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## Journal for the Study of Religious Experience



### Studying the Body in Rastafari Rituals: Spirituality, Embodiment and Ethnographic Knowledge

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Rastafari spirituality is a nonsecular science that considers how various energies and powers influence socio-ecological systems. Rastafari people follow a number of spiritual prescriptions related to the body, including smoking, meditating, growing matted hair, eating an Afrocentric vegan diet and drumming/chanting. However, a person does not have to follow all of these practices to be Rastafari, rather they are means to achieve specific spiritual objectives. While anthropology is generally a secular discipline, by participating in various rituals, the body becomes an ethnographic tool that can lead to an awareness of how spiritual and material worlds interconnect. While I have collected data through conventional ethnographic methods, the most important insights have come through my own personal, bodily engagement in many Rastafari practices. Anthropological work on the 'spiritual body' provides a theoretical framework for making sense of experiences of embodied intersubjectivity that arise out of participation in various bodily rituals.

Keywords: spiritual body; ethnography; intersubjectivity; meditation; nonsecular anthropology

#### 1. Introduction

Tucked away in a secluded corner of Cannizaro Park, Wimbledon, UK is a weathered bust of His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, who lived in exile in England from 1936-40. Although he and his family resided at Fairfield House in Bath, the Emperor was said to be fond of Cannizaro Park, which he visited during a short stay in Wimbledon. Apparently the Emperor made such a positive impression on Wimbledon society that an amateur sculptress was inspired to carve the bust. On 23 July 2012 the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Ras Tafari Makonnen Woldemikael (who inspired the birth of the Rastafari movement when he was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930) there was a *groundation* celebration sponsored, planned and hosted by two nascent organisations: the Rastafari Council of Britain and the Rastafari Global Council. In addition to celebrating the birth of His Imperial Majesty and bringing together the diverse Rastafari community of London, the intention of the ceremony was to stake a spiritual claim on the grounds where the bust now rests, as a sacred space for Rastafari gatherings. I was invited to attend the celebration by the leaders of the two host organisations. I had even been involved in planning discussions for the event, including an unresolved debate about what the exact definition of a *groundation* is and how it differs from and/or encompasses other types of Rastafari ceremonies. Nevertheless, when I arrived at Cannizaro Park on that warm, sunny afternoon to help

set things up for the ceremony I felt a shyness, with which I had become familiar at the two Rastafari events that I attended at Fairfield House in the preceding months.

In those early days of my work with Rastafari, there were several reasons why I generally felt unsure of how to dress, what to say, how to act or what was expected of me (and how I might balance meeting certain expectations with my anthropological responsibilities). Rastafari gatherings in the UK bring together people from British, Jamaican, Trinidadian, Ghanaian, Ethiopian and many other backgrounds with which I (an American by birth) have varying degrees of cultural (un)familiarity and I was struggling with everything from greeting strangers appropriately to balancing multiple cultures of dining etiquette. Moreover, although 'white' individuals are generally tolerated, if not welcomed into it, Rastafari is a 'black' supremacy movement. While I have never found myself to be the only fair skinned person at a public Rastafari gathering, 'white' people stand out and may be put on the spot at any time. I also had a private, phenomenological crisis as I was faced with the realisation that I could not simultaneously sing, dance and shake a rattle (the standard musical role for women at the Rastafari ceremonies I have participated in), something I remember being able to do easily when I was younger.

MacPhee (2003) defines the spiritual body as a life force or mindful presence in the body. An emphasis on heightened sensory awareness differentiates the spiritual body from the individual body, the social body and the body politic (cf. Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). This paper is about ways of studying the embodiment of Rastafari spirituality and the bodily techniques that I have engaged in as an ethnographer, which on the occasion of the Cannizaro Park *groundation* helped me to be a spiritual body, ultimately able to overcome social anxieties and other mundane imperfections. This paper is also about the body in more private spiritual practices, particularly meditation, which make it possible to experience heightened states of consciousness, including intersubjectivity with the higher Self, and with other living selves. I argue that when spiritual practices are included in participant observation and combined with a focus on bodily experience the production of ethnographic knowledge is enhanced. I begin with a brief discussion of bodily participation in the production of ethnographic knowledge and its place in a nonsecular anthropology of religious/spiritual experience. I then present ethnographic descriptions of collective and private rituals, focusing on how they contribute to the (re)fabrication of the Rastafari body/self. Anthropological work on the (spiritual) body provides a theoretical framework for making sense of experiences of embodied intersubjectivity that challenge the distinctions between mind/body, spirit/matter, etc. and also makes for a more critically and corporeally engaged anthropology. I conclude that in Rastafari, embodying the divine is achieved through heightened states of consciousness, which are elicited by a variety of means that contribute to the production of ethnographic knowledge about spiritual power.

## 2. Embodying Ethnography

Cannell (2005) argues that anthropology was founded as a secular discipline that made an intellectual break with theology. For the most part, it is still generally a secular intellectual endeavour, in which valid knowledge is grounded in a rationality guided by reason (Kapferer 2001). This places anthropology at odds with the sincere embrace of spirituality as real (Bowie 2013; Perman 2010), as spiritual phenomena are explained away as social, political, cognitive and/or historical constructs. Positions of

secular neutrality can also prevent us from fully appreciating the inner experiences and motivations of the people we study (see Bowie 2003). Thus, anthropology often has to be anti-secular to overcome such blinding prejudices (Kapferer 2001). Moreover, secularism is not the same as atheism (i.e. denial of the existence of divinity), but rather the separation of divinity from the workings of ecology and society (Pina-Cabral 2001) and many anthropologists have their own spiritual beliefs and experiences in and out of the field. This has created a tension in anthropology between concealing religious experience as good secular scientists and revealing it as good reflective researchers (Stewart 2001). For example, in describing how she was transformed by ethnographic fieldwork with Amazonian (and other) shamans Glass-Coffin (2010: 212) writes 'when I begin to accept that outcomes of my actions and intentions toward normally unseen forces and powers have consequences in the material worlds, I have probably, at least for most of my colleagues in anthropology, "crossed over."'

Nevertheless, there appears to be a growing interest in new methodologies (e.g. cognitive empathetic engagement) for a nonsecular anthropology in which knowledge is an intersubjective creative engagement between selves (see Bowie 2013; Fountain 2013; Roberts 2016). Retsikas (2008) argues that the primary research vehicle for ethnographic understanding is the anthropologist's embodied, sensing and situated self. I began learning about Rastafari as a secular anthropologist, but using/acknowledging the body as an ethnographic tool led to experiences that opened my awareness to the interconnections between spiritual and material worlds. Holmes (2013) eloquently describes how his bodily experiences lent valuable insight into social suffering and power hierarchies in the lives of indigenous Mexican migrant workers in the United States. I have found that paying attention to the 'field notes offered by the body' (Holmes 2013: 57) is also of immense value in the study of spiritual power in the material world. However, before describing how they are valuable ethnographically, I must address a few methodological points.

My 'white,' female, American body has shaped my ethnographic knowledge of Rastafari, a (primarily) Jamaican 'black' power movement in the UK. As a body with 'white' skin, I can only ever have a partial view of the life experiences of the majority of Rastafari people. Moreover, Rastafari is extremely diverse and while some 'black' people are more than happy to share their lives with 'white' people (or even to do away with the labels black and white altogether), others find it difficult to relate to them and may even express wishes to exclude them from the movement. Working closely with two Jamaican men (first the founder of the Rastafari Global Council and later my partner/research assistant) has led to a bias toward male perspectives in the ethnographic knowledge I have produced. This has as much to do with skin colour as it does with gender dynamics. Of the relatively small number of women who have actively participated in my research activities over the years, the majority also has 'white' skin. A few of these women and several personal experiences have suggested to me that many 'black' Rastafari women (especially those raised in the UK) mistrust ostensibly single 'white' women, who are perceived to be competing for the affections of 'black' men. They may especially dislike 'white' women in 'mixed-race' relationships. In contrast, I have found that 'black' men are generally more ready to accept that I am actually an anthropologist who is interested in Rastafari and are less concerned with who my partner may or may not be. At the same time, I am a woman and for that reason alone there are certain things that men won't or can't talk to me about.

In my work with Rastafari I have participated in countless *reasonings* (ritual discussions), as well as more formal interviews. The main difference between *reasonings* and conventional semi-structured interviews is that the former are co-constructed equally among all participants, rather than led by the researcher. As such, *reasoning* can generate ethnographic data that is participant-led to complement responses to the questions posed by the researcher, giving rise to new insights. *Reasoning* is further distinguished from focus group discussions by the rituals that accompany it. For example, while *reasoning*, many people hold their hands in a specific configuration that is meant to focus the mind. Smoking *herbs* (cannabis) is also a frequent accompaniment to *reasoning* (which often deals with controversial topics), because it helps many people to stay calm and not take things personally. Many of the *reasonings* I have participated in have taken place during ceremonies and other public gatherings, but some have been more intimate in nature. While *reasonings* have been a significant part of my ethnographic work more broadly, this paper is more focused on other rituals (and other forms of participant observation) that involve bodily engagement. In particular, I return to the Cannizaro Park *groundation* and expand on the body's role in various aspects of such collective ceremonies. I then take a more introspective turn and explore meditation and ecstatic trance, as well as their potential as ethnographic methods. Both ethnographic reflections can be made sense of within the theoretical construct of the spiritual body.

### 3. Collective Rituals and the Rastafari Spiritual Body

In Rastafari, there are collective rituals that combine drumming, chanting (i.e. singing) and dancing, which can put participants in altered states of consciousness, with or without smoking *herbs*. A month or so prior to the Cannizaro Park *groundation*, when I met with the leaders of the two host organisations we discussed whether they should have a *groundation* or a *binghi*, or indeed whether a *binghi* was a part of a *groundation* (or vice versa). Ceremonies of the Nyahbinghi Order of Rastafari, usually referred to as *binghis*, increase the health and spiritual power of the participants so that African repatriation (and other aims of the movement) may be realised. In London *binghis* are organised by the Nyahbinghi Council to celebrate important holy days. They take place in a large room with an altar in the middle. On the altar (a table covered with white cloths, flowers and the Ethiopian flag) are pictures of Haile Selassie I and copies of various Rastafari holy books. Drums are arranged in a semi-circle around the altar in the far end of the room and chairs are set up along the wall near the entrance. While the men drum, women of the Nyahbinghi Order dance and sing around the side of the altar and use shakers and trumpets. *Binghis* are open to anyone with 'clean hands and pure heart' who wishes to pay respect to Haile Selassie I, so there is also a large crowd of men and women from all corners of Rastafari who dance and sing. While less intense than Jamaican *binghis*, which can go on for weeks, London ceremonies last until well after dawn, with dancing, singing and drumming punctuated by *reasonings*, sermons, naps in the chairs and breaks in the kitchen or around the fire outside the building.

In contrast, *groundations* seem to have something to do with making a connection to a specific place, as well as generating energy/spiritual power to fuel various *works* (projects). Because I reached the Cannizaro Park *groundation* early, I had time to relax in the sun and walk barefoot in the lush, inviting green grass before the crowd arrived,

which seemed to prove helpful in dampening my usual fieldwork (and performance) anxieties. I was hungry when I arrived at the park (after skipping lunch) but was distracted from eating the snack I had brought by the leader of the Rastafari Council of Britain who was growing more and more anxious about the late arrival of his colleagues from the Rastafari Global Council. Apparently, they were late because there was a delay with a cake they had specially commissioned for the event. He asked me to ring them (as they had stopped answering his many calls) and tell them to give up on the cake and “just bring the drums and the (dread)locks.” My call was answered and I was assured that the cake was in hand and they were on the way. They arrived just as the ceremony was beginning with the cake, as well as drums, candles, incense, Ethiopian flags and a *chalice* (water-pipe), which is used to smoke *herbs*. The *groundation* opened with prayers, chanting and drumming. The hosts looked stunning dressed all in white; the leader of the Rastafari Council of Britain, with his crewcut, in matching white suit and wingtips and the head of the Rastafari Global Council in a white dashiki and turban. To my relief he was also barefoot, as I had become very conscious that everyone else in the gathering crowd had kept their shoes on.

In Rastafari the way the body is groomed and clothed can help (or hinder) the fulfillment of various spiritual (not to mention social) objectives. Wearing matted hair, commonly known as ‘dreadlocks’ or *locks*, is as emblematic of Rastafari as smoking *herbs*. For many people who wear the hairstyle it is related to the Nazarite vow to let the hair grow naturally, without trimming or shaving it. However, not all Rastafari people wear *locks* and not all people who wear dreadlocks are Rastafari. Many Rastafari people who wear *locks* experience them as a conduit of spiritual energy that is captured during meditation. The head is considered to be the most important part of the body as it is the closest to the heavens, the seat of the intellect and contains a critical mass of the body’s sensory organs. In meditation, cosmic energy is said to come through the head to heal and energise the rest of the body. Hair channels this energy and the more hair the wider the antennae for capturing and holding it.

Covering the hair protects it from undesirable energies and pollution from the environment (not to mention lice), but at *binghis*, it is important for men, especially drummers to uncover their ‘spiritual antennae.’ This can cause tension when men of the Boboshanti Order, who always wear turbans in public, wish to pay their respects to His Imperial Majesty at a *binghi*. In London this issue was resolved by an agreement that Boboshanti men can keep their turbans on while attending a *binghi*, as long as they are also wearing their traditional robes (an expression of modesty and humbleness). Other Rastafari men may wear robes or dashikis on special occasions and cover their hair with a turban, but tams (large knit hats) are also popular (at least in the older generations), along with military fashions. I have seen several different dress styles among Rastafari women in the UK. The Ethiopian style is white robes, with turbans covered by a separate scarf that hangs down the sides of the head. Some women dress in West African style gowns with matching head wraps. Others dress in more European styles. But for Nyahbinghi, Boboshanti and many other Rastafari women skirts are worn long and the shoulders and hair are covered, at least in public.

In many respects, following Nyahbinghi dress code (which I do whenever I attend a Rastafari event) is not a huge deviation from my normal way of dressing. I decided many years ago to let my body hair grow because shaving it was destroying my skin, so my wardrobe is full of ankle length skirts and tops that cover my shoulders and

underarms. Moreover, while I generally keep the long hair on my head combed, I do wear it covered in public (albeit by a hat, rather than a turban) when I don't have time to comb it out (or when I'm attending a Rastafari event). I am well aware of the difference in attention that I receive (and the self-confidence that I feel) when I wear my hair down and when I wear it covered (or pulled back in a bun or plait), mainly from men, but also from women. While I have always felt my most self-confident when my hair is down and typically wear it that way on important public occasions in my professional life, I have found that keeping my hair pulled back, if not covered is helpful in maintaining a sense of humility and focus on work.

The colours of headwear and clothing may also be ritualised in Rastafari. Boboshanti are meant to wear a specific colour of turban each day of the week. These colours include the emblematic red, gold and green (worn on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday respectively), as well as 'planetary' colours (purple on Wednesday, blue on Thursday) that are said to align with astrological forces. The black worn on Friday contrasts with the Saturday Sabbath white. There are also colours associated with the 10 faculties of divine human consciousness (*Neteru*), which are fundamental to the Pan-African 'Ausarian' religious system that is growing in popularity within some sections of the Rastafari movement. The Ausar-Auset Society was founded in Harlem, New York by Dr. Ra Un Nefer Amen in 1973 to provide Afrocentric spiritual teachings to the African diaspora. Similar to Rastafari, the teachings of Ra Un Nefer Amen are influenced by Asian (particularly Yoga and Traditional Chinese Medicine), as well as African (especially Ancient Egyptian/Kemetic), spiritual practices. Each day of the week corresponds with a different *Neter* that in turn is associated with a distinct colour or colour combination. The body may be clothed in these colours to enhance its ability to manifest the corresponding divine qualities.

One aspect of my wardrobe that has changed over the years is the colour palette, largely as the result of a habit that I developed of wearing the colours associated with the various *Neteru* on different days of the week. If nothing else, this manner of dressing is an excellent way of remembering to pay attention to the various faculties of consciousness and their associated attributes (i.e. leadership, nurturance, justice, intellect, balance, intuition, joy and inner peace) every day of the week. However, this is not to say that I didn't struggle with my clothing when I started attending Rastafari gatherings. The first time I went to Fairfield House I made the mistake of wearing a long white cardigan (cum robe) over a black skirt. Although black is the planetary colour associated with Saturday (the day of the week on which the event took place) and many Rastafari, especially Boboshanti, wear white on the (Saturday) Sabbath, I found out too late that the combination apparently could also be taken as white symbolically dominating over black. At the Cannizaro Park *groundation* I wore a gold and green dress with my red hat. I was happy that I also chanced wearing the white cardigan again, as this time it sent the appropriate message, harmonising me with the colour schemes of the hosts' and the crowd's attire.

Food is also an important component of Rastafari events and eating/drinking are important spiritual practices for many Rastafari people. Feeding the body an Afrocentric vegan diet is linked to a strong ecological ethic within Rastafari, which includes being a steward to the earth by protecting it and keeping it clean, productive and free from the chemical fertilisers and herbicides that oppress both land and people (Dickerson 2004). In Jamaica, Rastafari farmers developed a system of agricultural

production and consumption known as *ital*, which involves a commitment to cultivating and using agricultural products in their natural states (Edmonds 1998). *Ital* agricultural techniques are similar to those of organic and biodynamic farming. The term *ital* is derived from 'vital' and implies purity as well as naturalness. *Ital* foods (i.e. vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes and nuts) and (herbal) medicines are prepared only with ingredients that are vital to proper bodily function. Thus, simple raw foods are an important component of an *ital* diet and cooked food should be unadulterated by salt. In many respects, the *ital* way of eating was developed intuitively, following logic such as avoiding food from under the ground when seeking spiritual upliftment (Morgan 2013). Although there are regional variations *ital* cuisine is generally comprised of West Indian and African recipes, with some innovations inspired by European vegan cooking.

Eating *ital* re-grounds the body within the physical and social environment (Dickerson 2004). It is also a way to keep the body purified, along with intermittent fasting, drinking pure spring water and consuming roots tonics and other herbal remedies. Jamaican roots tonics are deep decoctions of *Smilax sp.* and a variety of other roots, barks, and leaves that may be sweetened with sugar/molasses and/or fermented (Mitchell 2011; van Andel et al. 2012). They have a history of use as general strengtheners and purgatives but are now often marketed as aphrodisiacs to boost male sexual potency (van Andel et al. 2012). Many Rastafari roots tonics are different from the commercially marketed aphrodisiacs, as they come in a variety of formulas for men, women and even children. They are taken to purge the blood (and sometimes the gut or womb) of impurities and to make the body strong. Keeping the body clean and pure through these various consumptive practices is linked to healing powers and immortality, in the sense that some *italists* claim that they can remember past lives on Earth.

Although I have yet to keep up an *ital* diet for long enough to remember any previous incarnations on Earth, I do still remember a distinct lightness in my body that resulted from a long afternoon in the sunshine combined with my inadvertent fast on the day of the Cannizaro Park *groundation*. The feeling was not altogether unpleasant but it did exacerbate my musical and kinaesthetic challenges. It was the cake, which had caused so much anxiety earlier, that helped me to transcend them. Just before making a speech about the life and works of Haile Selassie I, the head of the Rastafari Council of Britain cut the cake, which was a beautiful masterpiece, expertly decorated with an image of His Imperial Majesty in fondant icing. He invited me to be the first to taste the cake, which we were informed was completely *ital*. The cake tasted even better than it looked and I happily invited the rest of the participants to partake of some. As I ate the cake while listening to the speech, I felt a change in my energy (and my blood sugar level) and for the rest of the ceremony found it easier to keep in time with the drums and to dance and shake the rattle at the same time. By the time the head of the Rastafari Global Council opened the floor to any participants who wished to share a 'word-sound,' I was feeling so energised and extroverted that I spoke publicly at a Rastafari event for the first time, albeit only a few words of thanks. In the cloud of smoke that perfumed the air on that summer evening in Cannizaro Park, confident in my appearance, after fasting, dancing barefoot on a sacred site and eating pure, natural food, I was a spiritual body.



#### 4. The Body in Private Ritual

Away from the public, ceremonial context, I also learned to be a spiritual body through practicing some of the rituals that are popular in Rastafari. Just as Amazonian peoples are focused on a predator/prey dialectic, there is a Pan-African preoccupation with master/slave polemics. One of the main spiritual aims of many branches of Rastafari is becoming master of the self, rather than master (or slave) of an other. Reflecting East African and Hindu roots of the movement, this is achieved through a variety of rituals for embodying the 'higher Self' that precedes the earthly body and lives on after its death. As the head of the Rastafari Global Council explains, although the body is just an 'Earth suit,' it is the higher Self's most important creation because it is a vehicle for action. He shares an African ontological perspective in which there is no distinction between matter and spirit. As he describes, all matter and energy in the universe are made of spirit and the body is spirit in its densest form. Therefore, the body can be used to make things happen in the spiritual realm, while happenings in the spiritual world are manifested in the body and its earthly environment.

In my ethnographic work, the bodily practice that has most increased my consciousness of spiritual power is meditation. My first year of learning about Rastafari consisted primarily of working with the head of the Rastafari Global Council who gave me initial instruction in Rastafari theology, history and culture. One of the many things we *reasoned* about regularly, were various types of meditative and trance states and I was encouraged to practice the meditative state in which the mind is completely still and quiet. I have been an intermittent yoga student since I was a teenager but at that point had never been able to still my mind for more than a few seconds and was generally reluctant to sit and meditate for very long. In fact, it was the sitting position that made my attempts at Rastafari meditation much more successful. Rather than sitting crossed-legged on the floor, I was encouraged to sit in the 'throne' position, on the edge of a chair, as befits a divine King or Queen. I found this position to be infinitely more comfortable and could stay in it for much longer periods of time. Eventually, I figured out how to keep my mind still by focusing on the sensation of energy running freely through my body (or perhaps I figured out how to sense the energy running through my body by keeping my mind still). At one point, I experienced a sensation that I recognised from my yoga teacher's descriptions of opening the heart *chakra*. I am now able to open this *chakra* at will and can send energy back out from it. These new abilities certainly allow me to ease my body when it is tense or in pain, though I have yet to determine whether my attempts at directing healing energy toward others have had any appreciable effect.

I was also instructed in the 'Ausarian' meditations, which involve visualisations and chanting Kemetic words of power (*hekau*), which can be done with or without recordings of guided meditations by Ra Un Nefer Amen. There are different *hekau* that correlate with the *Neteru* that govern the days of the week and chanting them can help invoke their corresponding divine qualities. Visualisations involve connection with the higher Self to learn one's destiny and plan for a successful life path. It is also possible to connect and communicate with the higher Self through ecstatic trance. As described in Congo-Nyah et al. (2013: 271) ecstatic trance 'is the highly receptive midpoint between sleep and wakefulness; between the subjective/ objective, conscious/unconscious, material/etheric, higher/lower self, etc. In ecstatic trance we can bridge the gap between the "two worlds" and communicate with/from the higher

Self and The Source.' It is during ecstatic trance that the mind can be (re)programmed with visualisations of desired life outcomes.

Smoking *herbs* is the most iconic method of achieving ecstatic trance in Rastafari and is also used as an aid in other types of meditation (see Congo-Nyah et al. 2013), which is why the plant is considered to be sacred. However, smoking is also considered to be a 'professional' activity that requires knowledge and experience (Waldstein n.d.). It can take years of heavy smoking to reach the highest states of Rastafari consciousness (including ecstatic trance), which means that smokers' bodies must be able to accommodate large amounts of smoke (and all of the chemical messengers that infuse it), which involves the fabrication of a new sort of 'self-body.' In Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea, habitual cannabis smokers are viewed as transforming their bodies into 'drug bodies' that are easy going, confident and social. That is, cannabis is ascribed an ability to transform bodies that other drugs don't have (Halvaksz 2006). African Caribbean peoples (especially smokers) tend to dichotomise cannabis and other drugs and in Rastafari, *herbs* is not recognised as a drug at all, but rather an agricultural product. Nevertheless *herbs* appears to have an ability to help transform/re-make the bodies of Rastafari smokers so that they can communicate with the higher Self. This ability offers smokers insights and esoteric knowledge as they learn to interpret and follow their intuition. Devisch (2012) defines divination as a form of intuitive and acute bodily sensory perceptiveness. It would seem that smoking *herbs* is helpful to many people as they learn to predict the future or know what others are thinking, based on bodily intuitions in ecstatic trance.

Ecstatic trance can also be achieved through sex (Congo-Nyah et al. 2013). While this necessitates partnership and intimate contact with another person, in Rastafari sex is still a private matter between man, woman and *Jah* (the Creator). However, this is not to say that the subjects of fertility and reproduction are never discussed. Moreover social media provides just enough anonymity that from time to time there are postings about sex on various Rastafari Facebook groups, raising issues that might be more difficult to broach face to face. In the material that I have seen (e.g. Nyahbinghi sexual code of conduct) there is an affinity with both Tantric and Biblical directives. For example, some of it is reminiscent of the Evangelical sex manuals described by DeRogatis (2009), which suggest that the main point of sex is unification with God, while enjoyment and even reproduction are secondary. There is some recognition in Rastafari that sex is important for more than conceiving children alone. With practice and care, the procreative energy of sex can be channelled into making ideas and aspirations (as well as children) become manifest. Thus, even the infertile or those beyond reproductive age can benefit from sex because it can lead to ecstatic trance and other divine experiences. Nevertheless, in Rastafari, conceiving, developing and raising children are important social obligations and are also necessary to reach the highest levels of spiritual consciousness. This is why homosexuality is seen to prohibit people from reaching their fullest spiritual potential and helps explain Rastafari's reputation for homophobia.

It is personally challenging and somewhat risky to write about the experience of ecstatic trance because the ways it is generally entered in Rastafari are taboo. The private nature of sex in Rastafari is compatible with both my relatively puritan upbringing and natural introversion. Moreover, in the current climate of British cannabis prohibition personal smoking habits are also best left private. Nevertheless,

there have been times when I have reached that state, one way or another, and have found it to be helpful in sensing connections between myself and the rest of creation and in applying the power of positive thinking to make things happen in the world. This connection between the self and the cosmos is a core feature of Watts' (1968) description of psychedelic/religious experience. With practice, it is possible to focus this unification on the embodied self and other specific embodied selves (e.g. between ethnographer and research participants). When it is possible to experience the self as other in ecstatic trance and similar meditative states it becomes easier to interpret both what is and is not said in interviews and *reasonings*. For example, I have had to make inferences about sexual relations and spirituality in Rastafari based on *reasonings* about homosexuality, as people are more willing to weigh in on this contentious topic, rather than discuss their own private sexual lives.

My ability to make such inferences was increased by my expanding sense of mindful embodiment that came from meditation. As Okely (2008) describes, anthropological encounters are more than periods of fieldwork alone, especially when this work takes place within the geographic context in which the anthropologist is normally resident. In such situations anthropology is 'infused with years of ideological representations, flotsam and fragments which are carried as internal baggage. These like the disjointed poems in the surrealist's imagination, may come to fruition and make sense years and dreams and events later' (Okely 2008: 67). I have found that meditation can allow such 'internal baggage' to resurface and is also a powerful and efficient way of making sense of it. As discussed in the next section, the intersubjectivity or shared consciousness that can be reached with other selves in meditation is related to the dissolution of mind/body dualism.

## 5. The Self, Other Selves and Ethnographic Knowledge

MacPhee (2003) argues that symbolic analysis is limited because it is predicated on an assumption of connections between a discrete mind and body, which obscures the link between healing and spirituality in anthropology. Likewise, studies of spirit mediumship have historically pathologised the phenomenon because they were grounded on a Western notion of a bounded self (Pierini 2016). Perhaps the greatest impediment to understanding religious sentiments and spiritual logics is the inability or reluctance of the researcher to break free of the Cartesian distinctions between mind/body, self/other, matter/spirit and natural/supernatural. Moreover, the Cartesian division between subject and object tends to place the body in the same ontological category as the objects of physical science (Jackson 2012). While anthropologists may recognise the significance of embodiment in the people they study, they may ignore or downplay their own bodies in the course of their research. However, embodiment as a technique of ethnographic research subjectifies and intersubjectifies the body, with phenomenological, theoretical and theological implications. More specifically, an ethnographer's ability to experience monism between self and other, not to mention other aspects of spirituality, depends largely on rituals of the body and other technologies of the self. Glass-Coffin (2010) argues that sometimes it is necessary to suspend participant observation and fully embrace new states of consciousness for transformational insights to occur. But rather than destroy objectivity this immersion facilitates bodily knowledge (Bowie 2013), which can be reflected upon later from a more secular anthropological perspective. Ultimately, our ability as ethnographers to

make different cultural/social/spiritual perspectives mutually intelligible lies in our ability to pass back and forth between dualistic, monistic and other ontologies.

Breaking down mind-body dualism is not to deny the experience of non-embodied states of consciousness, but rather to reconfigure the continuum of body, mind, consciousness and self. Phenomenologies of multiple modes of experience do not necessarily replicate the mind-body dualism that underlies both biomedical (and other scientific) theories and Western religious philosophies (see Halliburton 2002). The Rastafari concept of a higher Self that precedes and lives beyond the earthly body does not imply a dichotomy between mind/self and body. Mind, body, self, other, matter and spirit are unified in earthly existence, which is reflected in language. One of the most distinctive features of Rastafari speech is use of the pronoun *InI* (derived from I and I) in place of I, me, we and us, which reminds the speaker of the shared source from which all life comes (Congo-Nyah et al. 2013). That is, an emphasis on the unity of self and other is codified in Rastafari language. Access to experiences of such unification between the self and others can also be gained through attention to embodiment. As Jackson (2012: 70) writes:

to recognize the embodied character of our being-in-the-world is to discover a common ground where self and other are one, for by using one's body in the same way as others in the same environment, one finds oneself informed by an understanding that... remains grounded in a field of practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those among whom one has lived.

By using my body in a Rastafari way during meditation (e.g. sitting in the throne position, chanting *hekau*) I was able to achieve the effect Jackson describes, even in the privacy of my own home.

Theories of the body in medical anthropology are particularly helpful in reconfiguring dualist perspectives on the world and are also useful for understanding the place of embodiment in the production of ethnographic knowledge. In an attempt to transcend mind-body dualism with a 'mindful body' Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) draw on multiple alternatives, from various religious philosophies. For example, wholes may be conceived as harmonious, in which everything from the cosmos to individual organs is understood as a single unit. Or there is holistic (balanced) complementarity, in which the cosmos is understood as a state of dynamic equilibrium, oscillating between two poles (e.g. yin/yang). For Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), the mindful body is an overlap of the individual body (the embodied self, existing apart from other individual bodies), the social body (the body as symbolic of nature, society and culture) and the body politic (regulation, surveillance and control of bodies), which represent three separate units of analysis and three different theoretical approaches (phenomenology, structuralism/symbolism, poststructuralism). My exploration of the spiritual body within the ethnographic context of Rastafari, builds on these earlier conceptions, in the era of the ontological turn and post-humanism. By learning techniques for cultivating spiritual bodies in different cultural contexts, ethnographers can gain experiences that breakdown dualities between matter and spirit, offering new insights on the anthropological distinction between knowledge and belief, as well as the relationship between higher and embodied selves.

The spiritual body is similar to the mindful body concept proposed by Scheper-Hughes and Lock, but has a greater focus on the senses. As MacPhee (2003) describes,

Saharan housewives become spiritual bodies by learning to sense and connect pleasant sensations from the heart that radiate throughout the rest of the body. This definition of the spiritual body echoes Fernandez' (1990) description of the progression from sordid to spiritual body in Bwiti rituals by freeing blockages in flows of vital life processes. MacPhee (2003) explains that Islamic practices such as daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan and giving alms to the poor are thought to contribute towards religious merit and salvation. In Rastafari, similar practices are a means to achieve specific spiritual (and ultimately political) objectives, namely immortality (through reincarnation), intuition and the manifestation of divine will on Earth. Thus, one of the most interesting questions that has arisen from my work with Rastafari in the UK is whether Rastafari spiritual bodies can really do things that other bodies cannot do (e.g. divine and give oracles, remember past lives).

Answering this question requires looking at embodied spiritual experiences as knowledge, rather than belief. Anthropology has a relatively long history of contrasting scientific knowledge with religious belief, although more recently some of the problems inherent in defining religion in terms of belief (and beliefs through the category supernatural) have been acknowledged (see Keane 2008). Nevertheless, while spirit belief may be taken seriously, knowledge claims are still generally rejected (Hufford 2010). But what happens when we look at spiritual experiences, rather than beliefs? As McIntosh (2006) describes, Kenyans of European descent know they aren't supposed to accept African metaphysics as real, but many have had experiences that challenge this ideology. In a similar manner, people from North America and Europe who apprentice with Peruvian shamans, may eventually come to accept the existence of sorcery (Fotiou 2010) based on experiences that make it difficult to deny. Hufford distinguishes between visionary and interpretive spiritual experiences. The former involve the direct perception of the unseen order of the world (as manifest in apparitions, the performance of spirit mediums and/or omens) while the latter are primarily affective and don't involve the perception of spirits. Visionary experiences may be construed as normal in cultures that endorse and teach them, but are generally considered pathological in Western/industrialised societies, in which interpretive experiences are consistent with the modern view of religion as a matter of feeling and intuition rather than empirical knowledge. But using the senses to transform spirit into bodily experience makes it possible to observe and describe spiritual phenomena.

Assuming that empirical observation does not necessarily equate with visual observation, sensory experiences of all sorts can bear ethnographic data. Learning to sense and control embodied energies (e.g. opening the heart *chakra*) and to connect with the higher Self through meditation leads to intersubjective connections with other living selves. This intersubjectivity challenges the dualistic ontologies of anthropology and other sciences, but nevertheless provides empirical insights and can be described ethnographically. Zivkovic (2014) explains that Tibetan Buddhists know the body as interdependent with all other phenomena. She argues that intersubjective embodiment can enable an understanding of the body that crosses between human and extrahuman (e.g. spiritual) worlds in order to control the universe as a particular extension of subjectivity. In both Buddhism and Rastafari this is achieved through meditative insights, facilitated by other bodily rituals. Kohn (2013) defines selves as living, growing thoughts. But living selves are embodied thoughts that experience the world around them with a variety of sensory mechanisms that can be illuminated or obscured depending on socio-ecological context. Ethnographers may have bodies

that appear very different from those of the people they study, but the spiritual body—the body with heightened sensitivity and divine consciousness—can be cultivated by anyone and provides a bridge between self and other that transcends political, biological and ontological divides to produce particularly rich ethnographic knowledge.

## 6. Conclusion

Rastafari spirituality is less of a religion than a nonsecular science that considers how various energies and powers influence socio-ecological systems. The world we live in is made up of both material and spiritual components (which is not to say there is no afterworld), meaning that these energies and powers are treated as natural rather than supernatural forces. While anthropology is generally a secular discipline, by participating in various rituals, the body becomes an ethnographic tool that can lead to an awareness of how spiritual and material worlds interconnect. The embodiment of Rastafari spirituality involves consciousness of the higher Self, as well as the relationship between phenomena in the spiritual and earthly realms. Collective rituals that combine drumming, dancing and singing, such as *binghis* and *foundations*, as well as clothing and feeding the body in specific ways, facilitate the embodiment of divinity. The matted *locks* worn by many Rastafari people are considered to be spiritual antennae and covering the hair protects it from absorbing negative energies and other forms of pollution. The ways the rest of the body is covered can further help or hinder the embodiment of divine qualities. Eating is also a spiritual practice in Rastafari and consuming an Afro-centric vegan diet is a way to keep the spiritual body purified, along with periodic fasting, drinking clean spring water and taking roots tonics and other herbal remedies.

Meditation and ecstatic trance (facilitated by smoking *herbs* and/or sex) are also important in the (re)fabrication of Rastafari bodies/selves. In Rastafari, smoking *herbs* is a ritual activity that transforms the bodies of smokers so that they can connect with the higher Self, while sex can also lead to higher states of consciousness and increase (pro)creative power. In my work with Rastafari, my (ethnographic) knowledge of many spiritual practices has been informed by my own embodied experiences, as well as those of my interlocutors. Meditation in particular involves awareness of various bodily sensations and develops the ability to sense connections between the self and other living selves. It produces ethnographic knowledge that is experiential as well as affective. My position as a 'white' American female has shaped the ethnographic knowledge of Rastafari that I have been able to produce because it influences the type of people willing to engage with me. However, by engaging in rituals that embody spirituality, such as meditation I have learned to make inferences and interpret what both is and is not said. This is because meditation breaks down mind/body dualism, allowing experiences of intersubjectivity.

Exclusive commitment to Cartesian dualism can be an impediment to ethnographic research because ethnographers need to be able to move back and forth between dualistic and monistic ontologies. Breaking down mind-body dualism (at least temporarily) allows the ethnographer to experience intersubjectivity with other living selves (human and otherwise). Anthropological theories of the body, especially the concepts of the mindful body and the spiritual body offer some guidance for the ethnographer who wishes to use embodiment as a tool for breaking down dualities and experiencing intersubjectivity with others. The spiritual body is a heightened

sensory awareness and mindful presence in the body. It is cultivated through bodily rituals to achieve spiritual objectives, which raises the question of whether spiritual bodies can do things other bodies cannot do. Historically, scientific knowledge has been contrasted with religious belief, but experiences that embody spirit make it possible to learn and describe spiritual knowledge. In cultivating a spiritual body, ethnographers learn intersubjectivity with other living selves through heightened sensory experiences. This contributes to the production of ethnographic knowledge about spiritual power that challenges Cartesian ontologies.

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