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Ital Hermeneutics: The Innovative Theological Grounding of Rastafari Dietary (Ietary) Practices

Joseph Powell

Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

ABSTRACT



The Rastafari movement stands as one of the most instantly recognizable and socially influential spiritual groups of the last century. Having successfully crossed into the realm of popular culture with the worldwide popularity of reggae music, the movement has been able to achieve a level of recognition from the global public that other contemporary religious groups have not. However, knowledge of the groups' practices and beliefs beyond reggae, the veneration of ganja (cannabis) and recognition of the divinity of His Majesty Haile Selassie remains limited. This is very much the case amongst Rastafari dietary practices, something central to the daily observance of all Rastafari, and yet a facet underexplored in academic circles. As such, this study aims to draw attention to an integral component of Rastafari spirituality through interviews conducted in Jamaica and the UK, whilst also formulating and exploring an innovative Rastafari hermeneutical approach.

KEYWORDS

Rastafari; dietary practice; theology; exegesis; hermeneutics; Haile Selassie

Introduction

This study seeks to examine the dietary practices engaged in by Rastafari, as well as tracing and exploring the spiritual and scriptural influences that ground them. Given their frequently vegan nature, these practices and the cuisines they have given rise to have gained increased interest in the UK and elsewhere amidst a context of burgeoning self-described vegetarianism and veganism,¹ with enlarged national media coverage of Rastafari practitioners and restaurateurs from an alimentary perspective as a result.² This is perhaps best epitomized through the “viral” popularity of UK reggae artist Macka B, whose rapped exploration of Rastafari approaches to eating and wellbeing in his “Medical Monday” and “Wha Me Eat Wednesday” YouTube videos have captured the imagination of many.³

CONTACT Joseph Powell  jap86@cam.ac.uk  Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, 25 West Road, Cambridge CB3 9EF, UK

¹The status of ethical veganism in the UK received a recent boost in a ruling from an employment tribunal judge that it constituted a “philosophical belief” and was thus protected in law; BBC, “Ethical veganism is philosophical belief, tribunal rules”. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-50981359> (Accessed January 6 2020)

²Gander, “Meet the Rastafarian Vegans Who Ditched Meat Before It Was Cool”; Bryce, “Meet the Rastafarian Entrepreneur Bringing Vegan Caribbean Food to London”; Varley, “Ital – The Vegan Rasta Movement You’ve Probably Never Heard of Until Now”.

³Ruffner, “Reggae Artist Macka B’s Healthy Eating Anthems are Naomi Campbell-Approved and Utterly Addictive”

This journalistic coverage makes frequent reference to the concept of “Ital”, an “I” form of the word vital, which refers to a philosophy that underpins the Rastafari outlook and grounds itself in a fundamental appreciation and valuation of all life on earth. As one contributor to this study astutely described it, Ital is centred on “promoting life so you see life in all things and respect life in all things”. This holistic appreciation serves as the basis for “a law of life from which all our other practices emerge, the way you eat, the way you dress, the way you relate to people etcetera”. This preservation of nature and of life leads Rastafari to strive towards a world as unadulterated as possible, an ambition conveyed in the term “iration” which describes a creation without interference.

However, whilst contemporary audiences may be curious about Rastafari dietary practices, awareness of the composition of these beyond a crossover with veganism often remains limited. As well as this, the theological context surrounding these beliefs is also shrouded, even amongst academic audiences. Whilst treatments from Homiak,⁴ and Yawney⁵ offer valuable contributions towards understanding this subject, and from which this study has profited greatly, an examination of Rastafari dietary practices from a specifically theological start point is yet to be enacted. It is my belief that this has the potential to offer value both in utilization of the exegetical techniques and structures present in the discipline, and also in facilitating comparison with other theological studies of spiritual eating practices. This study will seek to address both of these deficiencies in charting the constitution of Rastafari dietary practices whilst also exploring the spiritual influences that inspire them, constructed through ethnographic, participant observation and interview-based fieldwork with Rastafari communities in the U.K and Jamaica.

In addition to the aforementioned, I will formulate and explore what I have termed an “Ital hermeneutic”. This constitutes a distinct and innovative Rastafari exegetical approach that emerges from the community and offers a radical reinterpretation of spiritual sources in serving to place the unity of creation at the centre of interpretation.

Methodology

To inform this study, ethnographic field work was conducted with Rastafari communities in Jamaica and the UK, constituting interviews with 27 Rastafari and scholars of Rastafari. This included one month spent living alongside Rastafari communities in Montego Bay. Participants were engaged in interviews utilizing a questionnaire informed by published literature and preparatory conversations with community members, which asked open, free form questions about their consumption habits and the spiritual and scriptural backing behind these behaviours. I have attempted to gain as broad a view of the movement and its dietary practices as possible in engaging respondents from diverse professional and socio-economic backgrounds. This ranged from tailors to quantity surveyors, herb merchants to international musicians, farmers to academics, and chefs to city council members. Given the largely unwritten nature of Rastafari thought and belief, the collection of oral testimony in this manner is fundamental in any attempt

⁴Homiak, “Dub History”, 127–176.

⁵Yawney, “Strictly Ital: Rastafari Livivity and Holistic Health”.

to understand the philosophies and practices contained within the movement.⁶ In order to engender as far as possible a sense that participants were able to speak freely and without repercussion, I have elected to anonymize these responses. These included five women and twenty-two men, a seemingly unbalanced gender ratio but one broadly in line with a majority male nature of the communities observed.⁷ Geographically, participants included nine in the UK and eighteen in Jamaica.

It must also be noted here, however, that any attempt to “categorise” aspects of Rastafari practice and belief require careful nuance. The movement and its adherents are a highly individualized and heterogenous group. Adherents that were engaged with during this study placed great emphasis on the importance of an individual spiritual journey and the philosophical conclusions and practices that this leads them to. Without a central spiritual authority or “orthodoxy” (in its literal translation, “correct opinion”) present in other spiritual groups, Rastafari has no “correct” way in which adherents are expected to believe. Whilst some adherents group themselves together in “mansions” (loosely, denominations) which offer more codified and uniform modes of practice for followers, contrasts within these mansions can still be large.⁸ Equally, whilst the veneration of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie as a divine entity might reasonably be considered to be the central pillar of Rastafari faith, even this belief has broad levels of variation within it.⁹

As such, generalization is an impossible and indeed undesirable task, and it is not the ambition of this paper to offer a text which lays claim to a definitive, broadly adhered to representation of Rastafari dietary practices and the spiritual grounding behind them. Rather, the information contained within this study instead merely reflects the views and practices of those who kindly contributed their time and guidance towards it. Its motivation is to engender discussion of these topics and to offer a picture of how some Rastafari adherents think and act. As such, it is my hope that it should be viewed as a “jumping off point”, seeking to encourage further academic exploration of these themes and of Rastafari belief and practice more specifically.

Ital

The “Ital” philosophy is a central component of the wider concept of Rastafari “livity”, loosely defined as one’s spirituality and the teachings that inform it, amongst which dietary practice features prominently.¹⁰ In this alimentary context “Ital” manifests as a mode of eating which aims to reduce harm to plant, planet and creature, emphasizing the biological and spiritual unity of all and attempting to protect all life in as natural a state as is possible. Ital is also used in reference to a more codified set of dietary practices where adherents may describe themselves as “strictly Ital”; this being a term which conveys consumption only of organic locally sourced foods and a strict abstinence from animal products, salt, processed and tinned foods, and any kind of artificial additives.

These notions are visible in the title of this study where “dietary practice” becomes “ietary practice”, which, much like “iration”, emanates from the “Iyaric” or “I-talk”

⁶See Homiak, *Dub History*, 129–130.

⁷See Christensen’s excellent *Rastafari Reasoning and the RastaWoman* for more extensive discussion of women in the movement.

⁸Barnett, *The Rastafari Movement*, Ch3.

⁹Wint, *Who is Haile Selassie?*, 159–165.

¹⁰Yawney, *Strictly Ital*, 12.

dialect, a reworking of English words which sees the first letters replaced by “I”. This serves both to emphasize the harmony between the speaker and the subject, whilst also providing a transcendental link to The Almighty through connection with the pre-regnal name of His Majesty RastafarI.¹¹ This relationship is most clearly visible through the conceptual expression “InI” (I and I) which forms a pronoun used both in place of the first person “I”, to convey unity with The Almighty (as each becomes one of the two “I’s”), as well as a plural pronoun in place of “we” or “us” to highlight unity with those in reference.

This is an important theological consideration in itself, offering a vocal embodiment of the Rastafari notion that The Almighty dwells within all of iration, and that, through a recognition of the boundless divine energy that imbues the world through him, humanity also becomes divine through this union. This is understood through a “consciousness of the self as divine” most clearly visible in the frequent Rastafari refrain “God is man and man is God”.¹²

Practices

General Eating Modes

Those who contributed to this study, both in the UK and in Jamaica, reported that their eating practices were almost entirely plant based. Six interviewees stated that they consumed some form of animal produce from time to time. How this eating occurred varied mostly on the basis of domestic living situations. Those living in all Rastafari households informed me that most commonly one person would cook and the household would dine together. Other’s cooked separately from those in their household who did not follow similar dietary modes. What these dishes consisted of also varied between the two countries, but most frequently consisted of one pot stew type dishes, with rice and a salad accompaniment. Tofu, tempeh, whole grains, coconuts, fruits, nuts and seeds were also frequently present and emphasized as important for healthy dietary practice. Those observed in Jamaica were more reliant on outdoor markets which provided them with fresh fruit and vegetables, whilst those in the UK split their purchasing more evenly between fresh food markets and stores or supermarkets. Both primarily purchased carbohydrates such as rice and flour away from the markets. Many UK participants expressed their displeasure at being unable to access fresh items readily available in Jamaica such as ackee, breadfruit and callaloo, with these items usually only available in tins which rendered them purposeless for those who avoid canned foods.

For urban Jamaica Rastafari, the “Ital shop” played a prominent role in eating modes. These venues constitute an informal dining setting frequently to the side of a thoroughfare, usually shaded and adorned with Rastafari murals and motifs, which offer entirely plant based snack items such as patty’s (yatty’s) and festivals (istivals), as well as full meals including soups (sip), Ital stews, salads and rice dishes. In some, this food could only be distributed into a natural container (most frequently a “bash”, a dried calabash bowl) bought by the customer, whilst others provided polystyrene containers that occasionally drew discontentment from some of the Rastafari respondents. Beyond the provision of

¹¹Homiak, *Dub History*, 173.

¹²Edmonds, *Short Intro*, 32–36.

food, these spaces also served as an important social space for urban Rastafari to congregate and “reason”¹³ in lieu of a communal camp area as is most often the case amongst rural Rastafari communities. Urban UK Rastafari similarly frequented Ital “cafes” with similar food offerings, however, from observation these occupied a less frequent part of day to day life.

Larger and more rural Rastafari resident communities were only observed in Jamaica, and it was stated on numerous occasions that such participants were unaware of any such communities in the UK. In these settings, cooking and eating took place as a group activity. One or two members of the community would prepare a dish usually consisting of vegetables, beans, spices, chilli peppers and coconut milk, which would then be stewed for several hours and served hot when the vegetables had softened. This would then also be eaten communally and accompanied with reasoning and the smoking of ganja.

For all of these groups, food was self-provided as much as possible through agricultural operations of various sizes. This ranged from window boxes and allotments for UK Rastafari, all the way up to acres of farm land for some rural Jamaican communities. Whilst most were unable to eat completely self-sufficiently with what was at their disposal, sometimes even those owning acres, the importance of connecting oneself to the earth through agriculture was emphasized as of paramount importance. This was again framed through an appreciation of and an engagement with the unity of all in irration. Through this, many contributors to this study considered farming, cultivation and conservation as the literal pouring of one’s energy and emotion into the earth, the strength and sincerity of this being determinative of how the earth responds and what it reciprocates. It is through this mentality that participants highlighted the importance of approaching the environment in the most delicate manner possible, adhering to organic methods and substances most in tune with the earth into which they are feeding.

Meat

All those who participated in this study, both those in the UK and in Jamaica, did not consume meat as part of their diet. For many this was grounded in a respect and care for all in “irration”, with the taking of life from any of its inhabitants falling outside of this. Nicholas summarizes this philosophy in Biblical fashion, writing that “only life can give life [...] he shall not make his stomach a cemetery says the Rasta”.¹⁴ Other adherents opined that as a movement of peace and love it is not correct for Rastafari to cause pain and suffering through the slaughter and consumption of animals.¹⁵ For many, this desire to avoid pain and suffering rendered the avoidance of meat a self-evident truth and was thus not expanded on at length. Health concerns around the nutritional value of meat and processed meat were also raised frequently.

For those born into Rastafari families and communities this was a practice present from birth. For others, however, the implicit social subversion present in the

¹³Reasoning can be understood as a deeply communal discursive ritual process between two or more Rastafari in which wide ranging philosophical discussion is accompanied with ganja. Yawney, via Edmonds, describes reasoning as an “exploration of intersubjectivity” which aims to gain “access to one visionary stream, to the condition of I and I consciousness”. This process serves as the primary outlet for Rastafari philosophy, rendering it an almost exclusively oral canon. Edmonds, *Outcast*, 75.

¹⁴Nicholas, *Rastafari: A Way of Life*, 58.

¹⁵See Owens, *Dread*, 167.

rejection of a prominent feature of the cuisine of both the UK and Jamaica resulted in obstacles and even persecution. One Jamaican elder raised in a Christian household stated that their dietary decisions drew derision and anger from their mother, to the point that she attempted to contaminate their cooking with meat. As result they saw no choice but to remove themselves from the family home, explaining that they “didn’t cook in mama’s pit stove or pot, [from then on] we build our own fire”.

Nevertheless, whilst those in this study did not consume meat many reported an awareness of some Rastafari who did for economic or health reasons. All facets of Rastafari dietary practice discussed were underlined by the aforementioned emphasis on the importance of an individual’s spiritual journey, understanding that individuals should eat as they feel in recognition of economic, medical and supply factors. As such, all in this study stated they would not judge a Rastafari for eating meat if they felt it was absolutely necessary.

Pork

A refrainment from pork consumption has historically stood at the centre of Rastafari dietary practice and occupies the focus of many scholarly efforts on the topic.¹⁶ Stemming initially from the Levitical code, this prohibition is similarly mirrored in Judaism, Islam and Orthodox Christianities, such as Ethiopian Tewahedo, the faith of Ras Tafari himself. Equally, the historic place of pork consumption as a highly sacrilegious practice which serves to defile is well attested to in the literature. Hyperbolically, Sam Brown, a prominent Rastafari political activist, referred to its consumption as “outlaw[ed]”.¹⁷ Adherents informed the researcher of Rastafari in desperate situations instructing butchers to wrap them some of “dat” whilst gesturing at pork so as not to acknowledge, at least verbally, the transgression that was being committed in its purchase. However, the core premise outlined above, that each Rastafari should consume whatever they deem necessary, led contributors to report an awareness of the consumption of pork by others.

In conversations, however, interviewees did not draw the same stark distinction between pork and other meat present in the texts referenced above. The large majority of those who engaged with this study stated that they included pork as part of a general prohibition on meat and did not view it as a foodstuff to be prohibited in its own right. Some respondents referred to an awareness of other Rastafari who did eat meat but avoided pork on the grounds of the Levitical prohibitions, but stated that these people were not in their close circles and were as such, largely removed from the practice.

Given this, it was the impression gained that for those contributing to this research, this element of Rastafari dietary practice has waned in its importance and centrality in a modern era where meat consumption amongst Rastafari more generally is rare. The proscription of this specific meat is, however, still notable for its Biblical ties and its seemingly larger historical emphasis.

¹⁶Owens, *Dread*, 167; Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 140; Carter and O’Brien, *Chant Down Babylon*, 223.

¹⁷Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 140.

Marine Life

The consumption of fish and marine life is something which was reported with greater variation than the previous two categories. Whilst most participants stated they viewed fish and wider marine life as another part of “iration,” which should not be interfered with, there were a small number who consumed fish, largely for personal health reasons. Some cited medical advice, with one Jamaican Rastafari elder stating that “fish is more vital for my structure” and had been medically advised due to the natural omega oils present. Another stated that it is not uncommon for Rastafari in their circle who do not generally eat fish to drink “fish tea” (a White fish broth) when suffering from illness. A Rastafari of a self-described “Ethiopian Orthodox influence” also detailed adherents who looked to the place of fish within the ministry of Jesus as a sign of its importance in human diets. The prevalence of this practice seemed to have a generational element. Fish consumption was more commonly reported by older Rastafari, something attributed by many to the high number of Rastafari fishermen in previous decades due to an inability to find work elsewhere.¹⁸

Within fish consumption some also applied further limits. Some Rastafari adhered to size restrictions for fish, limiting their consumption to those below 12 in. as these were not considered predatory and thus not part of the predation that pervades “Babylon”.¹⁹ Shellfish, molluscs, scale-less fish and other sea “scavengers” were also refrained from by some fish-eaters due to their Levitical prohibitions.²⁰ Their status as “foragers” of the sea generated concern around industrial pollutants that could be present in the flesh. One Rastafari pointed to this as an instance of the “common sense” of the Levitical codes. In this study, participants frequently connected this abstinence from marine life with environmental issues around the degradation of ocean environments.

Salt

Salt avoidance offers some of the deepest historical roots of the practices within the Rastafari dietary ethic,²¹ and stands as one of the most widely observed in this study. Yawney offers the general definition of Rastafari dietary observance as “meatless and saltless”,²² a categorization that is still largely accurate today amongst contributors to this study. For many, the addition of salt to food represented a needless adulteration of the food placed on this earth by Jah, The Almighty Being.²³ In its natural and ripe form in which the food was given to creation nothing further need be added. However, many others described using small amounts of rock salt in their cooking as they viewed it equally as a natural substance, avoiding iodised salt which does not conform to this.

Whilst there was still a general wariness around salt amongst those who did consume it, owing largely to its contribution to high blood pressure, osteoporosis and obesity, a

¹⁸See Owens, *Dread*, 169.

¹⁹“Babylon” is a Biblical allusion frequently employed by Rastafari to refer to imperialist, capitalist and industrialised societies and institutions; the land, people and institutions of the wicked and evil. This is countered by “Zion”, the divine promised land variously interpreted as present in this world in Africa (most commonly Ethiopia) and also as the ultimate place of salvation for the righteous.

²⁰See Homiak, *Rastafari*, 777; Zips, *Rastafari*, 17.

²¹Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*, 34–35.

²²Yawney, *Strictly Ital*, 4.

²³Homiak, *Dub History*, 148.

growing recognition of the essentiality of sodium in the regulation of blood and bodily fluid levels was also present. One Jamaican participant described the evolution of this awareness, from abstention framed around the understanding of a Biblical account to the modern day.

We didn't know there were various different types of salt [...] we jus know that Lot's wife turn a pillar of salt so we don eat salt but today we can realise that salt carries sodium chloride which is the most effective part of salt.

This progression points to a constantly evolving nature within Rastafari philosophy, as also seen in the connection between marine life and the degradation of ocean environments.

Additives, Preservatives, Processed Food and Cans

A strict avoidance of additives, preservatives and processed foods was perhaps the most highly idealized of the tenets of Rastafari dietary observance by those in this study. As stated, the fundamental roots of the Ital approach to food lays in the belief that all on the planet in its natural form is exactly as Jah intended it and as such cannot be improved upon, only degraded, when processed and altered by humanity.²⁴ As such, all participants stated that all of these processes resulted in deficient produce, and were thus to be avoided as much as is possible.²⁵ As well as the detrimental physical and nutritional effect of these items, a spiritual denigration was described by some as equally severe. One UK Rastafari stated that consuming processed food “interrupts your connection with Jah and the creation forces, it places a block in the way. You’ve taken processed things into your temple, so your antenna does connect so well with the almighty”.

However, whilst this particular practice is frequently listed amongst the most fundamental Ital premises by scholars,²⁶ the impression gained from this research was that it was also one of the most practically challenging which respondents tried to adhere to. Whilst a minority of those I spoke with had the means to avoid these foodstuffs completely, almost all acknowledged they would not be able to subsist without purchasing some food that has been processed or added to in an age in which supermarkets dominate global food supply chains. This was particularly true amongst less economically prosperous members of the community in both the UK and Jamaica, to whom processed and preserved foods offer an affordable source of sustenance. Even more wealthy members of the community with land at their disposal conceded their diets were occasionally supplemented with some of these foodstuffs when necessary. The practicalities of modern life have made this practice harder to achieve, leading some to offer this as motivation for urban Rastafari to embrace a rural agrarian existence idealised in the early phases of the movement's development.²⁷

Dairy Items and Egg Products

An abstinence from dairy items and egg products was also near universal amongst participants in this study.²⁸ Many pointed to the “naturalistic” view that Ital represents,

²⁴See Higman, *Concise History of the Caribbean*, 28.

²⁵See also Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, 198 and Hansing, *Rasta, Race and Revolution*, 95.

²⁶Yuajah, *Empress*, 23–34; Edmonds, *Short Intro*, 48.

²⁷See Yawney, *Lions*, 49.

²⁸See also Homiak, *Dub History*, 142–151.

stating that the consumption of elements of the reproductive cycles of other animals stands in contrast to this. One UK Rasta stated that after

I began to learn a bit more about female animals and why they lactate, why they give milk and how a cow is kept pregnant and milking I just decided to stop having dairy products. What I said is that I would stop having anything to do with animals.

The view was also frequently offered that the highly mechanized process in which these foodstuffs are often produced can lead to low welfare conditions and pain for the animals involved which raised further concerns. The life affirming nature of Rastafari further informs this, as eggs represent a dead foetus which has lost its potential for life, whilst milk signifies the removal of an essential life giving fluid for a calf.

Raw Foods

Further in line with this naturalistic view, many expressed the view that food should be ideally consumed in as raw a state as possible. This was again framed around the belief that food placed on this earth by Jah which can be consumed without cooking was intended to be eaten as such. Cooking thus serves as another example of unnecessary adulteration. The view was also offered by some that eating raw is more in keeping with the primordial humans first placed on this earth and was a more primal and original practice as a result. This also seemed to have a generational element with younger contributors to this study more frequently describing the importance of raw consumption whilst mentioning an increase in awareness of food movements such as raw veganism through the internet. Only one contributor to this study, however, consumed an entirely raw diet, with many viewing it as a noble ideal to be strived towards rather than an immediately practical approach.

When asked about raw eating practices, some Jamaican interviewees offered descriptions of early Rastafari ascetics living in the Jamaican hills eating an entirely raw diet, with some adopting the practice of eating only that which the birds also consumed, namely fruits and nuts from source. One described that “the original Rasta, due to his circumstance, ate sun food (that which grows above ground) like the birds. A birdite – anything the birds eat I’ll have”. The primacy of this way of life, and its connection with the natural environment meant that when evoked, these Rastafari were spoken of with veneration. This offers parallels with Ethiopian Tewahedo ascetics who follow similar behavioural patterns and also receive great reverence.²⁹

Alcohol

A general abstention from alcohol was also present amongst most of the contributors to the study. Whilst the consumption of alcohol was not largely viewed as a major transgression, the imbuing of excessive amounts of alcohol that can lead to drunkenness was, with the brash and occasionally violent behaviour this can foster, considered unbefitting of a peaceable Rastafari.³⁰ Describing this view, one UK Rastafari described “strong drink lead[ing] to violence”. On a small scale, however, the view was also offered that the

²⁹Malara, *Alimentary Forms of Religious Life*, 27.

³⁰See also Edmonds, *Structure and Ethos of Rastafari*, 354–355 and Nicholas, *Rastafari: A Way of Life*, 62.

fermentation process which leads to the formation of alcohol is ultimately another natural stage in the breaking down of plant life and that alcohol produced in this fashion in roots tonics and wines is sanctionable. One Jamaican Rastafari described making “my alcohol from cane liqueur in two to three weeks before fermenting for six months”. This is consumed sparingly, however, and largely for purportedly medicinal as opposed to recreational purposes.

Ganja

Whilst not always consumed dietarily, ganja is worthy of mention. Many Rastafari in this study saw ganja as both a crucially important sacrament that brings one closer to Jah as well as the “healing herb” which can alleviate almost all physical and psychological ailments.³¹ Interviewees described at length, the increasing recognition of governments, pharmaceutical companies and public research institutions of the therapeutic properties of ganja, in their eyes vindicating a Rastafari movement which has been making this case for decades whilst often suffering great persecution as a result.³²

Ganja’s healing properties are most commonly consumed in “spliffs”, using a rolling paper to form the herb into a cigarette. However, there was concern amongst some interviewees around the negative physical impact of inhaling raw combustion products. To counter this, some stated they ate the plant in its dried form to gain its healing properties thus incorporating it more directly into their dietary practice. One Jamaican elder described that this was their preferred method, stating that “when you chew it gives a gentle effect”. Amongst younger members the “steam chalice”, a water pipe which steams the plant as opposed to burning it, was described as another way of avoiding these harmful by-products.

Additionally, despite pervasive stereotypes, there were also respondents who did not consume ganja at all. One stated that it does not elevate their brain to “a smarter condition”, whilst another stated that they no longer need it to reach the meditative state it used to offer them, instead choosing to practice tai chi and Zen meditation.

Coconuts

On many occasions respondents stressed that the use of coconuts formed the cornerstone of Rastafari dietary practice. For Jamaican Rastafari, this naturally abundant foodstuff boasts a wide range of culinary and therapeutic uses that are called upon frequently. In food preparation dehusked or “dry” coconuts are most frequently prepared by cracking the “nut” open, draining the “water”, removing the shell from the “meat” by prying with a knife, and then grating the meat into a shredded consistency. At this point it can be added to dishes directly, however, most commonly water is added so that the shredded coconut can be squeezed to produce coconut “milk”. Larger unhusked, or “jelly” coconuts, are consumed in their original form by slicing a drinking hole into the top. After the fluid is consumed, it is cut open and the gelatinous white coating is scooped out with a piece of the shell. Participants described both the liquid and solid elements as

³¹See Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*, 31.

³²*Ibid.*, 156–157.

highly beneficial, the latter presenting particular value to infants as it is nutritious and easy to chew and digest. Outside of their direct consumption, coconuts were described as being utilized for “cooking oils, fuel, cups and cutlery”, and also as mattresses constructed from the brown “hair” surrounding them. Whilst for UK Rastafari their abundance is reduced, they were still utilized frequently and received the same veneration for their variety of functions and historical, romantic place in the Rastafari imagination.

Cooking and Serving Utensils

This natural and organic material ethic also extends to the cooking of food itself, with almost every participant expressing concern about possible cross contamination between certain varieties of metal cooking pots and the food within them. In this, cast iron and aluminium pots were warned against more frequently as possible contaminants. The most organically ideal was often described as clay, however greater energy use in heating these has led some Rastafari to opt for glass “Pyrex” dishes and stainless steel pots instead. Plastic and polystyrene containers are also avoided where possible for these reasons, with the “bash” serving as the preferred vessel amongst participants. It was stated that, historically, many Rastafari would have travelled carrying a manner of pans to avoid “eating from someone else’s pot” due to these possible contaminants and the presence of meat.³³ Whilst this nomadic existence was not a reality for those in this study, many did make the point that Rastafari should carry a “bash” at all times, so they can avoid plastic containers.

Grapes/Vine Food

Some scholars have described a general prohibition on grapes amongst Rastafari due to their prohibition in the Nazaritic vow.³⁴ This principle is extended amongst some to all vine grown foods, with one online Rastafari adherent describing them as “destructive plants” that “choke other plants just to get out nutrients and sun light”.³⁵ However, contributors to this study did not describe a specific prohibition on them in their own practice, with one Jamaican participant stating they felt such an emphasis was in decline.

Fasting

Occasional engagement in fasting formed an important aspect of dietary observance for some interviewees. Others saw it as an opportunity to respond to “ill feelings” in the body, cleansing it of any “heaviness” that might be present. This was carried out by a minority of respondents, and often on a largely ad hoc basis.

Theological and Spiritual Influences

The spiritual and scriptural influences that ground the practices described above was frequently stated as of the utmost importance and sanctity to those who contributed to this

³³See also Yawney, *Strictly Ital*, 5.

³⁴Spencer, *Dread Jesus*, 16.

³⁵ILA Designs, “On Eating Grapes and Food from the Vine”.

study, and its rich complexion draws on a variety of different sources which demonstrate the personally diverse nature of this rubric. Many answers were offered to the question of specific texts or teachings that inspire these practices. Some stated they needed nothing more than a simple observation of the natural world around them to come to their particular behaviours and practices. Some offered lengthy theological justification, drawing on multiple Biblical and extra-Biblical sources. Others spoke actively against the Bible as a tool of oppression in the hands of colonial slave masters, and resolutely sought no basis in it whatsoever.

This range of attitudes toward the Bible should be emphasized, and is again indicative of the heterogenous nature of the movement. Although discussion in this section touches upon Biblical scriptural sources, around a quarter of those who contributed to this study did not engage with Biblical texts at all. Whilst for some the many statements from His Majesty Haile Selassie on the essentiality of Biblical study leads them to value the words contained within them, for others resistance against Western Christianized hegemony and the tools which underpin it is essential.

All contributors, however, made direct reference to the words, both written and spoken, of Haile Selassie himself. At times this was combined with Biblical teachings, inspired by His Majesty's example as the "Defender of the Faith" of the Ethiopian Tewa-hedo Church. Others spoke vividly of moments of revelation which changed their dietary practice in an instant. This broad range of sources is characteristic of the individualistic nature of Rastafari belief, and offers a fascinating combination of spiritual influences for exploration.

Ital Hermeneutic

As will be demonstrated in the discussion of the sources following, the crux of what I have termed the "Ital hermeneutic" is found in two highly influential strands; the respect for all life in "iration" and a unity with it as described above, and a tendency towards a "natural man" ethos as described by Yawney.³⁶ The "natural man" premise can be defined as a striving towards a sense of primordial existence which seeks to radically return, in its literal definition, to those first in creation. Whilst this "natural man" philosophy is a crucially important source of spiritual guidance in its own right, here. I suggest it serves hermeneutically as both a lesson derived from the natural world *outside* of scriptural sources, as well as a lens with which to interpret them from *within*. Whilst explored in an explicitly dietary context in this paper, an Ital understanding was also connected intimately to issues around environmental protection and climate justice, by participants. It is my belief that the Ital hermeneutic has much to offer contemporary debates on these topics, and I intend to explore the interaction between these themes in more length in future research.

The Ital hermeneutic, thus represents an innovative mode of exegetical interpretation, which seeks to "read" the natural into and out of each source, something which is clearly exhibited through the grounding of dietary practice. In a Biblical context, this frequently emerges as an embrace of some Christian elements of understanding but a rejection of others, with an innovative rendering the ultimate result.

³⁶Yawney, *Strictly Ital*, 3.

Ital hermeneutics also differentiate themselves from a traditional Christian hermeneutical approach in another important way. Given the aforementioned largely oral nature of Rastafari thought and belief expressed through group “reasoning” sessions,³⁷ Ital hermeneutics do not apply themselves merely to interpretation of scripture. As will be demonstrated, this naturalist mode of examination broadens itself to all forms of Rastafari spiritual influence, specifically in this study (but by no means limited to) the words and actions of His Majesty, Biblical scripture, and personal revelation. In this context, the importance of the “Word, Sound, Power” paradigm is of crucial importance. Prahlad describes “Word, Sound, Power” as an “orientation that imbues sound with agency [and] with the power to manifest in the material world” in which “the nature of matter is [understood to be] vibrational.”³⁸ Those who contributed to this study frequently spoke in terms of “vibrations”, described as the energy which both forms and connects the physical world. The words and sounds of creation are an integral part of this, and thus have a power innate within them, beyond the immediacy of how the listening ears or brain might perceive them. This is understood as a spiritual “vibrational” potentiality which can be utilized by humanity to “chant down Babylon” in Rastafari drumming and chanting circles, as well as for speaking truth and rights to the all too frequently wicked powers that rule.³⁹

The Babylon/Zion dynamic touched upon earlier⁴⁰ is also key for a broader understanding of the orientation of Rastafari hermeneutics.⁴¹ Here, the two function as two opposing ontological realities. “Babylon” offers an interpretation of the industrial, colonial and post-colonial, Western reality as a subjugation of humanity in an existence defined by oppression and suffering. Conversely, the most divine locality of Zion represents a beacon of hope, freedom and a physical and spiritual repatriation to the place of The Almighty. This, of course, is of particular relevance in Biblical exegesis given the Biblical origins of these concepts.⁴²

It must also be noted, here, for clarity that my efforts to explore this innovative hermeneutical approach are just that, an exploration of an approach which emanates from and lies entirely within the Rastafari movement itself. The originality of this approach is entirely that of the Rastafari community, and the ambition of this project is merely to offer a formulation of this unique and distinctive hermeneutic.⁴³

Haile Selassie

As the supreme spiritual inspiration amongst Rastafari, interviewees were quick to quote the words and example of His Majesty Haile Selassie when asked about any spiritual grounding behind their dietary practices. All Rastafari who contributed their thoughts to this study spoke at length about the wisdom offered to humanity through this

³⁷See also Bamikole, *Rastafari as Philosophy and Praxis*, 125.

³⁸Prahlad, *Reggae Wisdom*, 19.

³⁹See Murrell, *Introduction*, 10–11.

⁴⁰See footnote 17.

⁴¹Duncanson-Hales’ recent *Dread Hermeneutics* more extensively explores the hermeneutical centrality of the Zion/Babylon dynamic through examination of Ricoeur’s conceptualisation of the “productive imagination” and the works of Bob Marley

⁴²For further discussion of Biblically oriented Rastafari hermeneutics see also Murrell and Williams, *Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari*, 326–349.

⁴³The author is not seeking to colonise Rastafari philosophic processes as his own property.

divine figure (“Christ in his Kingly character” as was often stated), as well as the influence his guidance has had on all aspects of their life. With regard to dietary observance, His Majesty’s wisdom was primarily cited in three capacities.

Fasting

One of the most frequently referenced aspects of Haile Selassie’s example for humanity came in his frequent engagement in fasting as part of his Ethiopian Tewahedo faith.⁴⁴ Many Rastafari pointed out that this fasting would have involved a completely plant based diet during periods of spiritual reflection similar to that of the “full time” diet of many Rastafari today. This fosters the view amongst some participants that a plant-based diet is one more spiritually in tune with Jah. Others who termed themselves “more Orthodox leaning” discussed engaging in fasting in line with the Tewahedo calendar through the example of His Majesty. One described that their medically advised consumption of fish does not take place when fasting, whilst another detailed abstaining from food whilst the sun is upon the earth in His Majesty’s apparent likeness, a practice more akin to the Islamic Ramadan fasting model than traditional Ethiopian Orthodoxy. All, however, took strength and comfort from the similarity between their own dietary practice and that of the Emperors in times of fasting, offering a sense of kinship and synergy with the one they consider “Most High”.

Small Portions

As well as abstaining from food in certain periods, others took inspiration from the amount His Majesty is said to have consumed when he did eat. Many voiced the opinion throughout this study that when His Majesty ate, fasting or otherwise, he would consume only small portions in a self-effacing and understated manner. One Jamaican participant put it that “it’s been known His Majesty ate little amounts, sometimes they would put on feasts for him, but he would only have the smallest plates and eat humbly”. This is countenanced by Joseph Voves, manager of the Ethiopian Hotel Corporation for a period under Selassie’s reign, who noted that His Majesty “ate like a bird, [consuming] very small portions”.⁴⁵ In this, participants pointed out similarities with the aforementioned “birdites”, with His Majesty thus paralleled with the natural and the naturalistic ascetics of early Rastafari. In this practice, some also saw Biblical parallels, stating further that “we take that on as a lesson that one should eat humbly and meekly, as the meek will inherit the earth”.

Here, His Majesty’s humble eating habits are drawn against the natural world in the form of the bird life which he apparently mirrors. Through an Ital hermeneutic the unity of creation is demonstrated no more clearly than in the alignment of the Most High and the most significant with the smallest and most delicate. This avian imagery is reminiscent of Matthew 10:29, where the Almighty’s care is shown to extend all the way down to the smallest in creation.

⁴⁴See Sauldie, *Ethiopia*, 44.

⁴⁵Neagus, *A Man Of Determination*, 120.

Within an Ital hermeneutic however, not just the Almighty's care but the Almighty's whole *being* extends down to the smallest in creation, as he is demonstrated to be akin to them and amongst them. Whilst His Majesty's eating habits offer a practical example for adherents, this mirroring of the natural world offers a deeper spiritual rendering with which to view Jah and creation as a whole.

Philosophical Influence

Beyond Haile Selassie's direct words and practices, some offered a more metaphysical interpretation of his being as a whole serving to inspire dietary practice. One participant stated that identifying His Majesty as an enlightened being "leads to an awakening within the consciousness" in which he acts

as a gateway towards finding oneself. You will realise within this trod [practice] there is a certain kind of live [*sic*] and it's a live that doesn't think of doing harm. If you have to kill animals to eat, either consciously or sub-consciously you are thinking about killing. It's the very law of life that we live by.

Through recognition of His Majesty's enlightenment, contributors to this study are inspired towards a peace and oneness with creation that leads away from an existence defined by death and destruction and towards one predicated on life and living.

This example provides perhaps the clearest demonstration of the Ital hermeneutic in the context of His Majesty. The sheer "oneness" that being in the spiritual presence of His Majesty engenders (as witnessed in the InI paradigm) brings an "awakening" which causes a complete reorientation of creation and the natural order. No longer do adherents seek out dietary modes which cause pain and death, all are one in The Almighty and thus all are equal. This powerful egalitarian message again exemplifies the radical re-conceptualization that the Ital hermeneutic offers, with a unity in the natural presenting an idealized society wholly opposed to the corrupted "Babylonian" Western society frequently decried.⁴⁶

Bible

Exodus 20:13/Deuteronomy 5:17

Despite its brevity, the most frequently cited Bible verse in response to questions of a scriptural basis for dietary practice came in the form of the 6th commandment conveyed to Moses, as detailed in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17, "you shall not murder".⁴⁷ In contrast to a majority of Christians and Jews globally, who also hold this passage central to their belief, participants that drew on it described it in a broader sense which goes beyond the killing of fellow humans and extends to all of creation. Non-sentient life also falls under this bracket, as adherents interpret the message here primarily as a reminder to treat all with kindness and impartiality, only killing plants when absolutely necessary and replanting them again where possible. Some clarified further that life is not humanity's for the taking and should not be treated as such.

⁴⁶See also Edmonds, *Short Intro*, 39–40.

⁴⁷All Bible quotes are taken from the NRSV unless stated otherwise

Here, we encounter the Ital hermeneutic at work Biblically, as those who cited this passage take a holistic view of iration in which all are equal in Jah and deserving of protection as a result. Participants questioned the narrow application of this instruction by other faith groups who can see its value and yet generally apply it only to one species. The simplicity of the verse frequently resulted in the words themselves being repeated, simply, verbatim and not elaborated on further, as the wisdom of the passages was considered self-evident by adherents who delivered it in a matter of fact manner. In this reading, Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17 provide clear demonstration of the life affirming philosophy that is Ital and the intrinsic value it places on the interconnectivity of all on earth. Here, the Ital hermeneutical approach initiates itself from a standpoint drastically different from that of many previous Christian and Jewish exegetes, with a radically different interpretation subsequently emerging as a result.

Genesis 1:29-30

Other than the succinct instruction above, those who cited the Bible most frequently drew on Genesis 1:29-30 to ground their dietary practice. Most often referenced in the King James formulation, it was cited as

And Jah said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, on which the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

These words were interpreted by interviewees as detailing a utopic vision in which members of the animal kingdom do not engage in predation, and instead subsist purely on “herb bearing seed” and all “fruits of a tree yielding seed”. Whilst a literal reading of the text limits its scope to herbs and fruits, all who cited it offered the view that it applied to the entirety of plant life on earth, also pointing out references to “seed bearing herb” to further suggest the divinity of ganja and herbs more widely. Through an Ital rendering, Genesis 1:29-30 represents a creationary ideal as instructed by Jah which humanity should endeavour to follow. However, those who cited this view were quick to state they did not consider the creation story as outlined in Genesis to be literally true, taking issue with an implied dominion of humanity over animals which was frequently labelled a dangerously androcentric view which has led the planet toward the precarious environmental position it finds itself in today.

However, much allegorical value and wisdom is taken from the notion that in an ideal world creatures would not have to end the life of another creature in order to survive. Therefore, this passage does not necessarily represent a historical truth describing how humankind previously operated in the early days of creation, but instead serves as a benevolent and egalitarian ambition that humanity should be attempting to enact. In the words of one participant, when humanity has reached its pinnacle in the full and complete adoption of Rastafari and Ital principles “man will come to live side by side with animals”, a description also reminiscent of Isaiah 11:6-9.

It is also worth noting the parity between the vision described in Genesis and the primordial “first man” philosophy described previously. Whilst the “natural man” paradigm is employed primarily to suggest a life in its most ecologically fundamental form, the

language employed is somewhat reminiscent of Genesis and may be a possible source of influence.

Leviticus

One of the most historically influential Biblical sources to shape Rastafari dietary practices comes in the strict codes of food consumption, preparation and storage offered in the book of Leviticus. Whilst as previously stated interviewees engaged little in specific discussion of pork consumption, which features prominently here, proscriptions against scale-less fish were mentioned and many pointed to the Levitical codes as containing a “dietary wisdom” which should be noted. The author writes that from “the land animals” adherents are permitted to eat “any animal that has divided hoofs and is cleft footed and chews the cud”. By this measure the pig, “even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you”. For marine life, the consumption of all that “has fins and scales” is permitted, but “anything in the seas or the streams that does not have fins or scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and among all the other living creatures that are in the waters – they are detestable to you” (11:7-11).

The citing of Leviticus from those who ate no fish or meat suggests a historical influence from the book which remains present in the background of the movement today. One participant described this previous significance in stating that in earlier times Rastafari looked to these verses for direct instruction as many Jews do today.⁴⁸ but over time the place of the Levitical codes in the movement has evolved from a position of direct instruction to one of venerated wisdom. Proscriptions against the consumption of some animals demonstrates an author and a community grappling with what one should and shouldn’t eat. Whilst the Levitical community were warned away from pork and shellfish due to the displeasure it would engender for their God through a lack of “purity”, similarly those Rastafari who abstain from any animal consumption do so as it is displeasing to Jah through a lack of creational unity.

John 4:34

The Christian Testament received significantly less mention than the overarching messages contained within Exodus, Deuteronomy, Genesis, and Leviticus as noted previously. Two passages, however, were cited by a number of interviewees as forming part of the grounding for their dietary practices. The first of these comes in the Gospel of John, in which Jesus responds to his disciples who state that he must surely be hungry after his encounter with the “Woman of Samaria”. As per the KJV version, as it was cited, Jesus responds by stating “my meat is to do the will of him who sent me to complete his work”. This bought up two exegetical interpretations from participants. Firstly, that one does not need literal meat when one is carrying out the works of Jah, and secondly, and perhaps more in line with modern translations, that sustenance and the bonds of flesh come second to a spiritually active life in communion with The Almighty, with the NRSV translating “meat” as “food”.

⁴⁸See also Owens, *Dread*, 167; Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 111.

Whilst this message of spiritual strength and sustenance rings true for other spiritual groups who utilize this passage, the literal interpretation of an instruction to humanity that meat is unnecessary when in communion with Jah is seemingly innovative. Through an Ital hermeneutic this passage becomes one of peace, harmony, and care for all in creation. In this, meat is not desirable to Jesus for the strength and wisdom of Jah, who idealizes a creation in which all live side by side, is far greater than the pleasure and satisfaction of meat consumption. In the NRSV translation this focus on preserving life is furthered to all elements of creation. Lacking the need for “food” of any description, humanity would no longer require the destruction of plant or animal life to survive. This again expands and innovates the text to offer a holistic reading which seeks the protection of all life.

Colossians 2:16

Another Christian Testament teaching cited by a number of participants came in Paul’s letter to the Colossians. A degree of wariness to Paul’s writings was described throughout this research, stemming largely from instructions offered both in this letter (3:22) and also in the letter to the Ephesians (6:5) – “slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ”, intuitively connected to the trans-Atlantic slave trade by participants. However, Paul’s writings were viewed on a seemingly case by case basis by interviewees, with the passage below cited alongside that of the necessity of women covering their heads when “prophesying” on numerous occasions, most often in reference to “Binghi” celebrations for Rastafari holy days (1 Cor 11:2-6).⁴⁹

Dietarily, some adherents pointed to Colossians 2:16 to ground their belief that whatever one puts in their body, Rasta or otherwise, this is ultimately their own decision beyond the judgement of others. Paul describes Jesus’ sacrifice as freeing the world from the legalistic system of his former faith, stating “therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or observing festivals, new moons or Sabbaths”. As discussed throughout this study, those describing their own dietary practice were quick to state that whilst these are the ways and means by which they govern their ethics in eating, an individual’s journey in coming to their own practices and beliefs is of the utmost importance. Through an Ital hermeneutic, here, the former of the two influential strands identified, that of unity and respect, lead to a reading in which individual’s choices are respected and in which union with them must involve understanding. Accepting the financial, spiritual and health circumstances of other’s is imperative to this, and to “condemn” the practices of others, does not further this cause.

Revelation

Outside of these more textual sources, multiple tales of personal revelation which had deeply altered individual perspectives around dietary practice were offered. To illustrate, one participant described in detail a revelation that had struck them when fishing in a river during their early days in the movement in the late 1950s. They stated that after

⁴⁹See Barnett, *Rastafari Movement*, 103–107 for extensive ethnographic description of Binghi celebrations.

catching ‘a big mud fish probably around two pound, I hit them out on the bank and I see a whole heap of flies surround ‘im. I was actually amazed. Flies just fly down around ‘im and when I open his mouth I see a next mudfish, a smaller one that he swallow, around four ounces. And ‘im could not swallow the head to go down in ‘im stomach, it stayed in his mouth and in his throat and began to rot away”. After taking the fish home and attempting to clean it with lime they furthered

I eat my portion [and] my stomach sick, and I vomit it all back. And you know when that happened, I looked up in myself and say no. I look forward distant away into creation through the power of the almighty Ras Tafari and within I the word said in prophecy [that] all green herbs bearing seed, to man the seed is meat.

The incredible presence of one fish inside another came as warning to this individual that all might not be as it seemed, but requiring sustenance for the day they proceeded to eat the catch anyway against their better judgement and became ill as a result. Subsequently, this deep physical response led to a moment of revelation in which both the image of His Majesty and the words of Genesis 1:29-30 dawned on them in one moment, leading them to abstain from fish consumption ever since.

Through an Ital hermeneutic one can see a yearning for union in the natural emerging once more. A fish attempting to consume another fish and failing, graphically, and to the point of death, serves as an omen that consumption of other living forms is not what Jah intended, an omen unfortunately ignored leading to a sickness imparting on this individual. In this moment, which has disturbed the natural order, the Rastafari receives a moment of deep and unshakeable revelation which demonstrates to them the natural order as intended, invoking the words and interpretation of Genesis as described previously. Revelation meets the Ital hermeneutic in scripture, which combine to form a moment of epiphany with a strength and vibrancy carried some 60 years onwards.

Another participant described a revelatory vision which affected them greatly, altering their dietary practice and leaving them with a deep veneration for nature. They described

this day I spread something on the ground and I laid back and [...] believe you me I saw myself riding on the rain of the sun and going up, and I went up to the centre of the sun, there was a space there which I travelled through and went up and found myself in the other land. This other land is the centre of the sun, there is pure greenness. I went up into this greenness and behold everybody was green, no body wore clothes because their locks [dreadlocks] were hanging around them so much they didn’t need clothes.

Taking the naturality of appearance and the constancy of green, this interviewee was left with a deep impression that a life in communion with the sun and the natural world was the right life to lead. This ultimately led them a greater respect for creation and the creatures in it and an abstention from the consumption of animal flesh. In this vision, perhaps the most frequently used symbols of the natural environment, the sun and the colour green, combine to present a transcendental physical and spiritual journey. Through an Ital hermeneutic, humanity is witnessed both in communion with the life contained in the natural “green world” but also the centre of that which enables it to exist, the sun. Again, the unity of each and all in iration serves as the enlightenment gained from this dramatic and transformational revelation.

Conclusion

Rastafari dietary practices, in reflection of other beliefs and practices contained within the group more widely, represent a heterogenous and broad collection of observances which cover a variety of food groups, cultural modes and some practices more closely shared with other religious groups. Theologically, sources of inspiration around Rastafari dietary practice and the divine truth that inspire them are again broad and individual. All who contributed to this study drew on a different variety and combination of spiritual sources to ground their beliefs, and it is further testament to the personal nature of the Rastafari spiritual journey that this range of spiritual influences could lead adherents to similar sets of practices.

The spiritual sources discussed above lay out the innovative and naturalistic mode of interpretation that is the Ital hermeneutic. Unity, the natural, and a powerful life affirming energy combine to offer an exegetical interpretation which is radical and distinctly Rastafari. The Biblical sources demonstrate an approach to scripture which both accept and reject Christian tradition, emphasizing the life and unity in all creation. The teachings of His Majesty reveal this life and unity through a “primary source”, whilst personal revelation in this instance incorporates all these elements. The Rastafari Ital hermeneutic demonstrates a creativity just as evident in the range of dietary practices themselves, and this rich and innovative rendering warrants further exegetical exploration.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Joseph Powell is a PhD Theology candidate at the University of Cambridge whilst also working as a research student at the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide, where his research focuses on Rastafari theology and religious environmentalism. Before starting PhD life, Joseph completed a BA in Theology at the University of Exeter in 2016, and an MPhil in Theology (World Christianities) also at the University of Cambridge in 2017.

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