and locked beard) in meditation, cosmic energy comes through the head to heal and energize the rest of the body. He explained that hair is a conduit of this energy and the more hair the wider the antennae for capturing it. The thickness of matted dreadlocks that one is able to grow is a reflection of how much cosmic energy the hair can hold. In addition to being spiritual antennae, dreadlocks are the holy *herbs* (cannabis) becoming manifest, especially when one is performing or divining. They also hold your

history and reflect a conscious divinity. Similarly, Negassi (an enthroned member of the Lion of Judah House in his 30s, with long dreadlocks and a groomed beard) explained that:

> 'When you leave your hair alone divine intervention will take place, and that structure will represent your personality… depending on how God made that person…manifesting who you are… it's the original way to grow one's hair. I split it to be more comfortable really, and to make sure it would stay in the curls and stay in the form. My routine is to keep it natural. Keep the beard and let that grow natural and keep it clean. Be who you are how God made you and wash yourself cos you should be clean physically as well as mentally. But it doesn't matter what other people do it's up to them.'

Dan (a self-proclaimed philosopher of hair in his early 30s with long dreadlocks) and Imani (a hair stylist who specializes in dreadlocks in her late 20s who wears re-twisted locks) suggested that in addition to the spiritual power they hold, big dreadlocks can also have other practical uses, e.g. as in legends of long locks of matted hair being used as weapons during times of war. They also explained how growing dreadlocks builds self-confidence and understanding of the self. Watching the reactions of others as the dreadlocks grow is also revealing. Sami (a pensioner of English ancestry with shoulder length locks) describes how for her dreadlocks are a symbol of dedication and consecration of oneself; 'the years of looking TERRIBLE like a crackhead etc or a lunatic - mine have only just, this year really started to take proper shape - and that is about six years forming them - which for a Caucasian is not easy.'

While growing dreadlocks is one of the most effective means of cultivating spiritual power from a Rastafari perspective, there are a number of reasons why Rastafari men, women and children may cut them off (if they ever had them in the first place). First is the practical reason that cutting them off may be the only way to get rid of lice in matted hair. Parents express sadness over the thought of cutting the locks of a schoolchild, but it is also

an opportunity to rid the body of stale energy. As Blessed explained, cutting hair is a way of cutting off certain awareness. Dreadlocks hold memory and history and are a catalog of a person. Rastafari people may cut them off to mark (and help forget) misfortunes such as the loss of a loved one, a particularly poor performance, or to make a break from a past of unhealthy lifestyle habits. Some people cut their dreadlocks off every seven years to begin a new spiritual cycle. When dreadlocks are cut or break off their energy must be unleashed. This can be into the air, through burning, or into the ground by burying them. Dan said that when he has cut his dreadlocks off in the past, he buried them and likes to think that if they were disturbed by animals, they would end up as material for birds' nests.

Like the first Rastafari brethren, many men in the UK wear their head and facial hair short or even shaven for reasons of employment, as well as political work. This is partly due to the fact that in the UK a clean-cut appearance is important when dealing with employers, politicians, the media, etc. However, Tom (a community organizer with a crewcut and low beard in his early 30s) explained that he keeps his hair short so as not to let his involvement in politics 'dirty' the sanctity of the dreadlocks. In contrast, Frank (a bald tradesman in his mid 40s) explained that if he had a full head of hair, he would probably grow dreadlocks down to the ground. However, as baldness runs in his family, keeping his head clean shaven is what he dedicates and consecrates himself to. Frank feels that if he were to try to grow dreadlocks on his balding head, it would be a mockery. Although he keeps his head and most of his face clean-shaven, his meticulously groomed mustache shows that he is a lion (i.e. is Rastafari).

Blessed reasoned that hair loss can happen as a man goes back to himself, i.e. becomes more like a baby in old age. When Waldstein pointed out that baldness is associated with high testosterone levels and that there is a stereotype of bald men being successful in business, finance and other 'high-powered' professions, Blessed conceded that

'a powerful, successful bald man who works hard is always thinking so his brain is bubbling. He's working all the time and testosterone is bubbling, but they're not pacing their life. If successful bald men practiced a more balanced *livity*, they'd keep their hair and achieve even more.' He then noted that men lose their hair right where the cosmic energy goes in during meditation. Both Frank and Blessed agreed that men lose their hair as a result of improper nutrition and lack of care combined with adverse environmental conditions (e.g. hard water) and genetic background.

Blessed went on to explain that many Africans feel they don't need hair to absorb cosmic energy/spiritual power because the follicle for kinky hair acts as a receptor below the roots. In the UK, we found that Locksmen, Beardmen and Baldheads are all equally likely to engage in Rastafari spiritual practices (meditation, burning *herbs*, eating vegan food, making music, etc.), as are women with a variety of hairstyles. None of our research participants denied that people without dreadlocks, even bald men, can participate in Rastafari spirituality. However, while men and women with more conventional hairstyles can more readily blend Rastafari principles into mainstream society, dreadlocks make a more outward expression of affiliation with Rastafari. The next section addresses the statements that various types (e.g. groomed or natural) of dreadlocks make in different generations of Rastafari people.

Grooming Dreadlocks: Abomination or Cultivation?

Many of the elders in our study affirmed that it had been songs and imagery of the artists during Britain's golden era of Reggae in the 1970s that influenced them, specifying that they adopted dreadlocks on the basis it was the traditional imagery they were presented with. For the elders, the tradition was to grow natural locks by foregoing the comb while continuing to wash and sometimes oil them regularly. Menen (an elder woman

of the Lion of Judah House with floor-length, re-twisted dreadlocks) confirmed that 'back in the day' looking after one's locks, other than washing it, was considered 'vanity.' Imru (a senior/founding member of the Lion of Judah House with re-twisted dreadlocks worn short due to age and thinning) emphasized that hair washed but not interfered with is 'how it should be,' for Rastafari. However, Menen felt that 'ripping' matted hair to separate it into distinct dreadlocks was also acceptable. As she explains:

> 'I think you know if you've got trees or plants, ok, stuff will just grow naturally, yeah? But JAH talks about pruning… just leave it just let it grow, what you gonna get, yeah? But JAH talks about cultivating, you know, and there's nothing wrong with cultivation to present, and to keep order. Because things naturally will go to disorder and JAH is about order.'

While many Rastafari elders felt that interfering with the natural growth of one's hair is a form of vanity and antithetical to the point of growing dreadlocks, middle and younger generations felt that cultivation of locks is important. It seems that among the middle and younger generations of Rastafari in the UK the locks grown have less in common with the neglected hair of Saddhus and other Hindu ascetics and instead resonate more with the ethnohistorical texts of the *Ngakpa,* which include precise instructions about caring for and styling dreadlocks (Bogin, 2008: 109). Many men at the Lion of Judah House in particular had especially groomed dreadlocks, in uniform square sections at the scalp. This style creates thin locks of almost identical thickness, all framed about the face and neck with short, cropped borders, reducing all regrowth of baby hair to a close shave. Lion of Judah women wear their dreadlocks in a similar style (thin, box sectioned strands), but rather than shaved borders, more 'feminine' alterations are made to the hair, such as fringes, 'bangs', loose curls, or baby hairs decoratively styled about the forehead and/or hairlines.

Among the middle generation of Lion of Judah Rastafari self-care and personal presentation were a great focus and the non-cultivated dreadlocks of the elders were seen as 'neglected' and potentially unhygienic. For example, as Amha (a member of the Lion of Judah House with long, re-twisted and shaped dreadlocks) elaborates:

> 'Yeah, cos I've seen what dreads can turn into when you don't groom it at all and it's not visually nice. You know, I understand we're supposed to be all earthy but at the end of the day you're 'sposed to take care of yourself. You know, and I feel by you just letting it grow, you're… it's almost an insult to the dreads cos you're not looking after it, d'yakna mean?…I've seen them get to the point where there's mould and like they're literally ten bunched up into one. It's just like you're not looking after yourself or your dreads. If Rasta's about your dreads, you should take pride in how your dreads look. Do you know what I mean?'

Despite himself having had a 'shape-up,' Imru, along with almost all non-Lion of Judah Rastafari elders we spoke to, refuted this idea standing firm to the point that by shampooing it, their hair is just as clean as any other hairstyle, despite not being 'neat.' Among Rastafari families at the Lion of Judah House, there were rifts in terms of the choices individuals made with their hair between parents and children; although no parents ever appeared to impinge on their children's autonomy by telling them what to do, as much as voice their own opinions about what they believe is the right way for their children to wear their hair. In a group interview, a cross-generational debate occurred at the Lion of Judah House, where the following exchange took place between Amha, Imru, Menen, Iyasu (middle generation with locks styled in cornrows and braids) and Tolla (middle generation with long dreadlocks, worn tied back).

Amha: ‘In terms of cutting, our generation now, you know like, with how I have my dreads, I’ve got the front of my re-growth cut down. There’s a lot of people that won’t agree with that, (Menen points to Imru with a comical expression on her face whilst he beams) they say you know, it’s cutting your hair. But we don’t see it as that cos it’s literally just the regrowth of the hair it’s not me actually cutting (Iyasu interjects: the dread) my dreads themselves you know.’

Imru: ‘Whereas for me it’s a no, no!’

Menen: ‘And probably, it’s a generational thing. Cos where we’re coming from, you know, the barber was the enemy (various laughter) Barbershop, was the enemy, you know, comb: comb was the enemy! –’

Iyasu: ‘The barbers needed; the barbers needed for us. (Tolla interjects:

Yeah)’

This perspective concerning the barber as essential, was related to maintaining acceptable standards of hygiene and presentation among the middle generation at the Lion of Judah House. At Fairfield House, we also encountered various Rastafari men and women who groomed their hair regularly in order to maintain uniformity and presentation. Some had taken their specialist knowledge of haircare to industry, working with Rastafari and non-Rastafari dreadlocks alike, offering to maintain and repair damaged locks, and even graph the sections for growing them on the scalp. We found that while natural dreadlocks are ungroomed (apart from washing) among the elder generation, the middle and younger generations of Rastafari suggested that the products that are used in grooming matted hair, determine whether or not dreadlocks are natural.

While straightening African hair requires chemicals and/or hot irons that can burn the hair and scalp, the styling and shaping of Rastafari dreadlocks involves the use of

nourishing, protective oils. Moreover, outside of Rastafari, there are many other methods for maintaining dreadlocks and a vast array of tools used including chemicals, waxes and crochet hooks. However, even those Rastafari that went to the salon to get re-twists and razor 'shape-ups' to the borders of their hairlines disdained and shunned these levels of maintenance as unnecessary and excessive. They recriminated it as vanity, akin to Nyahbinghi recrimination of comb, razor and scissors; this trinity of abominable items is now reformulated for the new tools of wax, chemicals and crochet hooks. As described in the following section, there have also been changes in the way Rastafari dreadlocks are (or are not) covered. Together with grooming practices, turbans and other head coverings distinguish Rastafari dreadlocks from other types of matted hair and are shaped by gender as well as age.

Visibility, Gender and the Spiritual Body

As explained by Blessed 'people who wear locks are more outward. When Bob Marley shakes his locks on stage you can see something spiritually is happening. Cutting locks is a form of rebirth. Men who bald their head are rebirthing everyday but probably are more internal.' Wearing dreadlocks also attracts attention. As Sami describes, 'people seem drawn to dreadlocks for some reason. I walk around my estate at times if I'm making a fleeting visit to the estate shop with my hair piled up like a wind ravaged rooks nest and still get the oohs and ahhs as I pass - the faint murmur of "nice hair".' However, in the UK many Rastafari men and women who wear dreadlocks present themselves in public (especially at Fairfield House) with their hair covered.

Hair covering, like grooming, has been a source of contention in Rastafari. Expectations of women to wear their hair covered in public have been cited as evidence of their subordination in Rastafari (Lake 1998: 110). In the UK, we found that some elder

women, like Menen had to endure the challenge of waiting for attitudes to gradually progress and change, before they could confidently wear their hair uncovered. This often meant waiting for husbands to get over their qualms about uncovered hair. Menen's decision to wear her hair uncovered related directly back to her husband's jurisdiction:

> 'It's only later on when we started to have these discussions and this issue of about how it's perceived by other men. Because as a wife, you know, we would have that discussion, he didn't mind it being uncovered, but other men had [a] problem with it. Or they would like to think that they would have authority in that area, do you know what I mean? So they'd be like you know 'you should cover your -', well, since when did you have authority!?'

Rastafari women who wear their hair uncovered have met resistance, not only from men challenging their decisions, but also from other Rastafari women. Menen confided 'back in the day if you went certain place and your head was uncovered, I mean, you would get the [visual] daggers from other women.' And expressed 'oh my gosh, don't go to a gathering without covering your hair.' It was clear that women in Menen's generation 'didn't feel like they had the choice; there was no choice, you covered your hair. That was it.' In contrast, Phoebe (middle generation Lion of Judah member of European ancestry who wears her long hair uncut but combed) reported that she had not faced the 'daggers' or discrimination at any point. She attributed this to not having dreadlocks and speculated that as she had no locks to cover, there was no contention to be made.

In our study, women were much more likely to cover their hair at Fairfield House than at the Lion of Judah House, which may be related to concepts of gender in Lion of Judah Rastafari theology. While there is a general distinction between male and female

energies in Rastafari, which must be balanced to work together cohesively, men and women of the Lion of Judah House are both 'sons' as explained by Imru:

> 'We're angels of God as Christ says… there's not husbands and wives in the resurrection but they're all like angels of God, so we believe the same thing here. You know, we're still male and female, but we're sons and sons is not a gender name; sons means male and female in spirit and truth. A one who inherits.'

This perspective on gender is linked to hairstyles and head coverings, as Imru stipulated: 'in your hearts of hearts, there is no male and no female. Hence you wear your hair how you want to, you know, before the Lord there's no male nor female.'

Lion of Judah House perspectives on gender are not necessarily typical of the Rastafari movement as a whole, in which there is much diversity of opinion. Nevertheless, there are clearly defined male and female gender roles in Rastafari, as having children is seen as an important part of the spiritual development of both men and women (Waldstein 2016: 79). Some of the key ethnographic studies of Rastafari in Jamaica (i.e. Chevannes 1989 and Lake 1998) characterise the movement as male-dominated and patriarchical. For example, Chevannes (1989) argues that the involvement of Rastafari men in childrearing and domestic work, the exclusion of women from various rituals, and a belief that birth control is a conspiracy to suppress the fertility of black people are evidence of total male hegemony in Rastafari. Similarly, Lake (1998) argues that Rastafari women embody the sexist aspects of female/male relations globally, and that the subordination of Rastafari (and all Caribbean) women stems from historical racial inequalities, as well as pre-colonial African hierarchical systems of male domination. However, other work suggests that in Rastafari, 'masculine' and 'feminine' are ways of conceptualising different (i.e. predatory and nurturing) energies, and should not be conflated with male and female bodies (Christensen, 2003). Moreover,

while Rastamen must cook when their women are menstruating (Chevannes 1989) and Lake (1998) describes Rastafari women as second-class citizens who are polluted through the ability to menstruate, Montlouis (2013) shows how Boboshanti women are honoured for their monthly 'sacrifices' of blood, which is collected during their seclusion and returned to (nourish) the earth.

Lake (1998: 110) also argues that Rastafari head coverings subordinate women because while men can choose whether to wear their hair covered or not, women are always expected to cover it in public. However, at least in the UK there are usually fairly strict social norms for when men should and should not cover their hair, which vary in different Rastafari groups. While a range of male and female hairstyles and practices are accepted in the Lion of Judah House, Nyahbinghi dress codes for men (uncovered hair) and women (long skirt and covered hair) are strictly enforced at drumming ceremonies (*binghis*). *Binghis* are generally aimed at increasing the health and spiritual power of the participants so that African repatriation may be realized. Blessed explained that women are expected to keep their hair covered because 'you gotta protect your brothers.' That is, the site of beautiful, natural African hair on a woman may distract drummers from their important spiritual task. While Waldstein did hear a man tell a woman she must cover her hair at a *binghi.*, she has also seen a woman challenge men who did not remove their turbans.

Although the Islamic veil has been associated with modesty, shame, seclusion, subordination, etc. in the mainstream media, ethnographic research suggests that covering the hair and body is about sanctity, reserve and respect. That is, veiling is symbolic of a woman's right to privacy (Pfluger-Schindlbeck, 2006: 77). Likewise, in Rastafari, the long skirts and hair wrappings that women wear in public also provide privacy in the sense that they may conceal 'bad hair days' and natural, unshaven legs. However, this form of dress is more about dignity and humility, which Rastafari value in both women and men. A woman's

hair may be a source of (spiritual) power, but respect is gained through using her body to reflect beauty and wisdom, rather than sexuality (which is reserved for her partner). Doing so also helps manifest the 'spiritual body,' which MacPhee (2003) defines as a life force or mindful presence in the body that is distinguished from the mindful body of Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) by a heightened sensory awareness. In the case of Rastafari, the natural cultivation of dreadlocks is part of a set of bodily rituals that enhance sensory powers (see Waldstein 2016). While the Rastafari spiritual body is gendered, as reflected in hair practices, our work suggests that in the UK women's roles in the movements have become more visible through the generations, as women have enacted dreadlocks in various ways.

We suggest that this is related to practical, spiritual reasons for covering the hair that are common to both men and women. From a Rastafari perspective covering the hair protects it from undesirable (negative) energies and pollution from the environment (not to mention lice) and also prevents it from falling out. This is important because hair can be used in witchcraft (Chevannes 1989: 113) and it is also mortifying to cooks when stray hairs are found in their food. Moreover, a brightly coloured turban, *tam* or head wrap, made large by covering masses of hair is perhaps even more eye-catching than are dreadlocks themselves. For example, among the elder women in our study, because locks could not be exposed often, head wraps embodied years of commitment to Rastafari: the larger the wrap, the more hair underneath, the greater the dedication to the movement. The colours of headwear (e.g. Boboshanti turbans) also have symbolic meaning in Rastafari and are aligned with astrological forces and divine qualities (Waldstein 2016: 76).

Conclusion

Ramberg (2009: 511) suggests that a legacy of colonial medicine has situated the 'native body' as being in need of (European) civilization and secularized it to be a biological, rather

than a spiritual, entity. But even (or especially) under conditions of oppression, matted hair remains a source of spiritual power in the African diaspora. In Rastafari, this is related to a concept of spirituality that is more natural (or ecological) than supernatural (or magical), as well as recognition of the unified nature of spirit and matter. Dreadlocks are connected with the power and energy of the Rastafari spiritual body and, along with other bodily rituals, increase sensory awareness. However natural dreadlocks are enacted in different ways depending on gender and age. They may be left to grow on their own, or carefully groomed with a range of natural products. While it is difficult to make sense of Rastafari dreadlocks from dualistic, psychoanalytic perspectives, spiritual interpretations are broad enough to capture their symbolic, social, political, ecological and sensory complexity.

Rappaport (1999: 49) has argued that strong emotions are the source of power and efficacy in ritual, which allows participants to bring about their desired states of affairs. In a similar way, this is also achieved through the emotions that are aroused in many people by the sight of matted hair. Indeed, as Pfluger-Schindlbeck (2006: 72) suggests 'conceptualized as a symbol of culture-specific values, hair practices can arouse a feeling of threat and can become a political issue.' While our work shows that short hair and bald heads have personal meanings that are not as readily recognized by others, dreadlocks are a cultural symbol of resistance acknowledged within and outside of Rastafari society. However, our focus on matted hair as part of the Rastafari spiritual body (rather than their role as cultural symbols) suggests that the power of locks is not so much in their ability to inspire dread, but rather in their utility in attracting positive energy and attention. Our Rastafari material also suggests that although the body multiple concept originally developed in association with better understanding of illness and disease in a clinical setting, it also offers further insight into other aspects of bodily experience, including the symbolic and spiritual.

From a body multiple perspective, the different manifestations of Rastafari dreadlocks link individual, social, political and spiritual embodiment. For example, rather than breaking from society, practices of grooming dreadlocks among younger generations of Rastafari in the UK are associated with a concern for looking neat and hygienic, i.e. socially acceptable. Moreover, one of the main aspirations of the movement is to rebuild African civilization, so in Rastafari dreadlocks don't represent a break with society per se, but with a particular unjust, racist society. Thus, some Rastafari practices of maintaining dreadlocks are as disciplined as is shaving and both hairstyles may be considered a precept and/or covenant with *Jah* rather than a social or a psychological statement. However, spiritual dreadlocks are also enacted as social (e.g. grooming and/or covering dreadlocks to be presentable and professional) and biopolitical (e.g. boycotting hair products from ethically questionable sources) statements.

Symbolic analysis is limited because it is predicated on an assumption of connections between a discrete mind and body (MacPhee 2003). Moving beyond older debates about symbolic meanings of hair, Rastafari dreadlocks show how their different manifestations have shifted the grammar of hair symbolism over the generations. Our work on Rastafari hair in the UK suggests that age and gender influence how spiritual bodies are constituted, as well as meanings attributed to different hairstyles. Dreadlocks are not required to recognize or worship the divinity of Haile Selassie or to be accepted at Rastafari gatherings. However, growing them has been part of Rastafari spiritual practice for over half of the movement's history for practical, as well as symbolic reasons. Assuming that Rastafari dreadlocks are simply an expression of cultural pride and resistance to white supremacy, or a manifestation of deep-seated psychological drives negates the experience of spiritual energy that is familiar to many who wear matted hair. In Rastafari, hair may be magical and social, but it is primarily a source and expression of spiritual power. This suggests that

theories of the body can benefit from attention to spiritual as well as corporeal, symbolic and biolpolitical aspects, to better capture the fluidity of people's bodily experiences.

Although not unique to Rastafari, matted hair is emblematic of the movement. The wearing of dreadlocks, *tams*, and turbans all serve to make a publicly visible statement of one's association with Rastafari. Hair not only houses spirits, energies and emotional histories, but it also helps the wearer attract attention, inspire confidence and authority and stimulate engagement with social and political issues. While dreadlocks are an important, if not essential part of the Rastafari spiritual body, hairstyles and customs evolve. In the UK, the heads upon which the full range of Rastafari hairstyles sit are being used collectively to increase the visibility, understanding and acceptance of the political aims of the movements (i.e. reparations for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, including repatriation of its descendants to Africa). This is the true power of spiritual hair.

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