Black Hair as Transcript of Gendered Experience and an Artifact of Racial Resistance

Longue Durée Reflections on Salon Posters and Art from the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen and the exhibit *Hair Power*

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Hair is fundamentally linked to issues of race, class, colorism, gender, culture and identity. It is the physical manifestation of an intersectional nexus that connects these aforementioned issues and has real impact on the ways in which we interact with others based on our own positionalities. This article thinks deeply through how Black hair often takes on a life of its own, defying the time, space, class, race, and gendered expression of its owner. Taking a long durée approach in conversation with salon posters, art and artefacts from the collection of the Nationaal Museum of Wereldculturen, and in conversation with the current exhibit *Hair Power*, on show at the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam through January 2024, this article argues that Black hair presents a social history of resistance to the various attempts to subdue it.

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"Trust the universe and respect your hair"
- Bob Marley

Introduction

Black hair is a difficult object to contextualize in a museum setting. It is quite ironic that hair, so often seen as something to be displayed and admired, would be such a difficult item to portray in a museum. However, one of the most challenging aspects of displaying Black hair stems from its living past and growing history. As we will discuss, Black hair often takes on a life of its own, defying the time, space, class, race, and gendered expression of its owner. Black hair can be used as a tool to express gender in creative and non-conforming ways but also as an aspirational technology to articulate power and consolidate community. Even after its owner has died or has moved on to adopt another style, the memories, interpretations, and nostalgia of keratin crowns continues to document the Black experience in cultural, political, economic, spatial, and aesthetic ways (Banks 2000; Dash 2006). Hofstader (1999) discussed the idea that "animate beings can come out of inanimate matter," while hair is not usually thought of in the context of mathematics and computer science, Black hair presents itself as a "strange loop" of a cultural enigma. Hair documents time but people also make meaning out of time in how they engage with hair on its own terms.

People once believed that hair continued to grow after death, an illusion of post-mortem growth presented by the shriveling flesh of the recently deceased. The corollary of the idea is that while the body may decay, hair lingers as a liminal testimony of the life of the former self before the body succumbs to bone and then finally to dust. Scientists have characterized the biological process of growing hair in three phases, but accompanying those stages of growth, loss, and renewal. Hair also possesses a veritable afterlife as a testament of the past, a transcript of the present, and a prologue for the future.

Our obsession with hair is a stand-in for how communities engage with ideas of time and possibilities of space. It is strange that hair might be considered an entry point into theorizing on temporalities. While this essay will not directly engage notions of Afrofuturism, the connections with theories of Black temporalities becomes apparent in how it represents a range of how Black people engage with the meaning of time in their tribulations and triumphs with hair culture across numerous cultural and political contexts. Most of the observations in this essay are written from a vantage point in the United States; however, Black readers throughout the Americas, the Caribbean, and throughout the African Diaspora will readily understand many of these concerns though perhaps not relying on the same language to describe the forces at play. From the hours of braiding, locking, twisting, processing, and hosts of other rituals, Black hair is a *lingua franca* that unites the Africa Diaspora.

Despite the commonalities in the experiences of Black persons with hair across time and space, Black hair from the roots is itself a contested category of analysis. When referring to persons with Black hair, the majority of the English-speaking world call them brunettes. We would pause to remind the reader of the difference between *Black hair* (a racial reference that includes certain physical characteristics commonly ascribed to Black persons) and *black hair* (a reference to color). The term brunette certainly carries certain phenotypical assumptions that are seldom extended to include Black people. Black folk never refer to each other as brunettes, nor do whites (at least in the Anglophone world) refer to Black people with tightly coiled black hair or dark brown hair as brunettes. Additionally, red-haired people who are commonly recognized as 'gingers' may be surprised to find that African Americans call those Black people who possess sandy brown colored hair as 'red-headed' (Harvey 2015). Malcolm X, cited his nickname 'Detroit Red' as being derived from this characteristic. To play on the veil metaphor popularized by W.E.B. Du Bois in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), is to take account of a much more textured discussion of hair and its identities and meanings behind the veiled comb, than

is acknowledged on the white side of the comb looking at Black hair from the outside.

To explore what we mean by this, the range of textures of Black hair often preclude certain aesthetic judgments about Black people themselves on the part of a society that is fixated on standardizing a Eurocentric aesthetic ideal that implicitly connotes ideas about desirability and compatibility. Since hair is often used as valence of perceived positive or negative racial characteristics, people make approximations of identity and a host of other judgments, using hair as a short-hand transcript to communicate meaning and status within a racial and gendered hierarchy. For example, if a Black woman in Washington, D.C. during the 1960s was unwilling to straighten her hair to get at a job as a receptionist, that woman—like her natural hair—was coded as being unmanageable and difficult to work with. This dilemma reveals the range of aesthetic politics at play wherein hair is not only the accessory but the object of the conflict, as aesthetics objectify dynamics of systemic power and racial discourse in the society at large (Gordon 2018).

These targeted policies focusing on Black hair especially reveal the absurdity of racial logic. Since Black hair can range in textures, most assumptions, descriptions, and presentations about hair having so-called Black characteristics are situated in the range between 3C and 4C (Kymberlee et.al. 2015). The *type 4 coily hair pattern* has increasingly become a default to extend various kinds of judgment about manageability, beauty, and desirability. The phrase "good hair" was popularized in the mainstream by a documentary of the same name produced by Chris Rock (2009) but long before then the judgments of hair quality and thereby aesthetic standards were assumed by the enslaved and colonized descendants of African descended people to account for their positionality in a world that judged their moral character by their physical appearance. "Good hair" and "bad hair" were signifiers not only for beauty but also for character and worth. So the problem presents itself of how to portray hair that has such a living and contentious history that extends into the present (Byrd and Tharps 2014).

In the United States and Western Europe there have been numerous instances of Black hair being policed in an effort to enforce so-called norms of racial order and professionalism (Koomson 2016; Frank 2017). These prohibitions are not only within the United States but are also throughout the continent of Africa as many girls' schools require young women to shave their heads for attendance. While prohibitions against certain hairstyles have been used against all hair types, policies targeting Black hairstyles in its natural state are often forms of bureaucratic violence and institutional attempts to enforce notions of cultural and racial superiority. Policing the size of hair could be a practical matter when headgear is involved, but for most institutions, these prohibitions have had little do with the functional requirements of job performance. Instead, many corporations have played a major role in using economic incentives to extend their cultural authority to establish norms of 'appropriate' culture in context where they had no basis to do so. By promoting the idea that locs, Afros, braids, cornrows, twists, etc. were not professional hairstyles, many American corporations (and other institutions that have followed their example) have contributed to anti-Black aesthetics and a natural-loathing Black hair culture.

However, this article is not about the 'haters.' In the long durée, Black hair presents a social history of resistance to the various attempts to subdue it. **The fundamental idea of this essay is that hair is a living object that tells stories.** The context in which hair is received deeply influences the story that it conveys. Certainly in a museum, there are significant challenges to hearing the authentic testimonies of hair divorced from its natural environment. As Jasmine Cobb (2022) has argued, the look and feel of Black hair matters. The Afro-texture of Black hair has been associated with hopeful dynamics of change across the African Diaspora and deeply implicated in the politics of liberation. Along these lines, when we speak of Black hair as a transcript, we speak of it as a documentary revelation of change over time. The natural growth of hair, like rings in the core of a tree, tell a story of evolution, a measuring stick of change over time. The color of hair and its

transformation, its blossoming and thinning, present themselves as universal themes but the interpretations of these stages and its presence are fiercely rooted in diverse traditions and experiences.

Despite Black hair having historically been perceived by whites in the Americas (United States, Caribbean, and South America) as being unkempt and unruly—a metaphor for Black people—Black people used hair as a platform to affirm themselves and the importance of their complex identities. By embracing hair as a tool of resistance, Black folk have challenged the perception that coiled and curly hair was deeply related to and justified the idea of people of African descent as inferior. Eurocentric critiques and perceptions of Black hair in the United States laid the groundwork for broader American critiques of cleanliness, hygiene, and the alleged lack of evidence of intelligence among African descended people. These critiques were in many ways a globalizing theme that brought a unified response in the mouth of Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) who affirmatively praised the texture and styling of Black hair and urged Black citizens of the world to "straighten their minds and not their hair."

West African Salon Posters and the Idealized African Self in 1980s Hip-Hop Culture

The context in which hair is depicted and presented matters. Examining the way in which Black hair is depicted in Black-hair-positive salon photos presents a stark contrast to European and American depictions of Black hair as unruly, uncivilized, and unkempt. In this way hair itself behaves as a hidden transcript of resistance. James Scott (1990) used this term to describe everyday forms of resistance among agricultural workers but as Robin D.G. Kelley (1997) points out, African Americans have a rich history of such traditions and these observations are certainly manifest in Black hair culture. Perhaps these traditions are better described as people affirming themselves and making conscious fashion

decisions about how to present idealized versions of themselves to each other and the world. These posters are important because they not only signify an idealized affirmation of Black aesthetic aspirations but also indicate the complex ways in which the marketing of these identities both appeal to Black audiences and challenge the prevailing aesthetics of a so-called Caucasian ideal.

To many black audiences these posters are indicative of not only familiar aesthetics regardless of geographic origins, but also the situational political aesthetics of salon culture. Whether encountering these posters in Lagos, Accra, Amsterdam, or Atlanta, there is a dynamic vernacular that affirms a common cultural aesthetic rooted in black hair.

Across media, whether painted as in the case of paintings by the wayside artists (TM-5773-6) or photographs as in the case of Nigeria (TM-5011-1), these images document primary accounts of a cultural chronology of aesthetics of black hair.

Figure 1
Ebenezer, City Boys Art, before 1998.

All figures in this article are listed at the end of the present article, with their archival location, and corresponding permissions.

Figure 2
Objecten Reclamebord van een kapper(szaak), 1978-06-22.

Figure 3
Objecten Reclamebord van een kapper
Togo, before 1983.

Figure 4
Objecten Reclamebord van een kapper
Nigeria, before 1986.

Beier (1971) and Christafano (2014) discuss the role wayside artists and others working with visual media play in shaping the aesthetics of Nigeria and Ghana. These salon posters evoke a particular aesthetic that is local to West Africa but also are in dialogue with apparently recognizable themes across the African Diaspora and particularly in the United States. The 1990s commentary on hair and counter-commentary made by Black hair took a prominent role within American hip-hop culture that both influenced and was influenced by West African hair aesthetic sensibilities.

Figure 5
Objecten Reclamebord van een kapper(szaak)
Benin, before 1987.

Figure 6
Objecten Reclamebord van een kapper(szaak)
Lagos, before 1988.

À votre choix (your selection) illustrates the role of these posters in showcasing a menu of options for a prospective patron of a salon but also an appeal to embrace a range of possibilities that invoke an affirmation of distinctly African aesthetics located in Benin. Many of these styles adopted outright or modified in an African American context and popularized without broader attribution to hip hop culture.

Figure 7
Kappersbord,
Ghana

Figure 8
Kappersbord,
Kameroen

The beauty salon is also a sacred space: films such as *Barbershop* (2002) and *Beauty Shop* (2005), and more recently and depicted in the exhibit *Hair Power* currently in Rotterdam through January 2024, the film by Derrick L. Middleton *Shape Up: Gay in the Black Barbershop* (2017) depict the importance of the beauty salon as a site of struggle and healing. The salon is also a place of support (emotional and family support). People gossip, but they also help each other deal with life's turmoil. The barber/beautician in some ways is at once the local griot or storyteller, the therapist and the healer, with clients/parishioners making the religiously recurring trips to the salon with steadfast attendance as regular occurring as adherents going to a church or a mosque.

Black Women and the Subversive Sex Lives of 'Borrowed' Hair

While much has been made of the role of India-sourced hair on the heads of African American women (Compaoré 2011), there is an alternate and more subversive reading of the afterlife of Indian hair and weave. Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's 2020 music video hit "WAP" embraced weave and wig culture as part of an unabashed sexual openness while sampling Frank Ski's and Al "T" McLaran's 1992 "Whores in this House." Another of Frank Ski's hits "Tony's Bitch Track, "features Miss Tony, a queer MC and club icon from Baltimore. Miss Tony was known for openness about his same sex attraction in the hypermasculine and homophobic rap-dominated 1990s but also for a line that became a schoolyard bullying chant, "Ooh bitch that ain't fair, Give that horsey back his hair! (Soderberg 2016; Shipley 2020)." The complexity of the put-down implies that a woman wearing a cheap weave or a wig derived from the hair of a horse was not playing by the aesthetic racial rules—she was stealing the hair of another creature to account for inability to grow flowing 1a tresses of her own.

This playground putdown that Black boys and men often hurled at Black girls and women combined the insults of describing their counterparts as bald-headed, *thieving*, and having equine-like qualities. It was both a gendered and a racial slur. The underside of the insult was to denigrate African-descended women who did not possess hair texture in the range of 1a to 2a that is often ascribed to Asian and Caucasian women. The painful sting of the comparison was the implied allegation that Black women were ugly or somehow less desirable because having the horse-like texture of 1a hair in the form of a wig or a weave would never put them on the same pedestal of beauty as Asian and Caucasian women. These verbal insults have been documented and quantified in the painful self-dialogue that often manifests in internalized self-hatred stemming from racialized skin and hair dissatisfaction (Harper & Choma 2019).

Of course such horrid insults makes several assumptions about the possession of characteristics of beauty and thereby power. They assume that beautiful hair must be naturally acquired and that Asian and Caucasian women themselves were not consumers and connoisseurs of weaves and wigs. Furthermore, these aesthetic calculations concede in a world dominated by European standards of beauty, that the display of beautiful hair rested solely in the domain of those with the power and the means to possess it while challenging those same aspirations among marginalized people. There is no widespread interrogation of the tendency of white folk to travel and get cornrows (e.g., Bo Derek, Kylie Jenner) or microbraids and the role of cultural appropriation in these contexts because of the assumed racial and economic positionality (Cheang 2016; Esders & Broeck 2020; DeLongoria 2018).

Here we find an important but often underexamined aspect of the aesthetics of hair. The possession of hair and the costs of its maintenance is deeply rooted in the politics of beauty, patriarchy, inequality, economy and power. As documented by what is now approaching a $7 billion dollar industry in weave and wigs

marketed to Black women (Green 2018), the control over one's appearance, even when that appearance may present paradoxical and contradictory messages about one's self image communicates messages about power, wealth, and status. As the film *Bad Hair* (2020) suggests, all of these themes are reinforced in a capitalist society within notions of beauty and the idealized self (Artavia 2020; Simien 2020).

We should find it no more disturbing that Black women wear wigs and readily change their wigs or weaves than we find it unnatural that many of the founders of the United States also wore powdered wigs made of goat and horsehair as was the custom in England and other parts of Europe and its colonies (King 2007; Marknäs 2021). To this day, judges in Nigeria, Bermuda, Jamaica, continue the practice of wearing this relic of colonial power as a signifier of authority. Some Hasidic Jewish women shave their heads in observation of their interpretation of the rules of modesty and wear wigs (See for example *Heads and Tails* (2019) directed by Aylin Kuryel, about the hair market.)

The subversive racial role of weave/wig culture is played out in a national and a global context, where the desirability and sexuality of Black women is constantly juxtaposed against the value of Black lives. In this context weaves can be seen as a mask of sorts, an attempt to negotiate power and signal an affirmation of one's humanity by appropriating/adopting/possessing the manes of others. In the absence of traditions of ceremonial mask making and wearing, is it possible that weave/wigs in Black diasporic contexts have taken on new roles that evoke historical themes in light of contemporary social needs?

There is no way to effectively approximate this relationship by displaying a wig in a museum setting or by hanging weave from the walls. However, there are historical counterparts to this dynamic that are useful though not identical to explore this concept. For example, the prevalence of the *irukere* (Yoruba) or horse

hair whisk, prevalent in Western Africa but also throughout the continent, is an important pre-colonial signifier of status. Horses were largely introduced into Western Africa around 262 BC and due to the conditions they encountered there became somewhat rare. The horse hair whisk however became embedded as a ceremonial signifier of status for kings, chieftains, and other rulers.

Figure 9
Hoofdband,
Niger

Figure 10
Hoofdsieraad: pluim,
Niger

In Yoruba traditional religious stories, Obatala carries an *irukere funfun* (white flywisk) in his right hand and Oya carries a *irukere dudu* (black flywhisk) in her right hand (Brodie 1992, p.73; Campbell in Olupuna 2016). The significance of this item did not carry a signifier of beauty but rather of power. The possession of animal hair and display of it was an acknowledgement of wealth. Other items, like the *umnftwana* (TM-2724-28) also elicited such themes of power as existing not from the beauty of hair growing naturally from the scalp but being possessed and wielded by the recipient and the bearer.

While it is not rare to see hair depicted in African pre-colonial art, with some exceptions the depiction of hair became much more pronounced in African artwork during the colonial and post-colonial era. This tendency may be ascribed to the increased contact that Africans had with Europeans and particularly European reactions and depictions of their own hair. We have early encounters of Africans describing European/Caucasian 1a hair types (Northrup).

"A man who cuts his hair is like a tree without leaves"
- Rastafarian proverb

Black Men's Long Hair as a Transcript and Site of Resistance

Moving from these examples, we can see how it can be complicated to present hair in a space devoid of the broader commentary surrounding it. Black ownership of hair is a complicated affirmation of identity and beauty but also a signifier of one's relationship to a broader dominating Euro-centric aesthetic. Across cultures, hair is largely seen as an extension of one's identity. However, hair can also be perceived as a threat to norms of supremacy.

As hair can be physically owned and displayed as a form of empowerment and an expression of sexuality, it can also be willed as a signifier of resistance. The long history of attempts to legislate the length and texture of Black hair are largely without comparison. While there have been numerous prohibitions against the length of hair as uncivilized and then as unprofessional, complaints against the texture of hair have largely been level towards persons of African descent. How Black folk have responded in many contexts of public and private space reveal the centrality of hair as a transcript of a narrative in resistance (Griffin 2019).

Among the Maasai in Kenya, long red braided hair becomes a signifier of masculinity and preparedness for war, taking on multiple meanings in a (post)modern context (Hodgson 2001).

Figure 11
Henk van Rinsum,
Masai krijgers tijdens een dans,
Kenia 1973.

Figure 12
Henk van Rinsum,
Masai krijgers tijdens een dans,
Kenia 1973.

Figure 13
Henk van Rinsum,
Masai krijgers tijdens een dans,
Kenia 1973.

Figure 14
Henk van Rinsum,
Masai krijgers tijdens een dans,
Kenia 1973.

Figure 15
Henk van Rinsum,
Masai krijgers tijdens een dans,
Kenia 1973.

Figure 16
Henk van Rinsum,
Masai krijgers tijdens een afweeroefening met het schild,
Kenia 1973.

Facing the challenge of a globalization of commercial exchange, some of these men have turned to professions as hairdressers and gigolos servicing white women from Europe in search of exotic romance. Touching a woman's head is strictly forbidden in traditional Massai culture but this shift is an example of how a hairdressing skill learned during the rite of passage (*moranhood*) is transformed by the economic, racial, and gendered dynamics of globalization (Mohamed 2008; Melu 2014). The 'spinning' and dyeing of the young boys' heads red as they undergo a transition in the traditional ceremony demonstrates historical symbolism of hair coming into contrast with modern sensibilities of gendered stylings and conflicting norms of Eurocentric masculine self-image.

Comparably, in the United States the African American barbershop is often a location of honest racial and political dialogue. While the space has long been heralded as a sanctuary for men, it has also been problematized as a haven for homophobia and misogyny. The work of Derrick Middleton (2016), as mentioned above, Clyde Franklin (1985) and Q.T. Mills (2005) have all explored the contradictions and complementary role that the African American barbershop plays in Black identity formation and political activity.

In many historical and cultural contexts, men congregating to cut their hair is also as important as men taking on an identity based on long hair as a signifier of masculine virility and warrior identity. However, the process of modernization that foregrounded European aesthetics increasingly attempted to shorten and unplait the hair as a sign of domination (Hickey 1977). There are infamous stories of Native American populations in the United States having their long hair forcibly shorn via policies of civilization and professionalized standards (Zahniser 1994) and Chinese American immigrants to the United States being ridiculed and attacked for their long queue braids (Fernandez & Brookshaw 2004; Metzger 2014). In the evolution of a lore around the matted hair of Rastafarians in Jamaica so disturbed the British that they described the flowing locks as dreadful. According to Mastalia and Pagano (1997), "In

the Rastaman's lions mane of locks, British imperialists saw their worst nightmare manifest–the African primitive unleashed" (12). All of these confrontations with so-called notions of civilization and manliness played out in themes of race and aesthetics of hair.

During the 1990s, as Black men denigrated Black women for having short hair, many men entered a phase of baldness as a sign of athletic masculinity. This aesthetic was popularized by Michael Jordan and Tupac Shakur whose scalpy alpha male aesthetic was challenged by cornrowed youth and other long hairstyles that were associated with street life. These themes continued well into the 21st century as the resurgence of the man bun and the persistence of locks and braids among Black men in the African Diaspora have become signifiers of gendered and cultural aesthetics of power. These articulations of gendered aesthetics of masculinity were complicated by numerous contradictions. Gang members in Chicago turned to the earlier aesthetic of straightened / processed hair to underscore their relationship to a particular clique. Pimp culture also was evidenced by long processed hair, an apparent articulation of defiance to respectable politics regarding sexuality, criminality, and masculinity. The Black pimps of Detroit sported straightened hair and characterized themselves as pretty, even as they exploited and denigrated the women trafficked on the street.

Fetishizing of Black men with locs and appropriation of Black hair in Japan (Cornyetz 1994) as noted for example in Vince Brown's narration to *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness* (2009), directed by Llewellyn Smith.
Amidst all of this clamoring to present an idealized image in a world that hated Black hair, we see the attempts to manipulate the presentation of hair and to develop aesthetics that affirmed the autonomy of Black life even as it was victimized.

The military placed strict restrictions on the length of Black hair and permitted styles. Professional life declared that for Black men and women to wear hair in an Afro style was contradictory to norms of

professionalism. The language of professionalism took root in the 1970s as many Black youth were spurning the processed hairstyles of their fathers and mothers and donning Afros. In this context, the emergence of fisted comb and picks, represented an exclamation upon an already highly politicized style not merely as a technology to facilitate the securing of long hair in place. The comb and pic in this context served as an amplifier of a message already articulated by the subtext of Black 'natural' hair styles (Ashton 2014, Gittens, Kwami McMillan; Tulloch 2008; Coote 2007).

Figure 17
Haarkam,
Afrika

Figure 18
Haarkam,
Afrika

Figure 19
Kam,
Ivoorkust

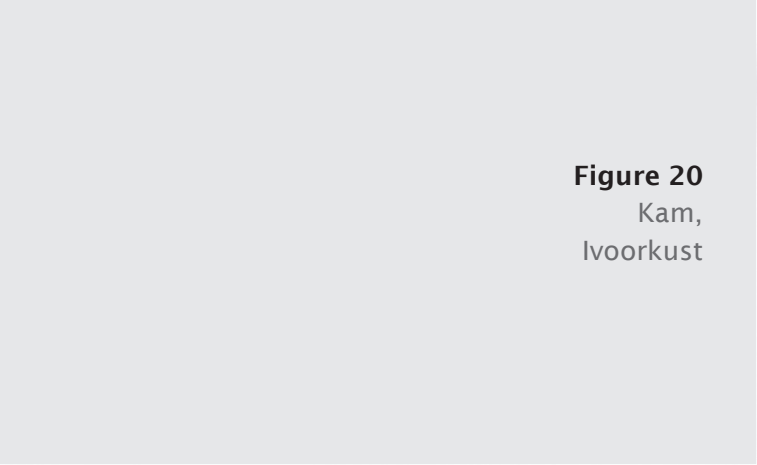

Figure 20
Kam,
Ivoorkust

Figure 21
Kam,
Ivoorkust

These themes continued well into the 21st century as the resurgence of the man bun and the persistence of locks and braids among Black American men have become signifiers of gendered and cultural aesthetics of power.

Conclusion

Hair is fundamentally linked to issues of race, class, gender, culture, identity and power. It is the physical manifestation of an intersectional nexus that connects these aforementioned issues and has real impact on the ways in which we interact with others based on our own positionalities.

The recent commercial by Dr. Dre, "Do You Love Me" featuring Naomi Osaka, is another example that highlights the close ties between Black aesthetics of hair and skin, popular culture, and the implications of these mediated encounters. The two-minute commercial presents various Black people with different skin tones, and a variety of hairstyles.

Meanwhile, in the background the narrator recites a poetry-song reminiscent of one of the most important rappers and songwriter of the 20th century Tupac Shakur (also known as 2Pac and Makaveli). The narrator states as if a refrain from a song: "You love me, you love me not…You love Black culture but do you love me? You love how I sound.. You love how I look, my hair, this skin but me no. We don't get to exist we are forced to survive… There is history in our skin… We build this country on our back…We're going to be us… We are going to define gravity. You love my culture but do you love me? What a world that would be."

Listening to these hair stories across time, space, cultures, and identities pushed us to think about our own hair stories and how experiences of our own hair might be told and shown in museums around the world.

We began our loc journey during a time when we would get plenty of stares and raised eyebrows, as the style was just beginning to take root in hip hop culture. Many Americans associated locs with lawlessness and violence and hair provided justification for all kinds of prejudices that contrasted with our lives as academic. When we

engage people about our livelihoods, they are still as surprised today as when we began our loc'd hair journeys nearly twenty years ago. Hair is a transcript, condensing a lot of racial perceptions into a braided or loc'd thread, that weaves our gendered, geographic, social, and political realities together for all the world to read. The collective story of our hair is a documentary of Black aesthetics over the last forty years from fades to bald, from cornrows to twists to locs and brotherlocs, each style reflects an era of popular culture. Musing about the past in this way is not new but what we find fascinating is the implicit racial politics and infraracial gendered interactions that have always accompanied the Black coiffure.

We are often approached by Black mothers and fathers who tell us how important it is for their children to see Black professionals with hair like ours. Several have told us that it is important for their children to see our hair to let them know that there is nothing wrong with them; dark skin and loc'ed hair is not (or shouldn't be) a barrier to pursuing one's dreams. While we cannot promise that we will don these locs forever, we can say that we will continue to share the message and the many stories of Black hair as one of the transcripts of the Black experience.

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Images

Figure 1: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
Coll.nr. TM-5773-6: City Boys Art.

Figure 2: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
Coll.nr. TM-4739-1: Reclamebord van een kapper(szaak), 1978-06-22.

Figure 3: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
Coll.nr. TM-4808-1: Reclamebord van een kapper, Togo voor 1983.

Figure 4: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
Coll.nr. TM-5011-1: Reclamebord van een kapper, Nigeria voor 1986.

Figure 5: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
Coll.nr. TM-5088-1: Reclamebord van een kapper(szaak), Benin voor 1987.

Figure 6: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
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Figure 7: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
Coll.nr. AM-609-101: Kappersbord, Ghana.

Figure 8: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
Coll.nr. AM-609-106: Kappersbord, Kameroen.

Figure 9: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
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Figure 10: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. WM-69383: Hoofdsieraad: pluim, Niger.

Figure 11: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. TM-20038840: Henk van Rinsum, Massai krijgers tijdens een dans, Kenia 1973.

Figure 12: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. TM-20038841: Henk van Rinsum, Massai krijgers tijdens een dans, Kenia 1973.

Figure 13: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. TM-20038842: Henk van Rinsum, Massai krijgers tijdens een dans, Kenia 1973.

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Figure 16: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. TM-20038845: Henk van Rinsum, Massai krijgers tijdens een afweeroefening met het schild, Kenia 1973.

Figure 17: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. WM-71292: Haarkam, Afrika.

Figure 18: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. WM-71293: Haarkam, Afrika.

Figure 19: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. WM-61808: Kam, Ivoorkust.

Figure 20: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. WM-61809: Kam, Ivoorkust.

Figure 21: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. WM-61810: Kam, Ivoorkust.