

**I-TAL FOODWAYS:
NOURISHING RASTAFARIAN BODIES**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
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B.A., Louisiana State University, 1998
August, 2004

For my father,

*whose great sadness and bodily suffering
I could never relieve,
despite every grand attempt.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks and praise goes first to my most treasured colleague and friend, my lion-hearted husband Eric Dickerson. Thanks also to my advisor, Dr. Helen Regis, for her fine example, careful use of criticism, and steady hand in handling my worries as I produced this thesis. Special thanks to Dr. Miles Richardson for all his inspiring, yet sometimes discomfoting, riddles and poems. And thanks to Dr. Jill Brody for her sustained interest in me and my project, and for giving my draft a thorough treatment. I would also like to show my appreciation to the Robert C. West Fund at LSU, which made summer fieldwork abroad possible.

To my consultants, especially I-nty Ilon, Shirley Genus, and Sojie Stewart, you have my *I-tinual Ras-pect*. You opened up your personal lives to me, and you came through when I needed you most. I only hope I have done the same. To my family, especially my mother Bonnie Garner and my sister Emily Burton, I will forever be grateful for the ways you support my academic work and keep a candle lit for me even through our darkest hours. And to my mother-in-law Virginia Dickerson, thank you for the example you constantly provide for Eric and me, through strong faith and radiant positivity. Last but not least, to all my friends, especially to Travis, my uncompromising vegan comrade, you never let me forget that I must live up and feel well.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a close look at the lived world of Jamaican Rastafarians through the lens of food-related practices and preferences, working to define the group's characteristic strategies for maintaining wellness and illuminating their tastes and sensibilities. It strives to evoke a sensorial and discursive awareness of the activities through which Rastafarians nourish and heal their physical and social bodies, by focusing on ways in which they produce and use *I-tal* food-medicines. Rastafarian taste for *I-tal* has developed alongside collective engagement with the valorization and revitalization of traditional knowledge about health and land use. In addition to providing sites for bodily nourishment, food-related practices have become historically, politically, and culturally significant "ways of operating" (de Certeau 1984:xiv) in the Rastafarian lived world. First historicizing the emergence of the taste for *I-tal* and discussing how this preference has become embedded in Rastafarian ideology and ecology, I then demonstrate how and why Rastafarians objectify and manifest this taste in dietary norms, in culinary preparation and arrangement of kitchen spaces, and in medicine production and therapy. My goals are threefold: to illuminate the Rastafarian taste for *I-tal* and sensibility for *natural living*; to evoke a sensorial and discursive awareness of the everyday practices and strategies Rastafarians use in building, cleansing, and encouraging bodily growth; also, to show how and why my Rastafarian informants, in particular, struggle to maintain control over commoditization of *I-tal* products and related cooking-healing practices.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The back is for bearing the load,
So is your head, to carry your load,
Arms to manifest the load,
Feet to take you where you are going,
And stomach to make you *live*.

– Shirley Genus

Jamaican Rastafarians embody a distinctive taste for *I-tal*¹ – everything wholesome and healthy, and therefore vital to bodily maintenance – in the food-medicines they make and share. While producing, preparing, distributing, and consuming these tangible goods – and while *reasoning* about cultivating wellness and revitalizing tradition through use of these goods – Rastafarians relate to and care for one another in bodily ways. *I-tal* food-medicines nourish and heal bodies; moreover, routine or cyclic use of and discourse about *I-tal* signals engagement with a project of *natural living* and with a traditional understanding of ecology. In the process of producing and using *I-tal* food-medicines, Rastafarians make authoritative claims about how land should be used and how tradition should be incorporated into practice.

This thesis focuses on the ways Rastafarians use *I-tal* food-medicines in managing bodily health, in achieving uplift, and in nourishing *livity*. I argue that in addition to providing sites for bodily nourishment, food-related practices are historically, politically, and culturally significant "ways of operating" (de Certeau 1984:xiv) in the Rastafarian lived world. First historicizing the emergence of a taste for *I-tal* and discussing how this preference has become embedded in Rastafarian ideology and ecology, I then demonstrate how and why Rastafarians objectify and manifest this taste in

¹ Words with foreign meanings and special provenience will henceforth be set off with italics and defined in the glossary located in Appendix B, except in cases outlined in Appendix A. Also, see Appendix A for a discussion about transcription and representation of Rastafarian language and Jamaican Creole.

dietary norms, in culinary preparation and arrangement of kitchen spaces, and in medicine production and therapy. I argue that because Rastafarians value personal autonomy and creativity over orthodoxy, their individual decisions and ways of personalizing practices make *I-tal* models and ideals for behavior fluid, flexible, and adaptive to circumstance. By presenting here what I believe to be most typical, informative, and triumphant about nourishing practices and *I-tal* goods, I hope to clarify what Rastafarians mean when they say that "I-tal is vital" in managing health and achieving growth, and in the practice of everyday life.

Taste for *I-tal* has developed alongside Rastafarian engagement with the valorization and revitalization of traditional knowledge about health and land use. Rastafarians appropriate the everyday cooking and healing practices widely associated with a "peasant" (they often say "roots") Jamaican lifestyle in their efforts to maintain bodily, social, and environmental health while promoting sustainability. They actively contest notions that old-fashioned customs, such as the following, have become obsolete or are now unfashionable: a normally vegetarian mode of day to day consumption; use of outdoor kitchen spaces where cooking may be done on ground fires or raised hearths; treatment of illness and bodily imbalances with botanical medicines and through ethnomedical therapies; and, stewardship of local environment through *family land* use, natural farming techniques, and practices of internal market exchange. My goals are threefold: to illuminate the Rastafarian taste for *I-tal* and sensibility for *natural living*; to evoke a sensorial and discursive awareness of the everyday practices and strategies Rastafarians use in building, cleansing, and encouraging bodily growth; also, to show

how and why my Rastafarian informants, in particular, struggle to maintain control over commoditization of *I-tal* products and related cooking-healing practices.

Sidney Mintz writes, on the topic of nourishment, that "basic biological need becomes something else because we humans transform it symbolically into a system of meaning for much more than itself" (1996:6). For Rastafarian *I-talists*, nourishing the body is a mode of practical resistance, which can and should offer personal, sensorial experiences of victory, freedom, and empowerment over *Babylon*, an enemy blamed for persistently manipulating and impoverishing black people's lives and bodies throughout African diasporic history (Edmonds 1998a). Today, for instance, Jamaican Rastafarians say that *Babylon* is personified by national and international bauxite companies which entice Jamaicans into selling land which could otherwise be used for subsistence, and by fast food companies which erode desire for traditional and homemade, nutritious meals. Through *I-talist* efforts, Rastafarians align themselves with a history of Jamaican popular struggle against alienation from land and capitalist control over means of production – struggles which began during captivity and slavery but persisted during the post-emancipation period and continue to the present day. In the following passage, Neil Savishinsky writes that an active reuse of anti-colonial tactics in popular culture drives the global spread of Rastafarianism.

The ideologies and practices of the Rastafari are . . . not new to many of the societies in which the movement has gained a following, but to the contrary represent a continuation of earlier historical traditions and processes rooted in anti-colonial struggle and the desire on the part of indigenous and oppressed people to improve their economic and social positions and to preserve a culture and a way of life that has suffered and continues to suffer progressive erosion in the face of Western economic, political, and cultural domination. (1999:361)

Rastafarian *I-talists* claim that by making and using *I-tal*, one protects one's environment and works to make it more sustaining for life. Talk about nourishment is almost always connected to talk about the land and its state of health, about how the earth responds to particular polluting or enriching treatments, also about how its productivity changes with certain human interventions. Rastafarians resist both pollution of environment which harms physical body, and alienation from small family farms which uproots social order. If modern, manufactured and processed food is poisonous to the people now, *I-tal* food is their medicine. Rastafarians believe that the best food and medicine comes from the land one farms and inhabits, since interactions with land form a connection through time. For Rastafarians – and for many other Jamaicans who may not self-identify as Rastafarians but who have sustained traditional attitudes toward health and livelihood – land ownership and cultivation are basic to nourishment. Rastafarians also hold the deep-seated idea that the land has a body, and that the farmer tends to its needs and problems while taking nourishment and treatment from it in return. Rastafarians believe that each body is involved in the cooperative pursuit of life and *livity*. They promote the idea that nourishment is interrelated with a responsible relationship with one's natural environment – defined as a physical and social world – and that while nourishing practices can maintain, build, and heal bodies they can also promote nonviolence, goodwill, and social ease.

In the rest of this chapter, I situate my study within broader anthropological studies which enrich and expand an awareness of food production and consumption. I link ethnographic and theoretical writings to studies of practice theory and embodiment, and to works which consider the appropriation of history and the transformation of

tradition – processes which I argue happen during the production and use of *I-tal* food-medicines. I bring in discourses from medical anthropology, which theorize and compare culturally specific conceptualizations of body, health, and therapy, and studies which reveal connections between food and medicine, and likewise between nourishment and healing. Then I detail my methodology and introduce field settings and context, provide profiles of the main informants with whom I worked, and conclude by outlining the text which follows.

Literature Review

This study of Rastafarian preference for and use of *I-tal* in nourishing and healing practices takes inspiration from the long-standing anthropological engagement with how and why food-related activities delineate human biocultural experience. Studies of food practices and culinary tastes reveal detailed, culturally distinct information about how people relate to their physical and social environment. Although early theorists often situated their work within materialist or structuralist paradigms, accentuating that food was either "good to eat" (materialist) or "good to think" (structuralist), more recent studies highlight the multi-valent significance of food within practices of everyday life.

Classic works by structuralist Mary Douglas (1966), such as *Purity and Danger*, consider food a substance that carries symbolic meaning and value. Her writing focuses intently on the ways groups of people structure social relations, set social boundaries, and preserve a bodily and social order through food-related activities (1966, 1970). In *The World of Goods*, she and Baron Isherwood use food practices to explain how individuals relate to and become constrained by social obligations of exchange and commensality, also by group ideology and politics (1979). Marvin Harris approached food practices

from a very different angle – as a cultural materialist. In *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (1974) and later in *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (1985), he emphasizes that food habits are based on patterns of cultural adaptation to environmental stresses, whether those stresses are social, economic, or political. He focused on the idea that various symbolic and ideological meanings imprinted on foods and food-related activities refer back to evolutionary logic. These two classic approaches to food and culture have both been criticized for being too general, de-emphasizing individual differentiation, agency, and strategy (Kalčík 1984, Caplan 1997); yet, a synthesis of important works in each tradition can support the notion that human bodily experience is patterned by both material needs and by symbolic meaning. As Gillian Feeley-Harnik writes, anthropological studies of food practices and preferences should bring together aspects of experience which people usually separate: "the fleshly, the spiritual, the environmental, and the social" (1994:16).

Food studies seek to do more than reveal broad evolutionary or mythological causes of culturally inscribed diet particularities, though, as anthropologists have taken applied and historical perspectives on the topics of nourishment, hunger, and access to food. Nutritional anthropologists work to offer solutions for nutritional problems by analyzing adaptive responses to poverty, food scarcity, delocalization, and the unequal distribution of foods along lines of social class (Pelto 2001, Weismantel 1989). Studies of food security and political economy often generate discussion about interdependencies among nations, and about commoditization and exchange on both local and global markets. Audrey Richards produced the first comprehensive ethnography of food, demonstrating how poor nutrition among the Bemba in Rhodesia was functionally related

to how people were provisioned during a period of British colonial rule (1939). Sidney Mintz also discusses food-related behaviors as indicative of historical transformations in global power relations. Writing about the commoditization of sugar, Mintz reveals that the workings of plantation economies in the Caribbean transformed global tastes for non-essential substances (1985). He details how food production and consumption patterned social relations between planter and slave classes, also how the culinary tastes of slaves became dominant in shaping food preferences in the colonies (1960). In more recent work, Mintz demonstrates that patterns of land use and marketing foods have always been tied to African American struggles for power and liberation in British island colonies (1996).

Other recent work asserts that while food practices and preferences are embedded with historical, economic, and political significance, they also create sites for the construction and negotiation of individual and social identity. Richard Wilk writes about how the transnational cultural flow of commodities influences how Belizeans use food practices in defining group identity and claims to cultural authenticity (1999). David Sutton writes about how memories of foods and food practices relate to ethnicity, history, and tradition, while influencing the social construction of self and presenting opportunities for individuals to recapture wholeness in sensory ways (2001a, 2001b). Jon Holtzman discusses how Samburu pastoralists redefine use of global commodities like tea in their traditional practices so that tea consumption reflects adherence to tradition rather than appreciation of modern items (2003b).

These three anthropologists and others demonstrate that nationalistic claims are often objectified in the context of food practices. Jamaican Rastafarians self-identify with

at least one ethnic group – the Rastafari; in addition, most members of this group also identify with Jamaican and/or African nationalistic identity. Rastafarians are interested in revitalizing and promoting the traditional culinary and medical practices of Jamaicans, regardless of whether these traditions derive from or synthesize African, Native American, Indian, and/or European material culture and oral history. And yet the Rastafarians with whom I worked claimed that they were appropriating these traditions in order to connect with the African part of history and identity. I came to understand that, for my informants, accentuating Africanness in food practices and preferences is a way of signifying their embrace of the "peasant" lifestyle historically associated with the black underclass in Jamaica, and their simultaneous opposition to a group of people who de-emphasize blackness by claiming identity as Creoles.

Ethnographic studies of food and tastes are often integrated with phenomenological theories about embodiment and intersubjectivity, sociological theories of habitus, as well as practice theory, and Marxist conceptualizations of political economy. Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes (1986), Brad Weiss (1996), David Sutton (2001a, 2001b), and Ann Brower Stahl (2002), for instance, describe how food-related cultural behaviors, practices, and tastes indicate the active construction and transformation of lived worlds. Weiss' studies of Haya practices of consumption and commoditization emphasize

the fact that eating, feeding, and all related acts are all simultaneously meaningful and material activities rather than, for example, signs or cosmological principles, in order to assert this constitutive character of food and its attendant processes. (1996:129)

Theories of everyday practices are grounded in theory about embodiment and objectification, processes which place the living person in a world that she shapes and

becomes shaped by, through the "intentionality and intersubjectivity" (Csordas 1994:4) involved in the experience of "being-there" (Richardson 2003:37). In participating in what Michel de Certeau calls "doing-cooking," a person engages with "a complex montage of circumstances and objective data, where necessities and liberties overlap, a confused and constantly changing mixture through which tactics are invented, trajectories are carved out, and ways of operating are individualized" (de Certeau, et al 1998.:201). Food-related behaviors and tastes are not simply habitual or habituated, but are rather enacted through symbolic, substantive everyday practices. In the context of doing-cooking – and doing-healing – Rastafarians actively negotiate individual positions in relation to the social network, allowing the perceived social order to influence their activities, strategies, and choices.

Furthermore, food practices and tastes should not be regarded as mere reproductions of rules and norms, but as improvised, creative, performative cultural activities. A person invents or innovates food production out of what she remembers. Practice and preference shape and are shaped by history, memory, and tradition. As Stuart Hall states, "The relationship between historical position and aesthetic value is an important and difficult question in popular culture" (1981:237). Food practices and preferences are often used in reinforcing, redefining, or transforming tradition. From Holtzman, Samburu ideas that "old foods suit people's health," and that new foods should be indicted for causing social ills, do not prohibit them from using imported tea in food practices (2003a). In *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*, Jean Comaroff notes that at the same time that Tshidi reject the food customs of white colonizers, they also selectively abandon certain native customs

like eating animals that die of natural causes (1985:219). Tastes and the practices they inhabit and motivate are shaped by, but are not passively imitative of, history. I challenge John P. Homiak's claim that *I-tal* food and the concept of *livity* were created by Rastafarians at a certain time and place (1998); instead, I advance a notion which Rastafarians themselves articulate – that *I-tal* is and has always been patterned on the dietary traditions, ethnomedical knowledge, land use patterns, and health practices of small farming people in Jamaica. I stress, however, that while Rastafarians make this assertion, they do not deny that they have reinterpreted these cultural forms by infusing them with Rastafarian rhetoric and ideology.

In the production and use of *I-tal* food-medicines and in *reasonings* about their taste for *I-tal*, Rastafarians embody the former lifeways of poor Jamaican farmers. Here, they also embody their vision of *naturality* and pre-colonial primitivism. *I-tal* practices and preferences, therefore, are used by Rastafarians to enact what Daniel Rosenblatt has called the "valorization of the primitive" (1997:293). Valorizing peasantry and *naturality* in their lived world, Rastafarians make their "attacks on the structures of power in place" in the modern post-colonial world of Jamaica (1997:293). Critiques of capitalism are deeply embedded in Rastafarian interests in mobilizing history and renovating traditionalism. Rastafarian ideology and ecology theorize the vital connection between person and society, in opposition to the unequal and exploitative relationship between employee and employer in capitalist ideology and political economy.

Dispelling the alienation which modernity brings, Rastafarians work to heal individual and social bodies through practical, object-related activities which they call *works*. They value the healthiness of self-employment and of farming to produce food for

oneself and one's family. Here, I draw comparison to Tshidi practices of resistance and revitalization (Comaroff 1985). Through the medium of food, both Tshidi and Rastafarians oppose the dominant social and economic order, valorizing and enacting what they conceive to be natural, traditional modes of production and consumption – "eating the work of our hands" as Tshidi say (1985), or "feeding up I-tal" and "sucking land for blood and not for money" as Rastafarians say. Feeley-Harnik writes,

Even as the imagery of slavery speaks powerfully to social processes of abstracting people from known places, so feeding speaks to processes of *re-grounding* people in relation to one another through complex sensory memories of experiences anchored in places—tables, tablets, houses, homelands. (1994:xvi)

Rastafarians use *I-tal* food in regrounding their bodies within physical and social environment, and in resisting capitalist modes of production and consumption which alienate person from land and society. For Rastafarians, contemporary use of *I-tal* for managing bodily health, and as an alternative mode of defining and improving livelihood, "can be understood in terms of the development of a therapeutic ethos based on the recovery of the self in response to the experience of consumer capitalism" (Rosenblatt 1997:324).

Weiss states that "food is clearly a kinesthetic medium" (1996:28). As body mediates the experience of object worlds and social relations, so food practices and preferences are mediated by body-image and ideas of wellness. Food practices and tastes enter into discussions about the management of "bodily capital" (Wacquant 2004:127-138) and bodily therapy (Farquhar 2002). Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock focus on the idea that humans are exceedingly interested in maintaining control over their bodily condition, writing,

What is perhaps most significant about the metaphorical extension of the body into the natural, social, and supernatural realms is that it demonstrates a unique kind of human autonomy that seems to have all but disappeared in the 'modern,' industrialized world. The confident uses of the body in speaking about the external world convey a sense that humans are in control. (1987:21)

In arguing that consuming *I-tal* for nourishment and therapy is a very important mode of establishing orientations in the Rastafarian lived world, I demonstrate how the taste for *I-tal* shapes strategies for growth and nourishment, social unification, and bodily control. This is why Rastafarians so often define *I-tal* food in terms of medicine and use it in therapeutic contexts. Works by Lock (1993) and Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1990) build on Douglas' earlier work on social body (1966) and on theories of embodiment, asserting that humans often make "symbolic equations between conceptions of the healthy body and the healthy society, as well as the diseased body and the malfunctioning society" (1987:20). Rastafarians conceive of personal body as a practical, earthly organism not separate or alienated from the belly, spirit, or mind it contains, and only able to achieve growth and nourishment when it consumes *I-tal*. Individual and social bodies operate on similar principles since energetic *flow*, derived from relationship with land, animates both. Using works by Elisa J. Sobo (1993b), Melanie Creagan Dreher (1982), and Michel Laguerre (1987) I seek to explain the traditional Jamaican ideas of individual and social bodily *flow* and health which Rastafarians appropriate and redefine.

Anthropological studies often relate topics of food and body to medicine, as medicinal foods are naturally available materials and are used traditionally and therapeutically in most cultures, to some extent. Nina Etkin and Paul Ross have researched traditional uses of plants for nutritional and medicinal purposes in Nigeria, finding that while some plant medicines may be prepared in a culinary context and others

ingested alone (1982). Both means of preparing and consuming plant medicines are done for the purpose of bodily therapy. Etkin, in a later article, writes that medical anthropologists frequently make use of ethnographic studies of plant medicines and medicinal foods in order to theorize bodily notions of illness and health and describes how ethnomedical knowledge is used as the primary mode of treatment in places where biomedical services are substandard or too costly (1990:157). In *One Blood: The Jamaican Body*, Sobo writes about traditional Jamaican uses of medicinal foods to treat the composition and *flow* of blood and other substances and thereby bring about a state of wellness (1993a, 1993b). Carol Laderman relates food practices to therapy, noting that Malay control bodily imbalances and thereby prevent illness by abstaining from certain kinds of foods which imbalance chemistry, making the body too hot or too cold (1981, 1994). Judith Farquhar also discusses the therapeutic uses of foods to remedy imbalance in the body and to prevent or correct illness, asserting that in Chinese traditional medicine, medicinal meals are composed of plants that either treat repletion or depletion of bodily substances, and that often these meals are commoditized for treating impotence, seen by many within the culture to be a widespread kind of depletion illness (2002). In her recent book *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China*, Farquhar stresses that food preferences and practices, including medicinal meals, are representative of a society's desire to control and maintain itself during periods of social upheaval, which is experienced in bodily ways. In many cultures, physical and social health are defined by a balance which is embodied and which can be maintained or manipulated through consumption practices.

Methodology, Context, and Informants

Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes conceptualize what goes into creating "tasteful ethnography" – both "tasteful fieldwork" and "tasteful writing." Because "tasteful writers" will be those who use "the notion of collage as . . . the guiding metaphor for writing" (1986:348), and because they "season their prose with the nontheoretical senses to evoke a world" (349), as fieldworkers they must always record sensorial and discursive information about social interactions, building a base of evocative materials for eventual analysis and representational collage. On the subject of fieldwork Stoller and Olkes write,

From the sensual tasteful vantage, the fieldworker investigates the life stories of individual Songhay, Nuer, or Trobrianders as opposed to totalized investigations of the Songhay, the Nuer, or the Trobriander. This recording of complexities of the individual's social experience lends texture to the landscape of the fieldworker's notes. In this way, seemingly insignificant incidents such as being served bad sauce become as important as sitting with a nameless informant and recording genealogies – data – that eventually become components in a system of kinship. In this way ethnographic research creates voice, authority, and an aura of authenticity. (1986:348)

In the field, I found that the topics of inquiry I chose in investigating *I-tal* cuisine and therapy – preparation of food in kitchen spaces located indoors and outside, the small-scale farming and gathering of culinary and medicinal plants, the marketing and lending/borrowing of food and food-medicines, and the sharing of meals – were very productive for collecting tasteful details as qualitative data. In part because of multi-sensory reinforcement, observations about food-related activities were easy to remember and write up later. Food also functioned as a medium for easy, practically based conversations which naturally opened up to topics less practical and more philosophical or mystical. In kitchen, garden, market, retreat, taxi, and store – really any space for social interaction – food provided an exceptionally useful frame for discussing tradition,

body, and medicine with Rastafarians and, in fact, with plenty of other Jamaican people as well. Yet when talking to Rastafarians – more specifically, those Rastafarians who engage in *I-talist* pursuits on a regular basis – I found that when I asked questions about food preferences and tastes, conversations about the aesthetics and sensory experiences of food were catapulted directly toward *reasonings* about ideology and eco-politics. This was not the case when interacting with non-Rastafarians. Noticing this pattern developing, I adopted the goal of collecting as much information as I could on Rastafarian food practices, preferences, and associated uses, and on the less objective but related conversations which they prompted.

Knowing that the kitchen would be the natural setting for a study on food-related activities, I planned to find a place to live where I would be allowed to cook in, inhabit, and otherwise participate in the activities of a communal kitchen space on a regular basis. After a very short time boarding at *I-rie Cabins* in Great Bay and using the kitchen building daily, I realized just how social a space the kitchen can be in Jamaica. Before long, both familiar and unfamiliar people seemed to want to talk to me, usually just as soon as my hands were busy working, preparing food or cleaning up in the kitchen. I gradually discovered that conversation accompanies kitchen work, and that participating in conversation in a kitchen space while working is both a social obligation and a joy. I soon found out that the kitchen was the best place to learn, not only about foods and their culinary uses but also about medicines, health practices and concerns, life histories, and family history. Of course, I could also access practical knowledge about food production, distribution and exchange, and consumption there. My front porch became the best place to take field notes – even at night by candle-light. However, I was occasionally scolded

for taking notes in others' company. I was told that my doing this was foolish – not rude, invasive, or bothersome – because while writing, I would inevitably miss some important detail that I would never have another chance to hear. The informant who told me this also said that growing up, she never asked her elders to repeat themselves, because in Jamaica you listen closely to what elders have to tell you because you know you will use that information for a lifetime. This lesson reveals that there is a local preference for oral over written in the transmission of knowledge.

My original motivation to study *I-tal* came out of a personal interest in becoming a wiser, healthier vegetarian, along with a genuine desire to learn more about nutritional and herbal medicine in order to advise chronically ill relatives. My stance as a vegetarian often added some measure of mutualism and reciprocity to social interactions with *I-talists*, in that we shared information, recipes, and health concerns rather freely. As I probed them for information, they did the same with me. My stance as a vegetarian turned out to be a disadvantage in some instances, too, though. I found myself excluded from participating in meals which included meat – meals which I would have liked to attend for the purpose of interacting more often with a variety of extended family members and with visitors. When I participated in a meal where meat was served, my presence could catalyze lengthy explanations about deviance from *I-talist* modes of consumption – explanations which I did not ask for and which tended to script me in a more critical role than I would have preferred. These interactions provided me with meaningful data, nonetheless. My involvement with the production of meals, and the pleasure I took in sharing kitchen space with other vegetarians, set up good relations between me and the informants I selected.

My stance as someone who genuinely wanted to learn about use of *I-tal* food-medicines in order to help others back home usually helped in eliciting information about food practices and therapies, as it showed that I respected their counsel and their knowledge. When my father died of heart failure unexpectedly in early July, my informants realized just how serious of a seeker I was, and how highly I valued their healing traditions. When I returned to the field after attending the funeral, my informants treated me very differently, engaging with me more personally while also showing greater interest in collaborating with me on my project. Shock, emotional distress, and tragedy were unforeseen obstacles, but to my surprise I found that pathos facilitated the development of rapport, trust, and intimacy with my informants.

I was initially curious about learning how *I-tal* food practices operate as practical, everyday resistance for Rastafarian women, but I found this research topic to be constrictive. I first needed to study food practices broadly, and I learned that setting myself up as a feminist was generally not a good tactic in interacting with Rastafarians – especially women – as feminist activists are generally perceived to be deviant. One woman told me that "the most powerful feminist" is a woman with "a warm heart, working hands, and connection to home-land. Only she can pull the tide, and only she have a *I-tal* magnetism." As I settled in at *I-rie Cabins*, I became much more involved in what Rastafarians were up to in their daily lives, and how they reasoned about practices which "grow," or build, the *livity* of people and plants around them.

While my informants usually evaded informal inquiries and more formal interview questions about ethnomedical knowledge and techniques, in the context of doing-cooking they spoke about using food for healing, and medicine for nourishment,

without reservation. Although I did encounter the use of *I-tal* food-medicines in settings designated specifically for healing, the kitchen became the more natural setting for learning about medical knowledge. Most Rastafarians are well aware that the ethnomedical knowledge associated with *I-tal* food and healing is valued at a high price by both the Jamaican government and outside bioprospecting agencies. For this reason, many Rastafarians privately commoditize their healing arts and their manufacture and distribution of *I-tal* goods, and some are even able to create a source of revenue for their families from the business of selling *I-tal*. In Great Bay on the South Coast, for instance, the Genus family, with whom I lived for almost two months during the summer of 2002, sells both accommodations at *I-tal Rest* – a guest house with beautifully crafted hardwood architecture and relatively modern kitchen spaces but which boasts the absence of electricity in its rooms – and traditional hydrotherapy services at a steam hut/massage parlor called *Zareeba* (see Figure 1.1). Also, for a number of years in the 1990s Shirley Genus, who runs *Zareeba*, partnered with an American tourist to manufacture and distribute *roots wines*, which are traditional Jamaican cure-all tonics – *I-tal* goods. The widespread Rastafarian suspicion of outsider interest in profiting from Jamaican ethnomedical knowledge would seem to extend into all contexts where that knowledge was transmitted, and I cannot yet explain why this information was so easily accessible in the context of kitchen practice at *I-rie Cabins* and at other sites where I participated in kitchen work.

My husband Eric and I kept a room in Great Bay at *I-rie Cabins*, which is a cluster of three cabins, a kitchen building, an outhouse, and an outdoor shower managed by Shirley and her partner, Stuart. *I-rie Cabins* is not listed on the TreasureBeach.net



Figure 1.1: Tourist map of the Treasure Beach area along Jamaica's southern coastline, borrowed from TreasureBeach.net's website (www.treasurebeach.net), featuring Shirley's Steam Bath among other places to "Eat and Play."

website (the definitive information site for the Treasure Beach area, which includes Great Bay) as a tourist destination, but rooms are rented out from time to time to visitors seeking a low-budget option to *I-tal Rest* and the Genus family's other guest house, Viking's House. During my time there, the other two cabins at *I-rie* were occupied by Shirley and Stuart and by a white female American tourist from Austin, Texas, and at

least six groups of guests moved in and out of *I-tal Rest* and Viking's House. In planning my fieldwork, I first thought I might make a home for myself at *I-rie Cabins* after discovering information about *I-tal Rest* and *Zareeba* on the world-wide web. I contacted Rebecca Wiersma, who is involved with the website and runs Treasure Tours, a business which finds accommodations and handles travel arrangements for tourists, and during these initial conversations, Wiersma advised my husband and me to work with Shirley and her family.

Great Bay is one of a string of four fishing villages along Jamaica's South Coast, and it is located within a larger geographical area called Treasure Beach. The area is located in the Pedro Plains region under the rain shadow of the Santa Cruz Mountains, and the climate there is usually arid, although the area was flooded when Eric and I arrived and it rained steadily for the first three days of our stay. Scrub vegetation – acacia, lignum vitae, thatch palm, cacti, sea grape, and thorny shrubs – and small fields cultivated by local farmers grow up from red bauxite-rich soil. Michael Hawkins describes the dominant physical landscape in the area in the following passage:

The farmers live in neat cottages built in vernacular style but with modern materials. Most of them haul water by pick-up truck, whether borrowed or their own, in fifty gallon drums and carefully mulch around the plants with guinea grass. This dryland farming landscape is one source of the area's relative prosperity and a marker of its culture. (1999:137)

Hawkins also writes extensively about the cultural geography of Treasure Beach and characterizes the region and its inhabitants as very different from the rest of Jamaica (1999:112-113). He also stresses that the tourism industry there presents a "striking contrast, or alternative, to mainstream post-tourism on Jamaica's North Coast" (25). As unusual as the region might seem, Jamaicans living on the South Coast maintain family,

economic, social, and professional ties to other urban and rural regions of Jamaica and to various places abroad, and they are much like other Jamaicans in this respect.

I spent most of my time in rural St. Elizabeth Parish, *grounding* with key informants in Great Bay and in Malvern, located about fifteen miles northeast of Great Bay in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I traveled frequently to Montego Bay, to investigate activities at Rastafarian-run *I-tal* food restaurants and to attend a festival called the *Supper of Rastafari* (see Chapter 3), and I also went to a *Nyabingi I-ssembly* in Scots Pass, to observe the use of *I-tal* food-medicines in the context of spiritual healing (see Chapter 4). These four centers of fieldwork appear on the map of Jamaica which follows.



Figure 1.2: Map of Jamaica, showing major field sites. Great Bay is indicated with a red marker, Malvern with aqua, Montego Bay with gold, and Scots Pass with green.

I worked most often with three key informants, Shirley Genus, *I-nty Hon*, and *Sojie* Stewart, who I will introduce here in brief profiles, although I also collected data from others who belong to these people's social networks. Shirley Genus, a middle-aged Rastafarian woman who lives near the beach on *family land* in Great Bay, offers

professional and *I-tal* therapies at *Zareeba*, manages *I-rie Cabins*, gardens around the two places and in family fields, and steals some time for painting canvases. Many members of her large extended family live on adjacent plots nearby, but some live abroad as well, in England, New Zealand, and the U.S. Shirley allowed me to stay with her family as long as I wanted, and often, when she was not busy at *Zareeba* or otherwise involved, we spent time on her porch, talking and *reasoning* about health, family history, farming, work, food, Jamaican culture, Rastafarianism, and tourism. She is a powerful woman and a tough one to reason with, in that she tends to command conversation and hold her ground. She set me straight on numerous topics of discussion, frequently, and I gained much inspiration and *over-standing* from sharing time with her.

Another key informant, I-nty, is a twenty-eight-year-old Rastafarian man who works as a family farmer in Malvern and as an *I-tal* cook, and who keeps a traveling store stocked with homemade *I-tal* wares – mostly jewelry which he fashions from natural elements like wood, coconut shell, and/or hardened cocoon (a large brown seed, sometimes eaten as food) and embellishes with decoration. Although I-nty has a room in his family compound in Malvern, he often spends time in the hills as well and camps at a lodge there. I met I-nty one day at *I-rie Cabins* as he approached me to sell me a necklace from his store. He grounds frequently with Shirley's brothers' families, and they allow him to sell his *works* to their guests. Although I did not spend as much time with I-nty's family in Malvern as with Shirley's in Great Bay, I-nty often traveled with me and Eric as we sought out city activities, large street markets, and health food stores run by Rastafarians in Treasure Beach, Santa Cruz, Montego Bay, and various places on the east coast near Morant Bay. I learned a great deal about *I-tal* food from a group of *brethren*

with whom I-nty *grounds* in Montego Bay, the *Iton I-tes*. Many members of this group live in *yards* in Montego Bay and on its hilly outskirts, while others live in hilltop villages and towns throughout the island. Members who live near Montego Bay are engaged in the daily work of supplying and running *I-tal* food stores, one of which I visited. All members associate as frequently as possible with one another, gathering to *ground*, chant, *reason*, write and record songs, and plan public demonstrations to teach Jamaicans and tourists about *I-talism*. The *Iton I-tes* organized the *Supper of Rastafari* and performed there as well. In addition to allowing me to participate in and observe meal-making in his everyday domestic space and inviting me to festivals, I-nty introduced me to food-related activities at his remotely located *hills camp* (see Chapter 3) and in the religious and public, yet guarded and exclusive, context of *Nyabinghi* (described in Chapter 4).

Sojie Stewart is a middle-aged Rastafarian farmer whose *family land* is located in the hills near Hilltop, which is somewhere between ten and fifteen miles north of Great Bay. I always interacted with him in Great Bay. He is very close with the Genus family and stays with them when he is not needed in Hilltop. He divides his time between coast and hills, always sharing in the work of gardening. While I stayed at *I-rie Cabins* I noticed that he walked back and forth at least two or three times each week. In the hills, he farms scallions, watermelon, and sometimes tomato. He also told me he has collected and sold seed to farmers since he was a child. In this text I work primarily with material I gathered from working with and around Shirley and I-nty, although I also draw a good bit of information about small farming and marketing, land, *livity*, and Rastafarianism from *Sojie*. *Sojie*, Shirley, and I-nty are experts on topics of *I-tal* food production,

consumption, and exchange. They all have firm connections to *family land* and participate daily in farming or gardening practices, and they all maintain associations with a broader Rastafarian community outside their own *yards* and hometowns. I-nty and Shirley are authorities on both *I-tal* cuisine and healing therapies. They both also sell homemade healing products and other *I-tal works* and therefore have crafts of their own making which they market, in part, to tourists. These two also have favorite places for *I-tal* retreat, and they have both made places for themselves at *Nyabinghis*.

I conducted planned, open-ended interviews with Shirley, I-nty, and Sojie at *I-rie Cabins*. However, as I have already said, I found that the best way to collect information on *I-tal* food-medicines was not through the frame of interview, but rather through doing-cooking. Interviews were very heated but were facilitated greatly by the fact that Rastafarians already value the social mode of verbal interaction very highly. It is very possible that what I regarded as interview, informants regarded as *reasoning*. As *reasonings* are designed for the discussion of ideology, history, politics, health, and ecology, the interview mode did not impart social disharmony on the field work situation, and in fact has thematically shaped the presentation of my data and analysis.

Although I took some photos, I spent most of my recording time in the field taking notes on what I encountered as participant observer and observing participant. I wrote thick descriptions which detailed and contextualized behaviors, conversations, social interactions, social and family networks, and uses of objects and surroundings. I made lists of meal times, cooking ingredients, snacks, and medicinal elements, created recipes, and paraphrased vivid narratives. I sketched maps of kitchen spaces, festival spaces, and *family land*, also drew figures of food preparation techniques. I triangulated

data on *I-tal* food, healing, and on Rastafarian beliefs and practices by cross-checking with family members and with other Rastafarians and non-Rastafarians who were strangers to them.

In assembling data and "fine-tuning" results, I chronicled normative depictions and critical scenes in sensorially rich language by writing ethnographic "vignettes" (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:180-186). I then elaborated and transformed these vignettes by overlapping them and incorporating excerpts from interview transcripts, giving form to the various evocative pieces which appear in the thesis. I have chosen not to feature recipes in the text for a couple of reasons. First, I believe that although I recorded and designed the written documents, I still share ownership with the people who enabled me to make them; we are recipe co-authors just as we are kitchen co-workers. Also, descriptive prose can represent the voices, strategies, and choices of individual agents, while recipe usually cannot. The evocative pieces are meant to present more than just how-to instructions. They show that doing-cooking and doing-healing are multi-dimensional, human-centered if object-constrained, bodily mediated experiences. Father Joseph Owens, one of the first people to do a long-term ethnographic study with Rastafarians, writes that

Rastafarian theology is experiential, it is not meant to engage one merely intellectually. We cannot understand it and come to grapple with it unless we open ourselves up and try to live it and experience it through the context of subjectivities. (1976:8)

In other words, theology is not merely dogma; by extension, Rastafarian food practices and preferences are also experientially embedded in individual lives and in collective endeavors.

Précis

In Chapter 2, I orient the taste for *I-tal* by discussing what motivates it – namely a Jamaican history of struggle for control over food production and consumption, land rights and bodily health, a Rastafarian ideology which supports the appropriation of this former mode of anti-colonial struggle, and a Rastafarian ecology which is focused on reverence toward and stewardship of land and which is connected to ideas that *naturality* and tradition are necessary for bodily nourishment. I stress that political ecology entrenches the taste for *I-tal* and gives food-related practices a therapeutic agenda. I use cultural-historical works and ethnographic information to envision what Rastafarians call *natural living*. In Chapters 3 and 4, I demonstrate how a taste for *I-tal* becomes objectified and embodied in tangible goods and in food-related practices. In Chapter 3, I present mostly my own ethnographic data, weaving together narrative and analysis to provide a representative sampler of *I-tal* cuisine, while evoking a present awareness of practices which are bound and constructed by space, time, and individual experience. Brad Weiss states that "even the routinized or 'stereotypic' activities of everyday life are in no way static or guided by a strict conformity to past models of action" (1996:223). My goal in this chapter is to make a realistic and fair reading of what is typical about *I-tal* foodways, in addition to provoking an understanding of the ideal and the problematic. In Chapter 4, I explain how and why *I-tal* cuisine is intimately tied to bodily therapy, and nourishment to healing, in Rastafarian practice. I focus first on medicinal and hygienic uses of *I-tal* and then on sojourns where therapeutic activities occur. I consider the problem of commoditizing *I-tal* food-medicines and healing journeys, showing how Rastafarians struggle to solve the problem of "selling culture" by maintaining private

control over who they sell to and under what circumstances. In this Chapter, I start by borrowing a comprehensive narrative about food-medicines and healing from one of my key informants, and then I use her categories to assemble a *materia medica*² for Rastafarian medicine, and to enlighten my own encounters with the use of *I-tal* in healing. I also make use a wealth of ethnomedical and ethnobotanical data from folklorists' indexes and scholarly writings and studies of eco-tourism and the global spread of Rastafarianism, to enrich my ethnographic data.

² Here, I am following the work of Judith Farquhar on traditional Chinese medicine and conceptions of body. Part I of *Appetites* contains a *materia medica* which examines the "logic and substances" constituting regimens of health maintenance (2002:26, 47).

CHAPTER 2
"IN THE LEAF WE TRUST": ORIENTING THE TASTE FOR I-TAL

I-tal is not all *reform*. It's a *way of life*. I have generation live like that before the poison come in . . . It's not something we bring back into being. It's something we a *deal with*. How the people them gonna forget it?!
– Shirley Genus

In colonial and post-colonial Jamaica, achieving liberation and improving quality of life have been intimately tied to land use and land ownership. Ever since their ancestors were brought to the island to work as slaves and indentured laborers in the agricultural operations of plantation society, members of the predominantly black Jamaican underclass have struggled to gain rights to use land for subsistence and commerce, and as a place where they could stake legitimate claims to family homes. A family's or community's ability to hold land and produce provisions for itself became a central indicator of progress, a move toward stability, and a measure of freedom. Rastafarians use the history of land use to valorize what they understand as a traditional relationship of people to land, through which land provides *I-tal* food for nourishment and a site for social integration, contingent upon humans' proper maintenance of it. In their view of things, preserving this relationship is, and always has been, crucial to individual and family survival. Protecting the livelihood of the land protects the livelihood of the people who live on the land.

Rastafarians protest the long-term misuse of land by *Babylon* – those who have sought to capitalize on the productivity of the underclass at the expense of both land and people. Abuse of land, first enacted by planters who restricted Africans' natural rights to use land for food, and more currently carried out through the pollution of soil, water and air, is tantamount to abuse of people and popular society. Impoverishment of land results

in the impoverishment of bodies of the people who eat from the land. Rastafarians explain their taste for *I-tal* through discussions of this history and ecology. They criticize the poisoning of land by large, and in part foreign, companies and by local small farmers alike, who together have instituted modern methods of fertilizing and defoliating with chemicals. They advocate the rehabilitation of the connection between people and land, which may be achieved through ecological responsibility and through traditionalism.

In this chapter, I situate the taste for *I-tal* within the history of land use by small farmers and internal marketers in Jamaica and within the Rastafarian reappropriation and transformation of these lifeways in their mode of *natural living*. I demonstrate that a history of "colonial entanglements" (Stahl 2002:828) has led to the symbolic understanding of land as representing both oppression, exploitation, and demoralization on the one hand and opportunity and progress on the other. Then I discuss how Rastafarian *I-talists* redefine progress in terms of connection to land, social productivity, and *naturality*, and how food practices became associated with *natural living*. I consider how engagement with history entrenches ideological concepts such as *livity*. I end by explaining the therapeutic posture toward history and ecology, represented in narratives about conservationism and maintenance of tradition, which is objectified and embodied in the taste for *I-tal*.

Land Rights, Dissent, and the Turn toward Natural Living

Daniel Rosenblatt, writing about modern use of the "primitive," states that "the present has a real historical and existential connection with the past. When people 'invent' traditions as interested political actors, they do so in ways that are meaningful to themselves and others, out of existing practices, and with purposes that were shaped by a

particular historical experience" (1997:291). In the context of my study, the historical experience is that of slaves and laborers gradually acquiring land rights in colonial Jamaica. The revitalized practices are those which Rastafarians associate with dissent over land rights and anti-colonial struggle, and the renovated traditions are those which Rastafarian *I-talists* enact in the practice of *natural living*, which for them includes both traditional use of family land and vegetarian dietary behavior.

From Jamaican colonial history we learn that on islands with hilly and mountainous terrain, British planters allowed slaves to farm marginally productive land as family groups, for the most part without supervision, and that they later instituted this practice in all of their holdings, in an effort to evade the cost of provisioning slaves (Mintz and Hall 1960:3). In addition to these provision grounds, which they worked during weekends, slaves also kept house-yard gardens where they grew what they needed for daily living, cooking and medicine, as well as plants which were regularly thieved from their provision grounds, delicate plants, and ornamentals (Pulsipher 1994:215). Before being allowed access to land for nourishment, slaves were denied food in times of shortage, even during times when they were being overworked in the fields; therefore, many slaves died of starvation or became ill from malnutrition (Mintz 1996:41). Although these agricultural practices increased their workload overall, access to land in both *yard* and hills gave slaves more control over their bodily condition than they had previously had when the planter class provisioned them.

However, slave subsistence almost always depended to some degree on planter provisions, especially during planting and harvesting seasons. When the price for sugar was high on the world-wide market, even slaves with provision grounds were needed

more often in the field, and so were denied time to work their provision grounds. At these times, therefore, slaves depended on planters to provision them. But because planters had an irregular supply of imported foods, slaves often went hungry at the worst time possible, when labor was intensive. While the planter class offered slaves the "freedom" of farming for subsistence, they also systematically took over provision grounds located close to sugar cane fields whenever the price for sugar was high, planting this land with cane and forcing slaves to harvest and/or abandon their crops. When sugar prices were low, planters conserved resources, planted less land in cane, and marginal land was re-allocated to slaves for provisioning themselves. Slaves thus intentionally sought out hilly land for their grounds – land which would never be appropriated for cane planting. Even if holding this more distant land for provisions meant that they had to spend more time and energy walking to and from provision grounds to farm for nourishment, they did it because this was the only way they could reliably come to consider a plot of land as "theirs" for feeding themselves. Otherwise their day-to-day health was susceptible to the unpredictable changes in the market for sugar (Mintz 1960:10-14).

Access to land in provision grounds also "provided the very basis of an open market system" in Jamaica (Mintz and Hall 1960:15). What surplus the slaves could produce on their provision grounds they often marketed on Sundays, either by hauling produce from field to the nearest public marketplace, or by exchanging goods on the plantation with other slaves or through a middle-person called a *higgler*, who would then market the purchased goods at some other location. Gradually, all slaves were given access to provision grounds, but for many years marketing of provision ground surplus was not officially permitted the planter class, and slaves often risked punishment for

engaging in market activities (Campbell 1987:33). While they may have sold their produce for money in some cases, as a general rule slaves exchanged agricultural goods they produced for other provisions they needed which were not grown in their house-yard or provision ground. In the passage which follows, Shirley Genus tells me what she has learned through oral history – that slaves in Jamaica did not grow food primarily for monetary gain but rather for the sake of subsistence, and that they marketed food not because they produced an excess of it, but in order to obtain a wider variety of foods and thereby diversify their diet, and in order to participate in community activities.

Most of them didn't make any money from food. What happen is in those days, it come to my generation that nobody get money for that, only get money for doing manual labor, if somebody hire you. My grandmother used to tell us that what happen is somebody could hire you for the laundry for the day, or for weeding in the fields, or for cleaning the house, and you would get paid for that. But you would keep a garden, and you don't really buy other things because there's no money. So they would exchange – as a community, if it's a farming community – somebody over here would plant gungu, and somebody over here this other, and they will exchange, and everybody end up with all the desired staple foods. For meat, there was no money to pay for that, so you'd have to exchange goods.

By farming land for family subsistence and by marketing for exchange, members of the slave society in Jamaica became better able to manage bodily nourishment and social productivity. However, in the context of slavery and colonialism, slaves could only do these things by working much harder than they already had before they had no land. The plantation system offered slaves provision grounds, but it also constrained the profitability of marketing from these farms. After emancipation, many ex-slaves became wage laborers for the same planters who previously enslaved them. These ex-slaves continued to work the same provision grounds, but the planter class instituted policies by which laborers would be charged high rents to hold plots. Property taxes on these plots

were inflated and served as a deterrent to ownership. Thus the newly liberated underclass remained bound to the plantation economy, now as wage laborers and renters. Even after acquiring what Jean Besson alternately calls "inalienable freehold rights" to land (1998:54) or "land tenure" (1984:57), the day-to-day situation of poor farming people was one of demoralization. Since the European planter class held a monopoly over the best farming land, they allowed the colony to remain underdeveloped, compounding the impoverishment of the working poor, a group which included, and continues to include, many small farmers (Campbell 1987:78).

Due to the historically particular circumstances described above, farming and marketing people who comprised the "underside" of Jamaican society (Nettleford 1976:44) associated planter-designed land use with both the potential for progress and the persistence of suffering. For all poor farmers, the multi-generational struggle to gain freehold of *family land* has been hard-won, and in many ways, farming people – as well as many others who have taken up more immediately lucrative enterprises and/or moved to urban areas – still consider land use to be entrenched in a systematic cycle of exploitation, as illuminated in the following excerpt from an interview with Shirley:

Shirley: In some way there's more expansion, but in other ways it just come down to *starvation*, because now you have to work harder, do more hours, doing more for less, there's no money to save, and everything go to the [international] market, because you know famine is not on . . . You try to do some farming, and by the time you sell, and you pay for the water rate which is so high, and you pay for those chemicals if you use them, or if you use organic, well there's still paying, and they're so expensive. By the time you take three months to get a crop in to sell it, you work for three months on nothing. So you give up, you know . . .

Mandy: Sojie told me too, this same thing – that it's very hard to make a business from just farming.

Shirley: Oh, poor *soul!* If a wife or family depending on farm right now . . . And when you look at the farming area, which is the best farming area – used to be, in all of Jamaica – right now I'm even afraid to walk on the land because I'll might [get] cancer, even barefooted youth can get from walk on those lands barefooted. They're oversprayed, those lands, with all these chemicals these farmers doing, and insecticide, and pesticide, and fungicide, all that. *God help them*, 'cause nobody else can. And that's what you get you know.

Since pre-emancipation manipulation of provision grounds and systems of subsistence and exchange, land rights have been a major rallying point for Jamaican popular resistance and dissent. For the most part, dissent came first from groups of enslaved or proletarian laborers, those tied to plantation productivity. Some dissenters worked under the plantation system for generations, gradually achieving freedom and land tenure or land access, while others decided that they could only advance their condition if they abandoned the holdings originally granted them by planters and set up independent farms on more remote locations. These people often found support in the "free societies" founded by Baptist missionaries and groups of ex-slaves (Mintz 1958), and sometimes in maroon societies. Many social, political, and religious movements coalesced while waves of popular dissent swelled before and after emancipation (mid-1800s), during the period of capitalist depression (early 1900s), and into the modern era of structural readjustment and international investment in the extraction of natural resources (Thomas 1999, Campbell 1987, Nettleford 1972).

Rastafarianism was one of these movements, through which four preachers – Leonard Howell, Joseph Hibbert, Robert Hinds, and Archibald Dunkley – came from different parts of Jamaica to the Kingston ghettos in the early 1930s in order to revive the "old Garveyites" living there, with the promise that oppression, suffering, and exile from Africa – the rightful homeland of the dispossessed, black Jamaican proletariat –

would soon come to end (Barrett 1988:82-84). They spotlighted the apotheosis of Haile Selassie, the recently coronated Emperor of Ethiopia, in order to stress the urgency of making preparations for *repatriation* and impending apocalypse. By the 1940s, local government and law enforcement in Kingston had begun to scrutinize the Rastafarians for their radical message and methods of fund-raising, and to regularly harass and arrest members for causing a public disturbance. Through ensuing decades of urban persecution, many Rastafarians left Kingston to take up residence in the remotely located St. Catherine hills, in a settlement called "Pinnacle," modeled largely on the maroon and free societies which were exemplars of anti-colonial resistance through rural living and community action (Chevannes 1994:122, Besson 1998:71).

The first Rastafarians were largely urban poor alienated from land and farming, and the movement steadily gained membership in the Kingston ghettos; moreover, when Pinnacle was raided in 1941 and then completely disbanded in 1954 by police due to its notoriety for *ganja* production and tax evasion, many Rastafarians returned to their old Kingston neighborhoods to regroup (Barrett 1988:87). However, what Leonard E. Barrett, Sr. calls the "wilderness experience" of migrating to and living at Pinnacle (1988:88) set a pattern for the subsequent and continual exodus from ghettos to rural sites of Rastafarian settlement, and for the dispersion of Rastafarianism throughout the Jamaican countryside. Pinnacle came to symbolize the "bridge-burning act" of leaving the city and severing ties with the establishment (1988:88). The model of Pinnacle also fueled an old desire for access to land and land ownership, and the characteristic Rastafarian valorization of the "peasant" or *roots* life comes into view during this early period of the movement's history. Exodus was never an expression of isolationism, but

was rather a reevaluation of the moral improvement, social unification, and upliftment which could be achieved by emulating and reappropriating former modes of *natural living* in daily practice.

Since those early days, Rastafarians have taught that although land has historically been used in systematic exploitation, connection to land is a necessity; moreover, they have stressed that land rights are natural rights (Besson 1998:69-72). Contemporary Rastafarian *I-talists*, like early Rastafarians, continue to identify with the reappropriation of *natural living*, but they also teach that land is blameless and deserves our reverence. For them, *natural living* includes acting as a steward toward the land one lives on, protecting the land's cleanliness and productivity for the land's sake and for the sake of the generations of people which can be nourished by properly treated land. As Sojie told me, the motto of both Rastafarian *I-talists* and poor farming people in Jamaica is "In the leaf we trust." *I-talists* hold much suspicion of modern farming methods, believing that the use of chemical fertilizers and defoliants constitute industrial maneuvers to oppress land and people. The land's produce can be *I-tal* food only if it is naturally, or organically and traditionally, grown.

The normal vegetarian mode of dietary practice became an important part of *natural living* in part because Rastafarians linked it to old-fashioned customs for subsistence. Shirley talked at length during our recorded interview, about the how vegetarian dietary behavior was the norm of most colonial Jamaicans. In the following statement, she states her opinion that the vegetarian behavior of *I-talists* comes directly from slave diet rich in a variety of vegetables.

I have generation live [I-tal] before the poisoning come in. That's the way them used to live, and didn't eat meat. People think a natural diet is

something that this new generation brought into being! Inna the old days – as back as in slavery days . . . [European colonials and explorers] used to *mark* slave food because it have so much greens and stuff, like callaloo and okra. It's documented. And there was no meat on the plate, and them say the people eat *poor*. African didn't have fridge or salt to salt foods, so only time when they eat *meat* is when they go hunting for it. They didn't have this big meat belly as now, and they were considered *poor* and *peasant* you know, because they didn't eat meat.

Because Shirley and other informants so explicitly pronounced the embeddedness of vegetarian lifestyle in the practices and preferences of rural farming people in Jamaica – and indicate continuity back to slavery days – I question a claim made by John P.

Homiak, a folklorist and historian of the Rastafarian movement, that the *I-gelic I-tes*, a Rastafarian group who lived on Paradise Street in Kingston and then moved to Wareika Hill in the 1950s (1998:138), invented *I-talism* in food production and consumption. I do not dispute that the *I-gelics* were great promoters and codifiers of *I-talism* – Homiak's detailed records of the social networks that existed between various Rastafarian enclaves during the 1950s and 1960s seem to make this clear – but I do not believe that the *I-gelics* alone are solely responsible for what he calls a "genesis" for *I-tal* food and *I-talism*.

At some point after the period when early Rastafarians declared the advantages of *natural living*, *I-talists* (including members of the *I-gelic* enclave) espoused and routinized *naturality* – cleanliness and sustainability in land use practices and diet. They began to link traditionalism and self-reliance to sustainable agriculture, *I-tal* food production, and maintenance of bodily health with *I-tal* goods. Additionally, *I-talists* of this period also envisioned a pre-colonial primitive, or a 'natural man,' to embody their definitions of *naturality*. Homiak says, after Yawney (1985), that the Rastafarians as a group drew from such sources as African Jamaican folk traditions, the Bible, and the ideology of the 'natural man' in patterning distinctive practices; the *I-gelics*, more

specifically, drew mostly from the 'natural man' source and that "their habitations, foodways, mode of dress, and ritual conduct were symbolic of this concerted effort" (Homiak 1998:139). I find it significant, and even ironic, that *I-talists* would reclaim the idea of primitive *naturality*, when plantation society used this very concept to segregate slaves in general as lower beings, and further into classes which they then pit against one another. In the Jamaican socio-racial hierarchy, the planter class thought that Creole slaves were more civilized and therefore more deserving of privilege than Africans and dark-skinned slaves, who they compared to nature and considered "proud and recalcitrant, with a propensity to abscond as soon as opportunity presented itself" (Brathwaite 1971:165); for these reasons, darker-skinned and African slaves were given much less freedom of movement. Rastafarian re-definition and re-mobilization of the 'natural man' concept challenges these colonial ideas and the Afro-phobic, anti-social, and anti-traditional mind-set that they have conditioned in Jamaican popular culture.

Rastafarians who sought ways to resist *Babylon* and to simultaneously nourish and rehabilitate the whole quality of life which was bodily, socially, and spiritually experienced espoused traditional land use and the strategies connected with *natural living*. For the *I-gelics*, and by now more broadly for most Rastafarian *I-talists*, *natural living* and its associated efforts – communal farming on *family land*, traditional systems of exchange, and *naturality* which includes production and consumption of *I-tal* and valorization of the primitive – structure a taste for *I-tal*, and are tied to the motivation to improve of quality of life. These practices were invented out of existing traditions practiced by poor farmers on *family land* and in the free societies, but they were

transformative as well in that they shifted the focus from poverty to resourcefulness, from modernity to traditionalism, and from alienation to rootedness.

Mobilizing History, Imagining Livity

At the heart of any discussion about how and why Rastafarians use *I-tal* food is a discussion about *livity*, which for Rastafarians embodies quality of life and constitutes their personal and social livelihood. While there is no ideal *livity*, a state of *livity* can be maintained over the course of a person's life. One learns about the maintenance of *livity* through participation in embodied practices – in my case, I learned through the medium of *I-tal* food. Rastafarians use the concept of *livity* to stress the power that ecological and social responsibility have for increasing the health of the living, which entails the necessity for each living thing to contribute to the productivity of the whole. A person has a *livity*, a plant has a *livity*, a society has a *livity*, a social or political movement can even have a *livity*, as can anything that lives, biologically or socially, literally or metaphorically. For example, someone might be concerned about her friend's *livity* if she saw her friend spraying chemicals on his garden nearby her house, or if she heard that he had been beating his wife, because both these actions impoverish the quality of life. What follows is a synthesis of definitions of *livity* I obtained from people in the field, and it bridges the previous discussion of the history of land use, resistance, and then subsequent reappropriation of the familiar mode of resistance, to a discussion of Rastafarian ecology.

Livity has a temporal dimension, but with emphasis on present the moment. When talking about *livity*, people accentuate future progress; however, they do so by discussing the *works* they must engage in to achieve progress, build *livity*. Frankie, Shirley's brother who owns and runs *I-tal Rest*, told me at the end of our conversation on *livity*, "The future

is not my *problem*, you know. The next day, it will *arise*." Although *livity* as a present consciousness is a temporally deictic term, it is also spatially deictic (Duranti 1997:207-209). Shirley says, with regard to *livity*, "It's about saying, okay you were here where you're oppressed, now let's go forward and execute these things and see how black people can *move*." Later, talking about convincing someone to leave an abusive relationship, she elaborates:

You can wake somebody down there in a hole, who didn't think like that before, that there was no more justice or no more *livity*, or higher living – 'cause that's what *livity* means, higher living. So it depends. Rasta is really going to the core of things and maintaining a higher life, a *livity*. Coming outta the back, coming outta the past where you are losing. You don't need to be a loser anymore. You didn't have to be a loser in the beginning, but that was then. You don't need to stay there. That's what Rasta is all about. So as I said before, that's why I said my mother and my father – and now since – brought Rasta, because Rasta is about changing for the highly. Was not about dread, about wearing dread.

Livity embodies present consciousness, change over time, and movement. As an ideological concept, it is thick with social meaning and power, and talk about *livity* both engages conversation participants with the idea of advancement and motivates them to action. Underlying the word-sound's power is a Rastafarian ethos of therapy which perhaps indexes a desire for transcendence.

An interest in building *livity* influences the decision to embrace Rastafarian ideology and participate in distinctive practices, which are in fact, projects to build *livity*. Rastafarians gain inspiration for their own everyday struggles for freedom by taking a lesson from those who struggled against oppression on provision grounds in the hills in spite of their enslavement, and from those who abandoned the effort to work for the plantation economy as wage laborers and created their own free societies instead. *Livity* is

a concept which orients Rastafarian projects of *natural living* in space and time, and it is used to tie the idea of *naturality* to the significance of sociality. Sojie tells me,

[Livity] means like, love and co-existence. Man-to-man brotherliness and sisterliness. A kind of social thing like, from a social point of view. Your social actions and your social products, your social intercourse. So that's only way society can exist. That is the only way man can exist, through coexistence.

Frankie says that one can build *livity* by channeling constant energy toward helping others who are suffering. So, projects of *livity* are enacted in the lived world as both personal and social therapy. Shirley says that by regarding *livity* and building it, one is "trying to develop the highest . . . where you interact, where the social and spiritual comes in. That's livity. You try to make sure there's no envy, no jealousy, and all those things that can come between you and another person." *Livity*, emerging from the Rastafarian ideology which values advancement, is like that "therapeutic ethos" described by Rosenblatt, in that it is "based on the recovery of the self in response to the experience of consumer capitalism" (324).

Ecology and Cultivating Anciency

"For [Rasta] take unto himself this concept: It a nature him a deal with.
It's *earth* him a deal with, right?
The earth is a mother, is a food, is how you look, is how you talk,
Is how you relate with *people*."

– Mutabaruka (Greenberg 1990)

The reappropriation and redefinition of certain rural Jamaican traditions – i.e., small farming, internal marketing, vegetarianism, and ethnomedicine – and the incorporation of concepts such as *naturality* and *livity*, together give *I-tal* practices their purpose and difference. Rastafarian *I-talists* use food-related activities to practically implement these goals and ideological concepts in their daily lives. The following

discussion should further illuminate *I-tal* practices and the taste for their tangible products, by explaining the link between nourishment, conservationism, and traditionalism. I analyze Rastafarian ecological narratives which conceptualize human bodies and the body of the land, their similar states of equilibrium and susceptibility, and their condition of interconnectedness and interdependence. These narratives emphasize the therapeutic power of *I-tal* and the imperative for *natural living*.

I went to Shirley often to learn about what *I-tal* means, not only because she so readily gave me advice on farming and cooking locally available foods and on dealing effectively with Jamaican *higglers* in markets, but also because she practices traditional medicine officially and professionally. She helped me understand the connection between medicine and food and between therapy and *natural living*. I can remember one of the first times I asked her if she would explain to me how nutritional healing takes place and how *I-tal* food is ultimately connected to the healing experience. She told me, "It all go back to the sins of the father that we must now pay for. The sins of the father are all based on restriction." This statement prefaced a long discussion about ecology. I came to understand through later conversations with her that the sins and restrictions she spoke of are those actions that impoverish the land and people of Jamaica, starting with slavers and planters, and continuing in various ways up to the present. She explained that all living bodies – land and social body included with individual body – are connected and operate on similar fundamental principles.

"Flow," is the overarching principle which Shirley – and many rural Jamaicans, according to Elisa Sobo (1993a, 1993b) – uses to conceptualize the nourishment of living bodies. In Shirley's body ecology, bodies are animated with life as energies and

substances flow through them and nourish them. The more balanced or normal the *flow*, the healthier the body can be. As *flow* nourishes vitality, bodies must manage *flow* to achieve wellness, and they do so through nourishing practices. Both hunger (lack) and clot (repletion with the wrong kinds of things and/or in the wrong amount) are restrictive to a normal state of *flow* and cause what Shirley calls "weakness." When bodies are weak, illness can take hold. So, she causally links malnourishment to restriction, restriction to imbalanced *flow*, imbalanced *flow* to weakness, and weakness to illness. Likewise, she links proper nourishment to balanced *flow*, balanced *flow* to strength/immunity, and strength/immunity to health. She defines therapy as the treatment of weakness and imbalance and *I-tal* as the medicine used in therapy. For Rastafarian *I-talists*, land is the major source for *I-tal*. The land is full of *flow* itself, and it can be used by humans to treat the *flow* contained in their bodies. Because land supplies nourishment, Rastafarians work to maintain it by acting as its reverent stewards. Work done to maintain the strength of *flow* contained in the land's body and its produce is, by extension, also work to reap the *I-tal* food-medicines used to treat human bodily *flow*.

In the following passage, Shirley talks about how land nourishes bodies by providing everything human bodies need to grow, not only food-medicine but also a home which can be used to nurture familial and social life.

Shirley: There's part of me which really love the land, because, you know, you don't *own* the land. There's part of me which detached from the land . . . You love [the land] as a nature, something you can't take with you, something you can remember only. I serve [land] with that kind of reverence, you know? I get the best, I see the best, that when I grow I remember best. I don't have any attachment to [the land] because I know that it doesn't *belong* to me.

Mandy: What are the major problems you see with your environment around you? That could be this land, that could be just land in Treasure Beach in general or Great Bay in general, or in Jamaica.

Shirley: It all go back to the IMF¹. They own the damn thing because whatever we do they have a last say in it, because to them it all about money. The land is actually all about the *blood*, but the system is all about money, and they don't work together.

Mandy: Blood – do you mean like family is blood?

Shirley: Not blood as family, blood as feeding yourself, making yourself strong and healthy, maintaining the blood – that what the land is *for*. It's a home, it should be a *home*, which is something that should feed you and keep you healthy. I can't see any of that happening now. Who is doing all of this is the people who are sucking the land *for* money, when they should be sucking the land for their *blood* and not for money . . . They *mash up the land*, so there is not anything to respect there. I mean, in my yard or around our area – except for next door over there. How can I respect that land over there? Of course the land didn't *do* it, you see. But how can I respect it? It's poison. If you try to suck it, it would harm you.

Mandy: Does that mean that if you were to plant there, things wouldn't grow?

Shirley: Of course things would *grow*, look at America. Look at America, for instance. America puts out the most organic things, and people buy that. It can't be! America is the most poisoned country in the world. Whatever come out of the land *can* be organic; it's still poison.

Mandy: What exactly is poisoning it?

Shirley: It's the chemicals, but it's the deeds of the people that make the chemical happen. Their action produced the chemical, and the chemical tear the path on the land that lives. So it's the deeds of the people, but not in thoughts, in *action* – in what they do, and what they create.

In this passage Shirley focuses on the idea that land is what she uses in order to give herself "the best" in health while she makes a home for herself on it, and because it provides these things she objects to the idea of "owning" land, and instead regards it with "reverence." For Shirley, blood is the dominant symbol of *flow* and source for

¹ International Monetary Fund

nourishment. Michel Laguerre, generalizing about "Afro-Caribbean" conceptions about bodily *flow*, notes that monitoring the blood is the major concern in these traditional systems of medicine, and that its various qualities and components are put back into normal balance through alterations of temperature and diet (1987:67).

Sobo discusses Jamaican ethnophysiology in terms of body image and *flow*, making connections with other humoral ethnomedical systems and studying Jamaican social body in depth by looking at the way ethnophysiology patterns kinship, procreation patterns, and the social and moral order in general. She writes that "because both physical health and social health involve unimpeded *flow*, people often reason hermeneutically, applying models from either realm to the other as needed to illuminate and express certain aspects of situations involving the ideal of continual exchange" (1993a:65). In the passage above, Shirley *reasons* from blood (or *flow*) which provides nourishment, to land for nourishment, to land for home, to home for nourishment/strength (or balance of *flow*). She implies that physical and social health depend on stewardship of land – which entails living on, protecting, and maintaining familiarity with the land in a traditional way. One important point I think Shirley is making in this passage is that there is no real bodily connection between people who use land primarily for profit and not for nourishment. It is because they lack this connection that they see nothing wrong in poisoning it, and because they poison it, it becomes unfit to eat from, live on, or even walk upon. But evidently poison is not always bad for the body, when talking about the natural poisons inherent in foods – what Shirley calls "vital poisons." This kind of poison is neutralized and therefore made harmless when the plant which contains it is ingested whole. It can be harnessed and used in making medicines, Shirley explained. As foods become hybridized

and genetically altered, though, vital poisons are drained and the balance in them thrown off. These foods are no good for medicine, and in fact, because they are no longer whole, they can do the body harm.

So in the *I-tal* ecology, land nourishes not just if it is free from the abuses of poison, but also when it is familiar, traditional. Shirley's reasoning behind the rejection of new genetically modified foods include statements like "they are too young," "they were not meant for us," our bodies have no "memory" of how to use them, and the land has not had time to "stabilize" them. She says her family makes great efforts to grow traditional food crops (those fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains, seeds, and herbs which are remembered from daily use in African, maroon, and slave cuisines) and "native" food crops (those grown by indigenous groups before Europeans reached the island) on their lands.

Together, this group of foods is what she refers to in the following passage, as "old world foods":

The whole world have that kind of plants still – old world plants. That's what we get along the line come down, until this chemical and everything take over. People in our civilization from couple thousand year back, coming to this civilization, is the same blood people. We never change. There was nothing much changed, and that's why they call it "old world plant" – it's coming from yonder, and it have its own character. That's why them say they are so *powerful* and good for *healing*. It's not *healing*, it's in maintaining the *blood*. We can get strong because we have that connection.

What I find particularly fascinating about these "old world foods" is that they have latent healing powers because they embody the connection between people and land, and because they maintain the blood. Combining her statement above with this one, she is stating that blood (*flow*) is more properly nourished and balanced by plants which the body remembers how to use. The body remembers how to use plants even when the

conscious mind has forgotten, or when one has decided against using traditional knowledge. Shirley told me on more than one occasion, that the most effective healer is one with a multi-generational, local knowledge of the old foods growing on the land. That person maintains an "ancient" connection with *family land*, which intensifies the accuracy of therapy he or she can administer to someone in need. She tells me I must always seek out the Jamaican herbalist to find the most *I-tal* in foods, because that person more than likely comes from a tradition of knowledgeable and resourceful people who have located, transplanted, cultivated, and learned to use the most powerful plants in their environment.

Anciency, sometimes pronounced "I-nciency," refers to connection to and familiarity with both African identity and *naturality*, and the idea is used by Rastafarians in making the authoritative claim that *natural living* is part of heritage. In Jean Comaroff's work about the Tshidi in South Africa and their revitalization movement, she says that in an effort to separate themselves from white ways of modern living, which they call "sekgoa," to reorient themselves according to more traditional ways, "setswana" (1985:192), Tshidi emphasize returning to traditional modes of food production and consumption. Comaroff writes about their "general injunction to 'eat the work of our hands,' informed both by the general desire to know the social origin of one's food and by the value placed by Tshidi upon freedom from the need to sell their labor power" (1985:218). Rastafarian *I-talists* also hold the ideal of returning to the *roots* for production and consumption strategies. In the Rastafarian case, dependence on manufactured foods and supermarkets alienates them from the traditional mode of food production on *family land* and from the consumption of local products. It also erodes the

social order (contingent on internal exchange of foods, the community-level cooperative venture for sustainability and the enrichment of health), vision for social health, the practice of daily healing, and struggle for progress.

I-nty Iion tells me that "locking onto the anciency" is a way of turning toward and embracing *natural living*, but it is also his way of stressing that the *roots* lifestyle should be practiced through humility and *naturality*, without novelty or perceived needful things such as "baggage" – all the things which he says "add poison to the living body." Cultivating *anciency* and building *livity*, for him, require an ascetic or purist *I-talism* (see discussion on purists in Chapter 3). Many Rastafarian *I-talist* practices which seek to revive *anciency* – especially in dress, speech, housing, and foodmaking – strike non-Rastafarians as radical. However, *I-talists* proclaim that their practices are *root-ical*, not radical. Stuart Hall writes that tradition "is a vital element in culture; but it has little to do with the mere persistence of old forms. It has much more to do with the way elements have been linked together or articulated" (1981:236). Performance of tradition, for Rastafarians, involves a synthesis of remembered material culture and modes of dissent. For *I-talists*, this synthesis articulates with efforts to conserve familiar natural resources which have therapeutic purposes. I now shift to a two-part discussion about practice – concentrating first on *I-tal* diet, kitchens, and food preparation and commodification, which together embody the sensibilities I have charted in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3
EX-TABLISHING I-TAL CUISINE

Hungry be fed,
Sick nourished,
Aged protected and infant cared for,
Selah.

– I-nty IIon

The previous chapter placed Rastafarian attitudes toward nourishment within discourses about regional culture history and within an ideological framework, arguing that Rastafarians conceive of local, natural, traditional food as nutriment which enhances quality of life, as a medicine to the body, and as an embodiment of their continual battle against oppression and alienation from land. In the next two chapters, I illustrate how my informants use the socially constructed media of daily meals and medicinal treatments to deliver nourishment and to demonstrate their concern for environment, body, and *livity*. In this chapter I intend to enrich what I have stated previously about *I-tal* food practices and preferences, by creating an immediacy of context and evoking a sensorial awareness. Contained here is a hearty portion of thick description in narrative accounts which give the reader opportunities to follow meal-time episodes as they unfold in and around a variety of Rastafarian kitchen spaces. Integrated with vignettes are excerpts from interview transcriptions, as well as comparisons with cookbook recipes (Osbourne 1988, Walsh and McCarthy 1995), folkloristic studies of food (Nicholas and Sparrow 1979, Robertson 1982), and ethnographers' considerations of food practices and taste (Stahl 2002, Weiss 1996, Farquhar 2002). I hope to present a realistic and fair reading of what is typical about *I-tal* foodways at my sites of fieldwork – i.e., Great Bay, Treasure Beach, Malvern, and Montego Bay – in addition to providing a sense of an ideal and the problematics. First, I consider the idealized model for *I-tal* diet, which Rastafarians

promote in *reasonings* but go on to personalize and improvise upon in practice. Then, I shift to presenting an assemblage of evocative pieces which highlight the most typical elements of the taste for *I-tal* food.

Culinary Models and Strategies

I choose to set side by side a composite of encounters with purist, or strict, modes of doing *I-tal* cooking with one encounter influential to me where reproducing the ideal was not in an individual's best interest. The collective taste for *I-tal* food demonstrates a level of idiosyncrasy which reveals that *I-talism* is less of a critical, accusatory set of rules and more of an imperative approach to human health, a monitoring system, and a set of reminders.

The Purist's Approach: A Composite

Ideally, *I-tal* food remains free from association with death, or with deadly associations with *Babylon*, throughout its transformation from land to plant to food to bodily nourishment; Rastafarians believe that this is why *I-tal* food lends life to the body when one consumes it. *I-tal* meals are preferably vegetarian, and I learned that *I-talists* choose plant foods like beans, peas, roasted seeds and nuts, also *pears* and coconuts, to provide the balance of protein and fat they need since they do not eat meat. Rastafarians have brought to light many ways to avoid iron deficiency, as Ras Hu-I tells Tracy Nicholas and Bill Sparrow, "Inorganic iron should never be taken as it is an irritant to the kidney. Red and white cabbage, spinach, butt lettuce, raw carrots, cherries, strawberries, currants, and onion are sources of organic iron" (1979:60). During the days before the *Supper of Rastafari* (held in Montego Bay in the summer of 2002), I talked with *I-stant Hon* on I-nty's *family land* about why his group insists on vegetarianism. He told me that

there are many reasons, but that one of the most important ones is that one should never eat something that might bite the hand or run away when one tries to take it and make food from it. Plant foods, he told me, hang from branches, and the branches release them easily into the hand when the food is ripe. During the *Sup' (Supper of Rastafari)*, the *Rocked-Up Chanters*, a group of young *Nyabinghi brethren* who performed musically on stage, claimed that eating meat – which represents the dead – turns one's belly into a "cemetery" and one's mouth into an "open sepulcher" (E. Dickerson 2002).

As I mentioned in Chapter 2 and discuss below in Chapter 4, *I-talists* believe that fresh plant foods are key in maintaining *flow* and in "building the structure" of the body, as I-nty and Shirley tell me. Purists believe that they should never eat the flesh of animals, in part, because meats build up in the belly, clot the *flow* of blood, and can poison the body as well if the meat is laden with chemicals. I-nty also says that what nourishes us best is what we can farm from the earth. Eating on fish is considered an alien act by the *Ilon I-tes*, although not necessarily by all Rastafarians, especially those who have a family history of involvement with the fishing industry, or whose *family land* is located along the coastline. For those people, fishing is often considered natural and traditional, and *I-tal*, but for some purists even flesh foods from the sea can do a person no good. The *Ilon I-tes* come mostly from farming areas, although there are two U.S. members who also associate with them as well. One night at *I-rie Cabins*, townspeople were holding a candlelight vigil down at Calabash Bay for three fishermen who had been lost at sea days before. I-nty commented on this event, that while he felt sympathy for the children who had lost their fathers and the women who had lost their husbands, he judged that the fishermen were "bound to lose one day." He said that people were meant to plant

and reap on the land, and to make their livelihood there – not to create "murderation upon the fishes." He said that the fisherman also should have regarded the weather with more reverence, because sea and wind are "powerful forces."

Because *I-tal* food both lends and enhances life, it is thought to be wholesome, substantive, and natural nourishment. The lively "vibe," or vibration, of *I-tal* food is heightened and thereby enhanced during the preparation process by a harmonious social atmosphere in or around the kitchen, and also during meals with prayers, blessings on one another, and amiable light conversations. In the epigraph above, which is I-nty's customary meal-time blessing, food is consecrated for treating hunger and sickness, and for the longevity and care of aged people and infants. Along with bodily health and relief from hunger come satisfaction, self-confidence, and ecological and social responsibility, which are all tied to the cultivation of *livity*. "Feeding up I-tal" can be a religiously righteous act as well – on par with "licking the chalice" – a way of taking what nature has made available through the soil, injecting what traditional knowledge one has attained (about old or familiar, and clean foods) and manifesting a good meal from it. Sister I-Peace, at the *Supper of Rastafari*, calls out from the stage, "I-lie I, good people, how are you *feeding* today?" By playing with language, she implies that if you are eating well – on *I-tal* food – then of course you are also feeling well.

Connected with the quality of *livity* are *I-tal* food's freshness, its seasonality, and its locality. There is a clear and stated preference for fresh fruits and vegetables, "agridishes" (Nicholas and Sparrow 1979:58) which are grown inside Jamaica, by small farmers. Many Rastafarians maintain a balance between consuming cooked and raw foods. All parts of edible plants are useful in cooking – roots, stems, leaves, and fruits.

Unpalatable parts may be useful for medicinal teas, or in feeding animals, and so are still called "food." Completely inedible parts of plants may be useful in making objects like baskets, rope, dyes, etc. Parts of plants which in aforementioned categories have no use are still good for composting, and will eventually be recycled.

Rastafarians prefer to exchange foods locally rather than spend money in markets, and they often mutually swap foods – or services for foods – with people they know (family, neighbors, and friends). They will also buy foods from *higglers* and growers, though they often inquire about whether the food was grown *I-ganically*, that is, without chemical fertilizers. *I-talists* say they do not like to buy manufactured, packaged foods because packaging indicates that preservatives ("chemicals") have been added; additionally, the packaging itself adds poisonous substances to the food. Nicholas and Sparrow learned from their informants that *I-tal* foods "are not contaminated or denatured by any processing, additions, or deletions" (1979:58). Rastafarians tend to avoid buying foods from supermarkets for a number of reasons, mainly because the foods for sale there are usually not locally produced and, even when they are, the growers are anonymous and the quality of their land is therefore questionable. *I-talists* have no way to directly confront the grower and *reason* with him regarding the *naturalness* of his marketed foods.

Along with *naturalness* of the foods being grown and cooked and the way they were obtained, the style and means of preparation, the combinations of ingredients, the use of wares, and the culinary techniques all come into defining a dish or meal as *I-tal*. Rastafarian meals may appear to be humble, but they are conceived of as artful within an *I-tal* world-view. *I-talists* fill their dishes with complex flavors and impressive ingenuity. Shirley's brother Frankie tells me that *I-tal* cooking requires a kind of culinary

"sophistication," but that this sophistication has nothing to do with the "science" of using modern appliances or exotic ingredients. Rather, sophistication emerges from a cook's practice with using *ancient*, or old-fashioned and traditional, culinary knowledge, techniques and ingredient combinations. *I-talists* may produce one-pot meals and utilize worn or multi-use implements in their kitchens, but at the same time they work to produce meals with substance, flavor, texture, aroma, and medicine. In this way, *I-talist* cooks *ex-tablish* the value of *I-tal* cuisine – meaning that they institute a distinctive style of producing the vegetarian culinary fare popularly associated with impoverishment and backwardness.

An *I-talist* may use crushed, ground or diced herbs and spices in making dishes more savory, but never salt. The *Rasta Cookbook* announces that "herbs and spices are also fruits of the earth and are as such essential ingredients to the diet" (1988:12). Salt is considered to be an unnecessary additive, since foods have their own mineral salts. As a preservative, salt carries association with death. Salt is also associated with the imported meat provisions provided by colonial masters, namely *saltfish*, which is crusted in salt as a preservative. Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Murrell write that Rastafarians are building from an idea common among Jamaican slaves, and then later among both plantation wage laborers and those who lived and worked in free societies, that the "strongly salt-based diet introduced on the estates by the 'plantocracy' was thus viewed by some Africans as a European plan to thwart their desire to repatriate to Africa and to corrupt their minds with colonial thoughts" (1998:46).

One ingredient which purists use very sparingly is cooking oil. If they use it, they use traditionally prepared coconut oil ("I-I"), which is usually stored in recycled and

found empty liquor bottles. *I-talists* seldom choose powdered coconut milk over hand-grated and juiced coconut flesh for the liquid base in their soups, stews and rice dishes; other base ingredients which are combined with coconut milk in soups include: okra, pumpkin, and *cassareep*. Nearly everything boiled contains some amount of coconut milk. Purists take the time and risk to gather coconuts once or twice a week. Extra kitchen time includes grating and juicing the coconuts by hand. Sometimes a person may climb 20-30 feet up a coconut tree to gather the fruits, and then the process of completely grating and juicing a coconut may take another 15 minutes for an experienced cook.

I-talists prefer to cook and serve food with simple kitchen wares (utensils, implements, dishes, and appliances), which they keep fastidiously clean. For washing, fresh spring water or rain water is preferable to tap water from pipes in the frequent cleaning of hands and washing of ingredients and implements (Nicholas and Sparrow 1979:58). Large covered buckets and barrels of rain water often sit outside kitchen spaces. Small pots, cups, or dried calabashes are used to "catch" some of the water for daily kitchen use. Purists serve food in calabash bowls from which people can sip or eat with their hands or using coconut husk spoons, and they prefer this serving method to using china with silverware. Cooks often choose wooden kitchen implements over others (metal or plastic), and when using metal they choose iron over all other metals, choosing aluminum last. The short, broad, and somewhat heavy *cutlass* is the favorite chopping, carving and dicing tool, and it travels with the *I-talist* from farm to yard to kitchen. Hand-carved wooden kitchen wares are considered sophisticated, rather than backward. In fact, many communities have skilled woodworkers who are commissioned to produce these wares. Purists prefer deep clay pots and earthenware vessels (sometimes called "yabbas"),

although if they cannot make them they can rarely find them, and when they can, they prefer to use them for storing or in making medicine (see Chapter 4, on Shirley's use of *yabbas* in *Zareeba's* steam booth and gardens). *I-talists* often borrow or scavenge pots, lids, pans, and other implements which may be well-worn but are versatile and sturdy in shape and composition, and are thus deemed capable of faring well on an open fire or inside an oven.

Outdoor kitchen spaces are considered to be the best way to cook foods in large pots slowly. Ground fires, built upon the ground outdoors by making a simple hearth out of three stones and burning wood, or raised hearths (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.6) are often used in *I-tal* cooking outdoors, even when a stove is being used indoors at the same time. Low boiling on an open fire is a native method of cooking food in Jamaica, and Rastafarian *I-talists* accentuate that their dumpling stews, soups, and rice dishes are extra tasty and nourishing for the body because they bubble and simmer for this relatively long period (compared to those meals made on modern stoves). Making the ground fire also entails a process that can be more or less *I-tal*, according to the materials burned and their aesthetic and safe arrangement (see below scene in the *hills camp* kitchen).

Dietary Dilemma: The Chicken Wings Incident

June 20, 2002. "Dread the day I and I see Lockswoman frying chicken, mi family," I-nty remarks as we enter the kitchen at *I-rie Cabins* to put some gathered vegetables into the pantry. I look to the stove and see something I have not yet seen here and which seems very out-of-place in an *I-tal* kitchen – a pan full of frying chicken! On the way out the kitchen door I pass by Shirley, and I stop to ask her, jokingly, if chicken

wings are *I-tal*. She laughs uneasily and explains that she is cooking this meal for her mother, who likes to have chicken or fish meat nearly once a week. No, it is not really *I-tal*, she says.

Worrying that I have been insensitive to make a joke of this and apologizing when we are alone together, I offer Shirley some vegetables we have brought in from the market. We start to talk more about the meal she is preparing – chicken and breadfruit slices, or "chips," fried in canola oil – and the smell of all of it is spicy and delicious. I am fascinated to discover that this *I-talist* *does* approve of eating meat from time to time, specifically when she feels overworked. She says she does not like the taste of fish at all but then admits that she will eat a wing or two from this pan of chicken and find it healthful and tasty. She believes that in hard times, when manual labor is heavy and *I-tal* food scarce – which come often for small farmers, for people living in dry regions, and especially for women – a little meat can help to correct deficiencies and satisfy cravings; in other words, the body can extract nourishment and/or medicine it, at least partially. I ask if her need for meat has something to do with the melon spoilage – the family's main summer cash crop, watermelons, were mostly ruined this year by heavy and unexpected rains. She says that the *livity* of the crop was one thing and the harder work endured by the whole family in order to compensate for diminished returns on the investment was quite another. She also explains that her work at *Zareeba* takes a great amount of energy, especially when the client is unfamiliar to her and/or working against her in their therapy sessions. When work is steady at *Zareeba*, her body sometimes develops deficiencies. These two explanations are interrelated because she practices a profession herself while also helping out with work on *family land*.

Broadening her explanation of *I-talism* and meat consumption now, to include the local historical significance of tastes, Shirley shifts the focus of conversation from herself to her elders. She tells me that her father never eats meat, that he does not crave it, and that she learned how to be a vegetarian from him first, rather than from Rastafarian *I-talists*. She says that being a vegetarian is his way of being humble, conservative, and clean in his diet, and that this how he passed on the practice to his children. Her mother's family, on the other hand, has had a long-standing involvement with the fishing industry around Great Bay, and Shirley attributes her mother's periodic cravings for meat to this history and local culinary tradition. She notes that until her mother became acutely arthritic that she used to always make *fish and bammy*, which was considered "by the family and everybody" to be a very *I-tal* dish, regardless of the meat component, for a number of reasons. First, the fish was locally caught (it was not saltfish), and the fishermen and fish mongers were family and friends. Second, *cassava* was a local and regional staple of primary importance in those days. The *cassava* tree in her mother's yard was the local source from which members of the family would dig the root to make flour for *bammy* every day. Also, the process of preparing *cassava* flour and then frying *bammy* (*cassava* fritters shaped as flat breads) in naturally processed, homemade coconut *I-l* was representative of African culinary practice preserved in Jamaica; making *bammy* was therefore a daily expression of African heritage.

Nostalgia for the days of *fish and bammy* has put Shirley into a sad, wistful mood. She recounts now, with honesty and some bitterness, her narrative of struggle with keeping an *I-tal* diet. She was vegetarian until about the age of 19, following her father's example, at which time her gardening work became so hard that she felt she had no

choice but to eat some meat. She says she was in a bad way at that point, manifesting poor health in her social life, and that many of her family members told her at the time that she was "cross and mean." She discovered that eating occasional meals of meat gave her back some strength to "go on like herself again." Later, when she lived in the hills near Montego Bay and learned to live as a Rastafarian *I-talist*, she never craved meat. The land was bountiful, and other *I-talists* lived near enough to "exchange" foods. But when she came back to Great Bay, she found that, because the land was not as productive and a good variety not always attainable, she could easily find herself alternating between periods of nourishment and hunger.

She tells me directly, at this point, that she does not deny that "eating meat is eating death." She learned from her family that being vegetarian most of the time keeps your body from getting sick, but she has come to know that the fittest diet for her is one full of a variety of local, clean vegetables and very rarely, some meat as well. She goes on to say that meat changes the way your body *flows*, it clogs *flow* because it does not just go in, get used, and pass out after your body consumes it. When she feels that meat-eating is causing her body trouble, she shifts back to *I-talism* and uses *I-tal* foods and the periodic change of diet to cleanse her body. On this evening for instance, she tells me she will have some chicken wings – the wings because they have the least flesh on them – but that tomorrow she may not eat at all, in addition to drinking some juice from the aloe vera plant and maybe some tea "for a cleanse," also that she will continue on an "I-tal foods diet" until she notices that bodily deficiencies – "weaknesses" – are subsiding.

During our taped interview two weeks later, I asked Shirley to speak at length about why she periodically breaks a strictly *I-tal* diet, and why she believes that pure (or

strict) *I-talism* is unsustainable in her life. She had more to say on this occasion, not only about the struggle with hunger during periods of hard manual labor, but also about the lack of access to a variety of vegetables on local lands during days when nearly everyone sprays their crops with chemicals. She focuses on the idea that vegetable foods one buys at the market (local markets and supermarkets) are "poison," saying,

There was a time when I could [be strictly I-tal], because I was in the hills and planting I-tal fruits . . . I-tal mean you eat natural food, clean food without *chemicals*. And when you start buying food at the market – there's no way, doesn't matter how much you exclude meat, can you be I-tal . . . There's no way I'm gonna go to the market and buy some food which has been sprayed – some vegetable which has been sprayed – and say I'm eating I-tal. I'm not. I'm eating some *vegetable*, but not *I-tal*. Seen? There was a time – years – when I did I-tal, you know strictly I-tal, but I couldn't *maintain* it. Because I mean, I was *working*. And having a staple diet of so many different things, which you don't have the land and the climate to *do* here. And I know – excuse *me!* – but not having food is important. I mean I have to have *food*. Not having food was killing me – you know, a staple diet. And even now I eat mostly vegetables and peas and stuff. And I know they have chemical on them – I go to the store, and I buy stuff from market that come from U.S. I know they have a lot of chemical in them, but *I know I am not I-tal now, you know*. I can't be.

Here, she intimates great frustration at the way the land and its produce are being poisoned. In earlier days, she, her family members, their neighbors, even higglers trucking in produce from the hills, could all exchange safe foods, and could depend on getting a diversity of fresh foods on any given day. An *I-tal* diet was more sustainable then. Now supermarkets and poisoned land in the area constrain her to include meat and "sprayed" items in her diet, and this prompts her to follow a more rigorous cleansing routine than she would otherwise require.

* * * *

The consistent reproduction of purist ideals for *I-tal* cuisine is troublesome to many and unattainable for some who, nevertheless, claim to be *I-talists*. From Shirley, I

learn that several conditions prompt her to adapt the ideal *I-tal* cuisine: involvement in sporadic or regular periods of hard work, desire to keep meaningful connections with both African heritage and local Jamaican heritage in culinary practice, and the notion that poisoned food is nearly unavoidable. For Jamaicans in general, widespread poverty can make many necessities unattainable on a regular basis; therefore, a nutritionally complete diet, *I-tal* or not, is not always available. Economic constraints push family members who cook regularly for the family to do most of the other domestic work as well – namely, tending the laundry, kitchen gardens, children and livestock if they keep any, so that the rest of the family can work away from the *yard*, in the fields or in town. This makes a cook's life very busy, especially when considering that since the foods for any meal likely come from many different fields, much of the family cook's day is spent *trodding* between friends' homes, with a shoulder, hand, or head basket full of something harvested for both subsistence and trade. While in many Jamaican homes, domestic roles fall largely on women, in Rastafarian homes men often accept these roles; therefore, feeling overworked by yard and garden plagues both women and men. Of course, ecological pressures periodically constrain *I-tal* food practices, too, by causing crop failure and spoilage, and sickness – during flood years, many Jamaicans fall sick for months, succumbing to both hunger and stomach ailments caused by bad water. Individual decisions tend to make the *I-tal* model more fluid, flexible, and adaptive.

Shirley's dilemma demonstrates how the taste for *I-tal* food shapes and can be shaped by perceptions of personal bodily needs, also how agency can be constrained by poverty and by a decline in land productivity. We see the purist model for behavior being partially incorporated and partially adapted by the individual. From hearing her story we

gather that although Rastafarians usually *want* to maintain an *I-tal* diet because they believe that *I-talism* helps one build *livity* and proper health, pure *I-talism* can be difficult to accomplish at all times; moreover, purist criticisms can at times seem unfair and patronizing to one who suffers from chronic hunger.

In the next sections, I shift from the atypical and problematic, to what I consider to be typical and triumphant about the production and consumption of *I-tal* cuisine, in an effort to go beyond constructing and deconstructing the ideal, to pull together representative examples of the practice. In both sections I work to describe dishes, culinary techniques, implements, kitchen spaces and social situations, cooks, and meal-time company, and I hope that a juxtaposition of these pieces will reveal what is typical and outstanding about the Rastafarian taste for *I-tal*.

Soups, Snacks, and One-Pot Dishes

The following evocative pieces illustrate the taste for and pride in conservative – meaning both modest and traditional – cooking habits, characteristic of the *I-tal* style. *I-talists* love to make soups, stews, and rice dishes, which are all hearty, complete meals but require minimal kitchen space and equipment. They enjoy natural, ready-made snacks like seasonal, ripe fruit and nuts, but they will go to some trouble, from time to time, to put together special dessert and snack foods which embody *anciency*.

Shirley's Pepperpots

July 10, 2002. A sweet, wet smell crawls up from the stove, falls out a propped-up kitchen window, folding itself through a salty sea breeze. Approaching the kitchen door, I catch a whiff. The cook stands out in front, volleying her voice over a hibiscus bush-fence into her niece's yard. Both women are in dialogue now though they stand far apart,

and they trouble over dark clouds hanging in the hills ten miles away (as the crow flies), worried they've chosen the wrong day to do the wash, blaming themselves for not getting the line up earlier.

I offer my hands in the kitchen, but told I am not needed, I busy myself washing dishes instead. The *I-rie Cabins* kitchen building (see Figure 3.1) is well-equipped and modern by Jamaican standards, with a four-eyed gas stove/oven, double sink, refrigerator/freezer, handmade wooden countertop, and shelving space, but it is different from other kitchens on the *family land* in that it is a free-standing, one-room building, separate from the other one-room cabins on the site where guests are housed.



Figure 3.1: Kitchen at *I-rie Cabins*, window looking out toward guest cabins.

At *I-tal Rest* and the *Viking*, and at Shirley's parents' and brothers' homes, kitchens are openly adjoined to the dining and sitting/visiting spaces. The *I-rie Cabins* kitchen

building is made partially of concrete blocks (stacked about four and a half feet high, topped with regularly sized wooden boards); this construction form speaks to the permanence of the structure. It was part of the original plan of the *I-rie Cabins* site. Although the *I-rie Cabins* structure may be old-fashioned, it is by no means *ancient*, compared to either outdoor kitchens or to other free-standing indoor kitchen spaces made of wood, bamboo, or found stones and topped with tin or zinc roofs.

Although I rarely had an opportunity to prepare dishes *with* Shirley, I found my usual place in or around her kitchen at *I-rie Cabins*, hanging out and tidying up while she cooked. And from time to time, it seems we swapped positions completely. Shirley was very generous in sharing kitchen space with me or with others interested in *reasoning* with her, and kitchen company normally included both guests – housed on site or at *I-tal Rest* or the Viking guesthouses – and family members. And the line between the two kinds of company is often a blurry one.

Although Shirley usually turned down help offered from adults, when children (her nieces and nephews) approached her kitchen, she enlisted their non-kitchen assistance immediately, using them to run errands for her, sending them out either to hunt a needed ingredient, or more often, to deliver a message to another member of the extended family. The message was sometimes a critical one regarding the timing of a meal to which she would contribute a dish. Often the message was also layered with playful and sarcastic comments toward the person on the receiving end, and children often enjoyed carrying these layered messages the most, which would allow them to participate in "Aunty" Shirley's humorous follow-up on a running joke. From time to time, Shirley dictated kitchen tasks to her helpers, too, asking them to husk or grate

coconut, shell nuts, or slice and chop fruits and vegetables. I learned early on from her that children are generally trusted with kitchen knives, as with the *cutlass*, and that they typically do not clown or play dangerously when using these tools around adults.

As I wash dishes, I gaze out the window over the sink and watch red and blue blooms droop in the afternoon heat. "What smells so *sweet* in here, Shirley?" I ask. Invited now, I walk over to the gas stove and peek into a tall aluminum pot, where bright yellow-orange pumpkin wedges are boiling. On the wooden countertop, dark green pumpkin *trash* rests among *trash* from fresh yellow yam, carrot, *cho-cho*, onion and scallions. Nearby rest untouched a whole coconut, a head of garlic, three green-turning-yellow scotch bonnet peppers, and a couple of knuckles of ginger root. "Looks like a soup," I offer. "That's my pepperpot – different from rundown, not so thick," she points out, explaining to me that okra is not a key ingredient in *pepperpot*, as it is in rundown, neither is the liquid reduced by so great an amount. Usually started by boiling one or two starchy vegetables—at least one of which is a root vegetable – and later adding some other vegetables like *callaloo* and everyday seasonings like scallion, thyme, ginger, pepper, and garlic, *pepperpot* can have many variations, all according to what is locally available. I took notice that cassareep was not used in Shirley's *pepperpot* bases, although the dish is prepared that way in most cookbooks I have encountered, as well as Mintz's account of *pepperpot* preparation (1985:137). Shirley tells me that working with *cassava* is so time-consuming that she does not use it everyday anymore. Juicing and using *cassava* was something that her whole family used to do because her mother insisted, but the practice has fallen by the wayside as her mother has become elderly. One other variation for Shirley's version of *pepperpot*: in *Traveling Jamaica with Knife, Fork and*

Spoon, I read that *pepperpots* can and do often include ingredients like pork, fish, beef, and oxtail (Walsh and McCarthy 1995:105-107), but at *I-rie Cabins*, though, *pepperpots* were kept strictly *I-tal*.

"Is it a spicy soup?" I ask, probing for descriptive information behind the name. Throwing in one of the more-yellow-than-green scotch bonnets whole, she says that this is traditional Jamaican soup, so yes, it *can* be very spicy if the pepper is spicy. If the pepper gives the soup too little spice for her taste, she cuts it up and puts a small piece in her bowl. "What about that one – plenty strong?" she teases, referring to the pepper now floating in the pot. I raise my eyebrows and shrug interrogatively, but tantalized I tell her I will soon see for myself, if she will allow me a small cup when it is finished.

Not responding to my request, Shirley walks purposefully out the kitchen door, coconut in hand. In an instant, I hear a *smash*. Rising quickly from her stooped position, she wheels around toward the door and on returning inside, skillfully catches an arc of coconut water with her free hand and scoops it to her mouth. She notices my surprise and wonder and tells me that coconut water is powerful medicine for a cook, "so cooling to the system." She says she never uses it in a dish, but rather uses milk from the grated, juiced flesh. I watch her labor with the coconut – first prying husk from shattered pieces of flesh with a sharp steel blade, then grating each piece back and forth on a large, curved perforated tool made from recycled metal, next adding a few spoons of water to the pulp and squeezing the mass in a bowl to juice out the milk, then finally straining the product into her *pepperpot*. Wondering aloud about whether there are more convenient ways to milk a coconut, I find out that many people resort to reconstituting dry coconut powder they buy from a store and using that as a substitute. She says the old technique just takes

practice, and that milking the flesh by hand gives you "the best in health and flavor." Having made this judgment, Shirley then comments that beyond hand-juicing, the kind of coconut you choose also matters. "The old coconut" – which she also refers to as the "*native* coconut" – "is the I-tal fruit." She says there is no comparison to a *pepperpot* made with the milk of that one, that it has "more nature fe nourish the body."

She dices and adds the rest of the vegetables while letting the soup boil uncovered, then seasons with roughly chopped scallion, ginger, and garlic, which she has bruised with a handmade wooden tool. I ask what the crushing implement is made of and find out that she commissioned an artist named Quest, from Treasure Beach, to make it for her out of Lignum vitae wood, for her use in the kitchen and for making medicines. She says he carved it from an exposed root from a fallen tree. She mainly crushes roots, barks, and herbs with it. I have never seen this kind of wood before, and I remark to her on how beautiful the material looks. She takes up a knife, and shaving off a thin slice of wood from the handle of the tool, she hands the crusher to me. "Can you smell the medicine?" she wants to know, adding, "When I feel bad – like feeling just *low* – I cut and smell."

Lignum vitae is a bushy, knarled tree bearing many small, inedible fruits, very common to the arid parts of Jamaica's south coast. It is Shirley's favorite wood and her favorite tree. She notes that Acacia has always surprised her by its ability to grow up from a stick in just about any place where you push it into the ground, but that compared to it Lignum is more "powerful" because of its valuable energy, which she says comes from its uniqueness and wholeness. She describes more particular reasons for loving Lignum vitae: its wood is aromatic and does not rot when submerged in water; its sap is

antiseptic, and with its resin one can make many healing topical medicines; also, its fruit shows all the colors of the spectrum as it matures. From her description of this wood I start to appreciate the value she places in whole sensory experiences of natural products.

The *peppercot* now covered and simmering over a low flame, Shirley retires to her porch, where Stuart sits. They share this *peppercot*, as they break fast from the morning's work gardening and working at *Zareeba*. On other occasions, Shirley shares dishes with her parents and family hanging out at her parents' home. And sometimes, but much less frequently and usually upon special request, Shirley also cooks for guests staying at *I-rie Cabins*. This time she allows me the cup I ask for, and it is milky (almost buttery), spicy, and savory. It energizes and fills me for the rest of the day.

I-nty's Rice and Peas

June 23, 2002. Now that Eric and I have rented a motorbike, we can accompany I-nty to his family's house in the Malvern hills without having to worry about expensive cab fares, especially on the way back down to the coast. Entering the gate which encloses his father's and uncle's houses and yards, and parking the bike and climbing the hills to greet Kingsley (I-nty's father) now standing at his doorway with his youngest child Moesha, we pass a stone well covered by large plates of zinc, and two cows with ropes tied loosely around their necks. I notice as the cows move that they are dragging the rather short ropes with them, and that they are not tied to anything to restrict their movement.

As we approach, Miss Mingy (I-nty's aunt) walks over from her house next door, and she offers me a chair, just as she has done twice before on previous visits. I tell her I do not feel tired and ask her if I *look* tired. She says, "No dear, but you are a traveler. I

would hope you would do the same for me if I visited your home." I chat with her and then climb the hill behind Kingsley's house, to find that I-nty has already lit a fire in the kitchen shed and scooped clean water from a bucket that sits nearby the house into a large pot, which he will put on the fire to boil. The door to the shed open as the fire is kindled, smoke billows out. I-nty watches it from just outside the door and talks to us. He cooks *rice and peas* for our dinner, a traditional one-pot dish in Jamaica. The peas are *gungu* peas, a variety which grows very well in the hills. Once the fire is ready, he pours green, yellow, and brown *gungu* into the pot, along with brown rice which we have bought from a small store along the road. He says the different shades of pea relate to their different stage of ripeness, and that the variety will do us good. He now grates and juices coconut, squatting near the ground where a large bowl catches pulp and then juice. After pouring coconut milk into the cooking pot, I-nty peels and chops other vegetables to add – carrot first, then garlic, scallion, scotch bonnet, and thyme to season. There is no counter space in the kitchen shed, so he works with one vegetable at a time, peeling outside the shed into a neat pile of *trash*, and then taking the peeled vegetable and finely dicing it over the cooking pot. I have noticed him use this technique even when he cooks at *I-rie Cabins* where he has access to countertops, and I have asked him about it. He says he chooses to use just his two hands and a blade – in what he calls the "primitive style." Counters are not necessary for him, are only an added burden. Later, I notice him doing the same at the *hills camp* and at the *Supper of Rastafari*. He distributes the *trash* to one of two composting areas at the bases of trees behind the kitchen shed.

Miss Mingy is surprised when I apologize to I-nty about not being of any help. She is surprised again when I tell her that we cook together often at *I-rie Cabins* and that

I-nty has taught me a great deal about *I-tal* food already. She admits that cooking over an open fire is, indeed, quicker and produces a better flavor in foods. When I-nty invites me to come inside the shed and look around at his father's "ancient kitchen," Miss Mingy grasps my hand and asks me not to, saying that I should not expose myself to the smoke. I go forward anyway. I see that the floor is firmly packed red dirt, the structure constructed of bamboo topped by zinc roofing. About knee high, a somewhat square hearth made from large stones cemented together holds the fire, where the pot rests. The shed itself has been built on a level area of the hillside, and a wooden bench holds some pots, pans, cups and mugs, which rest not on bare wood but rather on banana leaves. The kitchen is much less modern than *I-rie Cabins*, but the cook's techniques are basically the same. The main difference here is that fire warms the pot instead of a gas flame.

I rejoin Mingy and now Janice, Kingsley's wife, joins us, having just come home from work. They joke about my interest in the *I-tal* style of cooking, but Janice admits that I-nty *is* the best cook in the *yard*. I note that I-nty always works very intently on cooking *I-tal*, and the two women are tickled, remarking how they love to see a Rastaman in the kitchen, not only because they are freed of the chore but also because they know that the meal will be "proper, clean, and fit." On this evening, I learn that I-nty has had structured training in being a Jamaican chef. He "livi-cated" himself to culinary crafts in secondary school, as a vocational study. His hope in doing so was that one day he would cook in a restaurant, perhaps own his own *Rasta-urant*.

As we eat – I-nty, Eric, Kingsley and Janice and three of their children, and myself – I ask I-nty why so many restaurants run by Rastafarians are not *I-tal*, in that they usually offer fish or chicken on their menus. First, he says there are very few

establishments which are "strictly I-tal," but does mention that his *brethren*, the *Iton I-tes*, do run such a place in Montego Bay. He says that since most restaurant owners want to make money, they feel they have to offer the things which most people will buy. Then he adds that it is more than that, though, because many Rastafarians do not keep *I-tal* on a daily basis. "It's a horrible thing come about, me family," he complains, "Most Rasta on the island would not even like to eat a meal like this. They feel a craving for salt or powdered spice, or fish." Eating in the *ancient* of ways, as he calls it, is a rebellious act – not transgressive, but rebellious in the sense of public dissent about bodily health – which "fuels bodies of conquering lions to stand up against Babylon." He says that *I-tal* is "a way to get to the roots of I and I; it is a way not often taken in this place as I see it."

Ancient Snacks: Shem and Popcorn

July 19, 2002. Shirley and Stuart are making *ancient* snacks today, with the help of Sojie and Shirley's nieces Lakita and Syddie. Outside the gates of *I-rie Cabins*, I find the group as they roast freshly harvested peanuts and cashews on coals from a ground fire. While these are roasting, Shirley sends the two girls down to the beach for sand, and with their *cutlasses* she and Stuart strip kernels of corn from the dried cobs of many ears, dropping the pieces into a bowl. After the nuts have finished roasting, they are set aside to cool before peeling. The fire is stoked. When the children return with the sand, Shirley puts some of it into a large, deep, blackened iron skillet, just to fill the bottom (maybe half an inch deep). Then she rests the skillet on the fire to heat. Once the sand is ready (steaming), Shirley adds the corn kernels and roasts it in the hot sand, stirring it with the *cutlass* until it puffs. Then this skillet is carefully moved to the side, taken off the fire. The company gathers popcorn and cooled nuts in bowls, and we walk back to the *I-rie*

Cabins kitchen building. Cracking and shelling cashews takes a great deal of time, but as Syddie is determined to shell them all, nutmeats gradually accumulate in the large wooden mortar Shirley has placed on the sidewalk outside the kitchen (see Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2: Sojie teaches Lakita the correct *shem* posture and method. In the background, Syddie shells cashews.

I notice that the mortar and accompanying pestle are made from *Lignum vitae*, except for the two metal handles attached on either side of the mortar. The mortar is one whole piece of wood, hollowed out about half its depth. The pestle is almost six feet tall. The nuts are ground in the mortar, along with a small amount of cane sugar, into a grainy paste. After all the nuts have been at least partially crushed, Shirley adds some of the popcorn, which she has sifted so that it is now mostly free of sand, to the nut mixture in the mortar. The foods now in the mortar become well incorporated and mixed as they are crushed together. Shirley tells me that the ground nut component in the food being prepared is called "shem," as is the action of crushing and mixing in the mortar, and she describes the tradition of making it as African. She says that *shem* is an "African treat" that she makes for the children during the summer, as long as they have a good harvest of nuts. In her shem today, she incorporates popcorn. I ask her if the sand-popped popcorn technique is African, too, and she says that this tradition has Native American roots – "Taino," she says; in addition, the combining of the two foodways is Jamaican. So here, in this *ancient* treat, multiple traditions are pounded and mixed together, and African, Native American, and creolized Jamaican heritages are objectified and embodied in practice.

Lakita and Syddie take turns pounding and then call an end to the process. The children scoop some out with their hands to taste, while Shirley transfers the bulk of it to a bowl. Picking up some *shem* straight out of the bottom of the mortar, I notice that the texture is crumbly and a little oily, without being sticky or wet. Lightly sweet in flavor, it feels a bit gritty when I taste it, but it is delicious and pleasantly warm. I ask Shirley how to eat it, and she says not to chew it quickly or crunch on it but to suck on it for a while

and savor the taste. I wonder aloud if the fact that it has some little bit of sand in it is at all unhygienic. Shirley proclaims, to the delight of the children, "Ah no! Plenty clean, plenty *I-tal*. Here, we are the *Kings* of the dirt!" What little sand remains in the food she calls "rich and clean." She tells me it is prejudice and ignorance that makes people think that dirt is not useful for the body; in her opinion, land is fundamental for everything, even cooking. She says that bauxite companies capitalize on this oversight, robbing the dirt straight out from under the Jamaican people because they know its worth, which they want to "suck" for money. "They may rob some people blind – the *suckers* – but they're not robbing me!" she swears.

Outdoor Kitchens

Rastafarians take special delight in producing *I-tal* cuisine in outdoor kitchen spaces, and they have told me that this culinary style is important to them for many reasons, not only because it puts them in nature to make use of nature in nourishing their bodies, but also because when they can develop outdoor culinary skill it means that they are less needy of technology and modern conveniences. For *I-talists*, using outdoor kitchens is a conservative and natural technology.

Breakfast in I Hills

January 7, 2003. I-nty wakes up my husband and me soon after dawn, insists we get up out of bed and give thanks to the sun rising between two mountain peaks behind our room. He says we must "make a move," as our mission is to "trode in I hills," to make breakfast for his *brethren* who have been farming there for a few hours already this morning. He carries nothing with him but a thatch basket with strap, which he wears like a satchel. Tracing up and down slippery paths of red dirt far from Malvern's black-top

roads, guided somewhat blindly into and through forested, private garden spaces on rocky hilltops, weighted down with a load in my daypack, I think about what it must have been like – and what it still *is* like to this day, for many small farmers living in the interior hills of Jamaica – to trek from *yard* to provision ground at dawn every morning. I-nty tells me, during our interview the previous summer, why he feels such strong emotion about the hills, saying that it is a sacred space for meditation.

One Marcus Garvey say, "Ten mile from every city." In the town you will have more destruction, in the hills less destruction. Inna the hills you only see birds, bees, tree, herbs, insect, creatures – that something [there] harmless, and a *nature*, you nah see it. Inna the city now, there are so many something fe *distract* you off of your anciency! Whenever you in the I hills you can keep focus upon *any* something you gwan deal with. That why everyone need some time fe himself, fe meditate, *I-ditate*. I and I as Rastafari choose the hills as a place fe I-ditation, fe seat up within the I-self and view things, analyze things fe I and I-self. Weigh certain things so that we can balance, that when a go out inna I-ration we know how fe trod. So I see the hills more *necessary* fe I and I, more *even* than the city. The hills is a part of I and I . . . I and I dwell inna the hills as a *sacred* place fe I and I fe I-ditate upon *whatsoever*. The hills is a part of and I and I.

As we pass through various fields, I-nty stops to point out common plants because he knows I am curious to see them growing – coco yam and *dasheen*, cocoa (cacao), coffee, *callaloo*, *cassava*, *ganja*. He plucks off a small amount of *ganja* leaves and flowers from the top of a broken and leaning plant and says we will use it for tea, as *ganja* tea is good for melting morning "cold," draining it out of the body. After a thirty-minute *trod*, we arrive at a little sapling-framed shed, with walls patched in with cardboard and zinc panels and with a slanted thatch palm roof covered with cardboard and a blue tarpaulin. I look inside and see two cots supporting worn mattresses and blankets, a jacket draped over one of the cots, and a couple of baskets and calabash bowls lying on the hard-packed dirt floor. I-nty says that Asha and various other young *brethren*

sleep and nap here from time to time, although they have regular rooms in the family compound back toward town. This structure is makeshift and temporary, a camping lodge which many farmers share access to and which may be abandoned at will.

We walk through the little room and out the other side, entering the kitchen space. I-nty takes off his shoes before entering the kitchen. We quickly take inventory on the countertop (which is actually a zinc panel topped with fresh, clean banana leaves), trying to create an *I-tal* meal from what is available to us right here right now. It looks like we'll have rice and peas with vegetable relish. We have a great bunch of *callaloo*, plenty rice and freshly shelled *gungu*, *cho-cho*, carrots, scallions, peppers, thyme, garlic – truly everything we need! Asha enters now with some sticks, greets us boisterously, and begins preparing a ground fire (see Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3: Asha, feeding campfire with breath.

I notice that the stones and sticks supporting Asha's fire form the shape of the Star of David, which Rastafarians also call the seal of Solomon. He says making the pile this way gives the fire "more strength" and that Rastafarians use this symbol, "everywhere inna nature." Asha goes into the lodge, pulls some stuffing out of his mattress, and kindles the fire with the spongy material. The thick black smoke produced from the kindling does not look *I-tal* to me, and I ask if using this kind of material pollutes the air, but Asha says that the fire "cleanses" the toxic material in the kindling. The fire blazes as Asha blows beneath the flame steadily.

I-nty uses this fire first to boil a small container (an old coffee can) of water, mint and *ganja*, removing it once the water comes to a full boil and covering it with a calabash bowl to steep (in Figure 3.3). At the same time he prepares vegetables in two pots. One pot holds the rice and peas, the other the garnishing carrot, *cho-cho*, and *callaloo*. He puts the covered pot of rice, peas, and water on the fire and dices the other vegetables with a pocket knife, dropping these pieces into his second pot. I thought I was offering a great service in grating coconut for the rice and peas, until I saw later how much work I-nty did to "strip" (peel and freshen) and wash *callaloo* in preparing the relish (see Figure 3.4). I-nty pours the coconut juice into the pot boiling on the fire, adding scallion and thyme as well, and then he sits with us to sip some tea. The combination of herb and peppermint gives the tea a uniquely soothing flavor, aroma, and feel – fresh and bright but powerfully peppery at the same time. As we share tea, two more of I-nty's *brethren* stop by to take a break from farming, smoke their *ganja spliffs*, and to thank us for cooking *I-tal* for them. Not intending to stay long right now but promising to return for breakfast, the *brethren* tell us they will get something to eat from the pots "in a likkle more time."



Figure 3.4: I-nty stripping *callaloo*.

I-nty moves the covered pot off the center of the fire and uncovers it, using folded banana leaves for a potholder. Then taking the second pot (which contains the relish vegetables) from the counter, he empties it into the first, does not stir, and replaces the lid. After about twenty minutes more of low steaming, the pot is taken completely off the fire. When it has cooled, I-nty dishes out servings for us in calabash bowls. He finds a couple of forks for us and uses a coconut shell spoon for his own utensil. Fluffing the mixture a bit before eating, he compliments his own work, saying "this I-tal has 'nough flavor." As we eat, we welcome I-nty's brethren as they return and dish out some *I-tal* from the pot. Enjoying the complexity of the dish I am eating, the combination of textures, flavors, aromas, colors, as well as the company, I think about how I-nty described the seasoning of *I-tal* food in a *reasoning* that transpired during our taped

interview. First, I-nty explains that salt, beyond its negative symbolic and historical associations, also does the body harm physiologically. Salt kills cells, he says, thereby lends death and not life to one's body:

When you speak of salt, there is many different varieties of salt, you know. You have sea salt, which if anyone need to use a little extra bit of salt, that is the one you supposed to use. Beca' that salt, it nah grind, it original, nature bring forth that salt same way. But that salt what them pump and grind, that nah natural. That salt kill a million cell inna your body, so I and I couldn't take a something what kill you inna your body. And when you talk of salt or a seasoning – a every something you can find to eat out there have its *own* salt. [If you] combine the *natural* something out *there*, you know, you gwan get a natural taste outta it.

Next he lists a variety of his favorite ingredients and notes that all of these foods carry their own wonderful flavors and spices.

For example, you have a piece of yam, a piece of dasheen, you have coco, and breadfruit, you have sweet potato, a sweet cassava, seen? You have seasoning, all type of seasoning – onions, scallion, thyme and garlicks, and pepper. You have tomato, you have carrot, you have beet root, and you have turmeric, you have I-lah greens and I-mato. So you see so much variety of thing you have! And you have red peas, gungu, grains, you see me? You go cook a pot now – or you go prepare, or you go *set a spice* now, seen? You have breadfruit, you have peas, you have pumpkin, and you have coconut, you have scallions, onion, and thyme, and pepper. All of them something [there] have it own spice *inna it*, its own salt inside of it!

Finally, he talks about what happens when one combines certain foods. Because the dish contains all the needed nutrients and retains the force of life, it is not only energizing; it is also a medicine to the body. He says that *Babylon* tries to trick one into believing that the conveniences it provides should be part of daily cooking and eating. I-nty says resisting these unnatural alterations and cleansing himself of suspicious ingredients keep his health safe.

If we combine all of [them] something [there], they become *one*. One I-lahful taste you gwan get outta it, you know. Beca' true, every something have its own natural protein, vitamin, it own natural things inna it. I and I see it and know say, every something *combine* fe your *energy* now, so I and I nah really eat it for *a taste of salt*, you nah see it. You eat it, and you know say, it a *medicine* for the I-dem! For the life I a speak of, it a go retain it. I and I nah see that salt and sugar [there], chlorine water, as *natural* to I and I health, the white rice and flour and them something as *natural*. Babylon trick you fe say that a part of your *daily menu*. I and I plant and eat from I and I own I-neyard, you see me. That mean Babylon can never trap I and I, can't trick I and I, can never *control* I and I health. Anything Babylon want come trap, I foresight it. Like that something them call "veggie mince" – 'til the I-dem come around here I nah *buy* them something deh. I *never*. And I can come forward and flush I system and get rid of that. Beca' I nah keep something inna I and I what no *natural*, what no *I-tal*, man.

I-nty criticizes the use of "veggie mince," which is what he calls textured vegetable protein – a processed, packaged soy product that can be found in many grocery stores in Jamaica and in health food stores in the U.S. He says that he only cooked and ate it because we had bought a package of it, but that he remains skeptical of it because it is not harvested from the soil. More than once I-nty remarked about how *I-tal* food's flavors, spices, and colors can only "cook 'round properly" in one pot boiling on an open fire.

* * * *

Rastafarians favor this outdoor cooking style, but they are not the only Jamaicans who use it. Jerked meat dishes so popular with beach-going tourists are always prepared in traditional outdoor pit fires. Festival foods and meals are usually cooked outdoors as well, and though some vendors bring their quite modern, expensive barbecue grills with them to festival kitchen spaces, others bring homemade, standing fire burners created from found materials like rebar and scrap metal from junk cars (i.e., hubcaps and wheels). Vendors are always allowed to build ground fires at their stands and to use these for both cooking and warming food. I attended weekend outdoor parties during my summer stay,

where huge pots of "mannish water" (goat's head soup) were cooked over open fires made upon the ground. At the *Supper of Rastafari* festival, described in the next section, strictly *I-tal* food was cooked and warmed on ground fires, raised burners, and a gas stove. In addition to festivals, many roadside *rum shops* like the one in Figure 3.5 have outdoor kitchens out back, where shop owners usually cook both vegetable and meat dishes to sell for breakfasts or evening meals.



Figure 3.5: Outdoor kitchen at Kenroy's *rum shop*, Accompong. (January, 2003)

Supper of Rastafari

June 29, 2002. We are here to participate in the Annual *Supper of Rastafari* and Holistic Health Function, which is being held this year on the grounds of the Montego Bay public amphitheater, located in the center of a busy traffic circle, close to the bay. Outside, members of the *Iton I-tes* family have started two ground fires and are burning

leaves and palm fronds in one of them. They prepare their festival space, raking and toting *trash* over to the fire, picking up litter, and discussing the logistics of assembling a kitchen (see Figure 3.6).



Figure 3.6: *Iton I-tes* setting up and planning a kitchen space at the *Supper of Rastafari*.

It is early morning, and the *Iton I-tes* have until midday to finish their *set-up* and start cooking, for the *I-tal* feast should begin late afternoon. Booths are arranged behind the seating area by members of other groups wanting to provide nutritional counsel on site while promoting their local stores and holistic health services. The Ethiopian World Federation also has set up an information booth here. Most of the *Iton I-tes* carry machetes and wear clothes which look to me like burlap sacks, but I notice that some of these sacks have been sewn into elaborately tailored garments, each different from the next. I-nty is considered a member of the *Iton I-tes* Rastafarian group, and he is known to

them as "I-nty Iion," as all members carry the *Iion* as a part of their names – i.e. I-stant Iion, *I-ney Iion*, *Iion Flames Lightning*, *I-lahful Iion*, etc. Yesterday, three of these men visited I-nty in Malvern hills in order to gather a sizeable amount of vegetables and fruits from Rastafarian friends of I-nty's who live in the area, and I-nty left with them in their car. From there, they returned to Flower Hill, which is where the group *grounds*. Asha, who met us at here yesterday, tells us the rest of the group will be coming down from the hills soon, bringing "much I-tal food." I ask where the women of the group are, because I see that none are present, and Asha tells me they are in the hills. In my interview with I-nty, I followed up this question, probing for information on whether the *Iion I-tes* separate labor into "women's work" and "men's work," as I have read Bobo Ashanti Rastafarians do.

Mandy: At the Supper of Rastafari, I saw so many men working there in the morning on the set-up, and I was wondering, where were the women? And then I saw that they came at night—.

I-nty: You see the most of the I-dem daughters there, I and I wives there, have most like likkle youth. So I and I nah go put a pressure upon them to prepare the space, beca' she a play a role already. She a take care of her youth, even at the show.

Mandy: So they were taking care of the youth then. Are there kinds of work that only women do and other kinds which only men do?

I-nty: It nah really safe fe say that men and women, empress and king, have *individual* work – like the *Iion I-tes*. Like with I-gher garments: when I a trod up there, I nah have no crocus bag fe wear, no bumboclaat. But him a take off him crocus and give it same way, beca' it nah individual fe himself. When I come forward from St. Elizabeth, I bring pear and scallion and thyme, 'round give them. So something what them need I give it, ca' it nah mine, individual. The crocus a wear, same way. We combine so and become one. The daughter will a have her special works, you know, beca' we reason. Whenever time we reason, we know what a do. Say alright, when a get up in I morning, *Iion Flames* or *Iney-I* or I will go a orange bush and look fe some orange, early inna the morning.

I-stant Iton or the rest of I-dem inna the I-neyard, say, enough something in I yard I a go do. And we just a take part.

Mandy: If one of the I sistren would have wanted to come with the I and clean up, or help out putting up the stage or cook the food, would she have been accepted to do it?

I-nty: Sure. Free.

Mandy: She's not kept away from work like that?

I-nty: *No!* No time! I and I nah have no *bondage* over no daughters now! Even at Nyabinghi, I and I see how them have some rules and regulations where we want come break down! Like when the I come forward, and the I nah feel like put on the I wrap on the I hair and crown – we want to bring that inna the House and show them that, so them come decide whether to break down that, see if it a bondage to the I sistren.

Many, but not all, of the male members took the work of setting up the festival site so that the other *brethren* and *sistren* could do different work in the hills. I-nty emphasizes that the *Iton I-tes* house may be exceptional in the way that they choose mutual decision-making and cooperation among men and women, over the more orthodox mode of male control and delegation of work.

I-shankh Iton now crosses the street, carrying a two-eyed propane-fueled stove, which he says came from his restaurant down the road. Once the stove is in place, the group builds the kitchen counter near it, hammering together cut saplings and found two-by-fours and other boards, decorating it with vertically placed fronds. One member of the *Iton I-tes* sets up a standing burner, while others tote in plastic barrels for trash, buckets for water, and pots and lids for food. In Figure 3.7, a tarpaulin is strung up and around the back of the kitchen so that the gas flames on the stovetop will not be blown out by the sea breeze.



Figure 3.7: Putting finishing touches on the *Ilon Spice I-tal Kitchen*.

I-stant Ilon's rickety old Lada speeds around the traffic circle honking loudly. The car is full of burlap-wearing *locksmen* and their bounty of produce, numerous long poles of sugar cane stick out the open trunk, and a rider holds a red, gold and green flag out of the passenger side window. After parking, they haul in the food. As vegetables are cleaned, peeled, and diced, interested festival-goers start to gather, sitting and chatting with one another. Many venture toward the kitchen to talk to the two head cooks, I-shankh and I-nty. The dishes they prepare throughout the afternoon are the following: rice and red peas, mixed steamed vegetables (tomato, *cho-cho*, cucumber, cabbage, ginger, scallion, thyme) and a separate pot of steamed starchy vegetables (yams, sweet potatoes) on the stove; also pumpkin stew with dumplings and roasted breadfruit, each on one of the two ground fires.

Performers start to arrive: *Nyabinghi brethren, sistren*, and children, carrying drums and long locks, Kumina musicians, toting drums and wearing t-shirts which read "You can sell me, but you cyaan buy me," healers and *roots mothers* wanting to vend their tonics, teas and medicines, Bobo Ashanti Rastas with their locks tied tightly in brightly colored fabrics and wearing African-style tunics and pants suits. Victory, the representative and controller of the King of Spades Sound System, set up under a canopy between stage and audience, plays a mix of reggae and dancehall (popular) music. Dr. Tony Vendryes – Jamaican-born, England-trained anesthetist-turned-naturopath who has a local "holistic and integrative medicine" practice, does a weekly show on Jamaican radio Power 106 FM, and writes a weekly column in the *Daily Gleaner* – arrives in his SUV with a body guard and entourage (www.anounceofprevention.org).

Around noon, Dr. Vendryes takes off his suit coat, rolls up his sleeves, and lectures to the people gathered already, not from the stage but in the amphitheater seating area among them. He talks about nutritional medicine and the links between diet and chronic diseases in African American populations, such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease. He does not apply the name "I-tal" to the nutritional therapies which he promotes, but he has tailored his speech for an audience of Rastafarians, as he anticipates their questions about the biological differences between Africans and Europeans, and about what negative changes have occurred in African American bodies since they began subsisting on a European diet during the colonial era.

As Vendryes wraps up his talk within the hour and leaves, the *Iton I-tes* get back to work. I see that one Bobo has brought in a fresh *I-tal* juice cart, which he wheels around the side of the amphitheater opposite the *I-tral I-tes Juice Station*. At the station,

two members of the *Ilon I-tes* are now stripping cane, pineapple, and oranges, opening *jelly coconuts*, and selling these juicy fruits to customers for small change (see Figure 3.8). The stalk and some skin around the stalk are left on the pineapple (so that each fruit has a handle and can be carried and eaten like a popsicle), and half the rind is left on the orange (so that it can be chewed and sipped as from a cup), all done for artful touch and for the convenience of the visitors, also to show that because they appreciate both tidy eating habits and lack of waste (from napkins and such) they have developed "natural" customs to ensure cleanliness and conservation.



Figure 3.8: *Ilon I-tes* open *jellies* at *I-tral I-tes Juice Station*.

From the audience's perspective, there are two focal points of staged action and demonstration at this festival: 1) the food area made up of the *Ilon Spice I-tal Kitchen* and the *I-tral I-tes Juice Station*; and 2) the musical area – the *Ilon Station* – made up of stage

platform area where live performance emanates and Victory's tent, where the King of Spades Sound System controls the broadcast. The stage area is decorated with three flags, one with a family of lions, one with a family of wolves, the center flag picturing Haile Selassie in military garb. Many claims about *I-talism* are made from each stage throughout the duration of the festival. In the kitchen, cooks speak to the public about what they have prepared, the significance of ingredients, techniques, flavors and gustatory sensations they conjure. From the musical area members of the *Iion I-tes* (followed by a Kumina band, *Nyabinghi brethren*, and other musicians) take the microphone to speak and chant about health reform and *livity*.

Once the *Iion I-tes* women and children have arrived, the chanting and other musical performance starts. *Iion I-tes* transmit various messages to those gathered to participate in the festival, which is always referred to as a "holistic health function." Most messages focus on promoting *I-tal* diet; chants such as "Food that You Eat" and "Rotten Out and Turn Mulch" are almost entirely about eating a proper diet and living close to the land you can farm and eat from. Various sound-bites also attest to this focus on *I-tal* food and the fundamental significance of eating well. Iion Flames Lightning says that the space in the amphitheater has been constructed and arranged by the *Iion I-tes* as it has for the goal of "preserving life." He also says that the *Babylon system*, which is represented here by various fast food franchises across the street from the amphitheater, uses no-tal food to "hold you hostage"; moreover, he responds comically to those festival-goers who bring the "illegal substance" of junk food into the *Supper of Rastafari* by saying that they "need a jelly killing and a mango harassment," also that he would like to "take a soursop to [one's] backside" for that offense. Sister I-Peace lectures to assembled men about

giving self-examinations for prostate cancer, and later in the day Iion Flames harks back to her speech, saying that the people staging this event are "not into the cutting; only cutting jellies here." These two speakers couch a critique of biomedicine – especially surgeries – in information about natural prevention.

All performers (musicians as well as cooks and *I-talists*) are trying to educate the public about *I-talism*, the taste for *I-tal*, nutritional therapy and healing; when performers lose sight of this goal they are discouraged from continuing their performances. Each of the *Iion I-tes* who takes the microphone invites the audience to visit the kitchen before they leave the festival. Iion Flames proclaims, "You see the Iion Spice I-tal Kitchen there, with live food, with no poison, food we prepare with spring water cause we nah use chlorine, is there for you at cheap prices, so just free yourself and go there!" I-ney I was more critical of and challenging to guests, especially those he stands to convert to *I-talism*, shouting:

I and I nah sell you no likkle *nastiness*, so make you drink and drunk and stagger and turn over you know. Or no nyam no duppy fowl, duppy cow, no *dead something*. A *clean something* we sell! We have cane, orange, ripe banana, seen, pine. Yeah! And so we do it beca' we want the I fe *eat* up! And rest up here, so tomorrow morning the I-dem wake up *strong*. So we have some carrot juice and beetroot juice 'round here so. I-tal food! Yeah, man! So we don't want the I-dem to come and seat and don't come and feed up the I-tal food, because it's a *medicine* to the I-dem you know.

Indeed, many people did visit the kitchen. By nightfall most of the food was eaten, but the *Iion I-tes* served visitors into the evening. The next morning the *Iion I-tes* cleaned up the area and completely broke down the structures (kitchen and stage) put up the previous day.

I-tal cooking and eating were the main focal points of, and the motivating reason for, this festival. I think of the action as geared toward demonstration, in that within the

activity, there was constant challenge posed to those gathered in the amphitheater: to accept that it is only through natural and traditional food production and consumption that one attains health. The indictments being heaped upon fast food and manufacturing, the health lectures, the frequent sound of *cutlass* chopping on cane and coconut at the Juice Station, the information exchange at the holistic health booths, the women selling homemade *roots tonics* and bundles of herbs for teas and decoctions, the chants about being vegetarian, the display of *I-tal* bounty on the kitchen counter, the various stations where different members wearing *I-tal* garments attended different dishes – all these activities created a spectacle which focused directly upon "feeding better" with *I-tal* food.

Roadside Lunch and Market

June 22, 2002. Past Jake's Resort on the main road, in the tourist destination of Treasure Beach, not far from Great Bay, I-nty, Eric, and I stop to buy some food off the bed of a truck overfull with produce. The old red truck sits just off the road, pulled up next to a *rum shop* (behind which is the owners' house). As we approach the truck, an elderly man with long, black and gray dreadlocks stands from a squatted posture and walks toward us from some twenty yards further down the road. He calls, "Ilie-I! Blessings for the morning!" Behind him, smoke curls skyward, and on the ground beside him are two ground fires, one fire supporting a tall black pot, the other one just set with smoking coals. As he approaches, I-nty grasps his hand in his usual "lion's paw" handshake. I cannot tell whether the two men know one another. "Greetings King," I-nty offers. He introduces us to the man, who then says he wants to show us some of his wood carvings. From inside the cab of his truck, he pulls out two of his *works*, one of an

anthropomorphic lion, another of a Rastaman with huge dreadlocks, both pieces made of *lignum vitae*, wood common to the arid south coast of Jamaica.

Telling him gently that what we really want to buy is some fresh *I-tal* food and asking what fruits are sweet today, he tells us that his foods come from his farm in the hills, "just good natural land." He hands me a naseberry in one hand and a June plum in the other, telling me that the naseberries are "well sweet" now but that the plums have "just come fit" and should probably ripen for another day or so unless I like them firm, with only slightly sweet flavor. I ask him how he eats them, and he tells me he likes them fit, that sweet fruit can be dangerous to your health if you eat too much of it. I ask him where his farm is, and he tells us that he drives his truck in from Westmoreland parish every Friday and stays here until Sunday with the permission of his friends who own and run the *rum shop*. He sells produce and his *I-tal works* (carvings, crafts, and food) during the day and covers his truck bed with a tarpaulin at night. He says he "cooks I-tal" in his roadside kitchen "straight through" the extent of his stay. He will return to his *yard* on Sunday and then farm until Thursday, harvesting during those days and gathering foods from other neighbors as well, in preparation for his next run to Treasure Beach.

I ask if he has breadfruit, and he shows me two fit ones on the truck. Upon being asked how and when to cook them, he beckons us to "come forward" to his fires. In the tall iron pot, the man is cooking a large amount of soup, an "I-tal stew" which he tells us he has been warming slowly all night, adding ingredients and freshening the seasoning now and then, so that it is "good and cook down." The soup was started with a pumpkin, yellow yam, and coconut base, and then he added red peas and corn this morning, seasoned the pot with fresh scotch bonnet, scallion, thyme, marjoram, and turmeric. I ask

to buy a taste and hand him 100 Jamaican dollars (\$2 American), which he says is too much. He takes "fresh spring water" from a bucket, washes out half a calabash shell and scoops some stew out of the pot, then transferring to another clean calabash bowl, handing this to me and telling me to sip slowly. I sit down on a nearby tree stump, sip a little of what is a flavorful, heavy, starchy liquid, and notice that on the coals of his other fire breadfruits are roasting. At present these foods look completely blackened. I watch as the man picks up and peels one which sits off to the side of the coals, cooling. He uses the part of the blade closest to the handle on a freshly cleaned *cutlass* to peel off the rind and expose the firm whitish yellow flesh of the breadfruit. As he does this he tells me that this way of slowly fire-roasting breadfruit gives the food its best flavor, even though to be able to set the fruit down into warm coals you have to tend a fire for some time. His fires burn pimento wood, and he chooses this kind because it lasts a long time, gives the breadfruit a wonderful flavor, and has a nice aroma while it burns alone. He says he will keep his fires warm until Sunday.

When people who keep indoor kitchens want to cook breadfruit, though, he tells me they usually fry slices of it in oil, or boil slices in soups. He cuts a few pieces of the completely peeled breadfruit and hand them to me and my company, insisting, saying they have been paid for already. As we sit and talk about his roadside *rasta-urant* I find out that he feeds international and Jamaican tourists and locals from his kitchen, which is situated close to many places where tourists find food and lodging, but also close to many houses, family farms, and stores. He jokes that with his little outdoor kitchen and food truck, he offers some humble competition to local restaurants. He says many international tourists walk by him, that most will buy some bananas or a *jelly* from his truck, but that

most turn down his offer for *I-tal* food. I ask why he thinks they do this, and he suggests first, that some crave the popular Jamaican jerked meat or seafood dishes that they read about in their "likkle books" (travel guides), also that some others might think he is a "dirty man" with "nasty food." He says that these visitors "nah understand the I-tal ways of I and I." He says he finds it pitiful that tourists come all the way to Jamaica and "never taste the goodness of the earth." He tells us that they pay dearly for the choice, too, "in pocket and belly." He wants to impress upon us that the pot of stew we have just eaten from is "good for flow." *I-tal* food is a very important part of his "works" in this coastal town, along with the wood carvings, his food truck deliveries, and the "Nya shed" which he is also planning for this site. The shed is a project which he has been working on for several years already, and appears to have already laid some concrete foundation for it. He says that it will all be done in time, that at present he just continues his other *works*, spreads word about his food shop, and builds local support for the shed with "serious brethren" from the area. I look into the pot, which is more than half full and ask him if he thinks he'll sell all this food before he leaves, as it is already Saturday. He says that regardless of whether tourists patron his kitchen or not, he will finish his pot of stew each week when the time comes for him to go back to Westmoreland. "People 'round here love mi I-tal. Them love mi food, man. Them ask 'round what happen when mi don't show."

As the man in the roadside kitchen commoditizes his *I-tal* food for Treasure Beach, as an alternative to dining at resorts or to making dinner at home, he also offers the demonstration of his skill, the unique flavor and satisfying frugality of his product, and the accompaniment of his calm conversation; doing these things, he challenges the public to choose wisely for their health. Of course, he also uses his skills to make some

money for himself. Other restaurants around the area sell "Rasta patties," "I-tal stew," and various other items to customers, but this man is the only one running an outdoor kitchen. He attracts international tourists who see his kitchen as a novelty or oddity, and these people usually buy fresh food from his truck even if they decide to pass on the cooked meal. Once customers are drawn in, he can try to sell carvings to them, to find out how long they will be staying in Treasure Beach, and to inspire them to eat *I-tal* with him some time during their stay. He uses his *I-tal* food store in another important way as well; in this way, by cooking *I-tal* when he comes to town each week with his truck-full, he shows other Rastafarians in the area that he is serious about *I-tal* food, and about building *livity*. In this way, he builds support for his *Nya shed* and store projects.

* * * *

This chapter visits many sites of *I-tal* cooking and depicts a range of approaches to *I-talism* in culinary style. Most typical of this style are the preferences for conservatism, tradition, and *naturality*. I have demonstrated that they use natural objects, while creating a taste for *naturality* which is constructed in intensively social encounters, playing on ideas of body ecology and tradition. As Farquhar writes, "People need not only staple foods but community, not only nutrition but the special delicacies that can support a ritual life and can be exchanged among townspeople" (2002:101). The body goes through phases of wellness, ups and downs, but through their cooking and celebrating, chanting and conversations, Rastafarians remind one another daily that they care for one another in a bodily way. They demonstrate, through practice, that the body is both a public and social organism and that livelihood, or wellness, is based on social connectedness and interdependence.

I have illustrated that *I-tal* cooking can be both elemental *and* sophisticated, and ultimately resourceful and artful. Sophistication emerges from a cook's practice using *ancient*, or old-fashioned and traditional, culinary knowledge, techniques and ingredient combinations. *I-talists* may produce one-pot meals and utilize worn or multi-use implements in their kitchens, as they work to produce meals with substance, flavor, texture, aroma, and medicine. Although Rastafarianism is a heterogeneous movement without rigid hierarchy and orthodoxy (Edmonds 1998:347), Rastafarians do have a collective understanding of ideals for diet, meal preparation, and arrangement of kitchen space. They exhibit through their *reasonings* and through their practices that they have a taste for *I-tal*. Historical developments within the movement (Homiak 1998), along with socio-religious convictions and ethical motivations (Owens 1976, Campbell 1987), inspire these ideals and give them authority. And yet these ideals are not always attainable, as individual desires and needs and social expectations, in addition to structural inequalities like poverty and sexism, can constrain adherence to the model.

Ultimately, a range of foods and food practices, rather than a rigid set, are described by Rastafarians as *I-tal*. Beyond that, individuals find ways to *ex-tablish* their tastes for *I-tal*, as I-nty would say. As Weiss writes, "Cuisine objectifies an orientation to the world" (1996:81). Rastafarians find ways to explain various dietary dilemmas or atypical behaviors as moments when they have to step outside the established order so as to protest restriction personally felt, and to innovate a practice which they can more realistically and honestly reproduce daily. However, most Rastafarians faced by these dilemmas continue to believe that re-establishing an *I-tal* diet is the best thing for them, and so they do it when they can, and are proud of themselves for making the change. The

taste for *I-tal* food demonstrates an idiosyncrasy which reveals that *I-talism* is not so much a critical, accusatory set of rules and more of an imperative approach to human health. As Shirley reveals her frustration about craving meat and rejecting poison, as Asha explains away his use of toxic material in making an *I-tal* fire, as I-shankh IIon sets up his stove next to fires just built on the ground at the *Sup'* – here, we glimpse at a range of acceptable choices. Resourcefulness is valued by Rastafarians more than convention, so we should understand that *I-talism* cannot be understood as seeking to reproduce an ideal. Circumstances necessitate ingenuity and improvisation. "Practice theory works against a view of culture as finished product and stresses strategic and improvisational action over rule-driven behavior" (Stahl 2002:829). I have sought to humanize, historicize, and demystify the models of Rastafarian food behavior presented by other writers (Homiak 1998, Campbell 1987, Barrett 1988). The intent in discussing dilemmas is not to concentrate on informants' failings or double standards, or on the impracticality of dietary ideals, but rather to emphasize that individuals create and use meaningful strategies in reconciling bodily needs and desires within a larger cultural design for nourishment.

CHAPTER 4
I-TAL FOOD-MEDICINES AND HEALING JOURNEYS

Let your food be your medicine, and your medicine be your food.
– Hippocrates

For Rastafarians, nutritional therapies are essential for remedying bodily discomfort and dysfunction related to imbalances of *flow*; because of this, *I-tal* food-medicines are ubiquitous in settings where healing work occurs. However, although healing typically subsumes the consumption and application of food-medicines, it can also involve various other embodied processes of rejuvenation, such as spiritual journey and retreat, processes which promote meditation, inspiration, and social reunion. Because all of these processes, in various combinations, enhance the health of personal and social bodies, and thereby nourish their *livity*, they are promoted among Rastafarians as *I-tal* ways to heal. In this chapter I demonstrate first, how *I-tal* foods are used medicinally – in maintaining bodily *flow*, and in cleansing the *structure* or *temple* of the body by treating *flow*, so that more efficient maintenance work can resume. Then, I look to narratives and experiences of retreat to expand an understanding of how the taste for *I-tal* operates in healing encounters which are multi-dimensional for Rastafarians, in that they are not reducible to nutritional therapy alone. To end the chapter, I consider how my informants have commoditized *I-tal* healing for the sake of tourist consumption, but in also as an outlet for creativity and for economic gain, over which they maintain control.

I present interview excerpts, observations, and autoethnographic vignettes, while drawing from the following sources to support the connections I make between food and medicine: Sobo's long-term ethnographic study of a rural Jamaican bodily idiom (1993b), Robertson's collection of herbal and nutritional folklore (1982), the ethnobotanical index

and folklore of Beckwith (1928), the ethnographic and applied study of *ganja* use by Melanie Dreher (1982), oral histories of Mammy Forbes' healing practices written by Beckwith (1929) and Barrett (1973), and Wednoja's study of balm mothers (1989). A sizeable portion of information is taken from contexts in which healers, medical knowledge, and healing experiences are not categorized exclusively as "Rastafarian"; however, as I have stated before, Rastafarians actively make use of what they perceive to be traditional (and natural) about Jamaican cultural practices, including medicine and therapy, and recast this knowledge as *I-tal*. Therefore, I find collections of Jamaican ethnomedicine, ethnobotany, and health-related folklore to be invaluable resources for enhancing an analysis of the various data I have collected. While the taste for *I-tal* shapes the experience of bodily healing for Rastafarians, at the same time it is prefigured by a tradition of Jamaican nutritional and herbal medicine and healing therapies.

I-tal Food-Medicines and Physical Work

The idea for this chapter came to me while trying to find a way to analyze an illuminating exchange between myself and Shirley which I recorded, and to integrate other information on traditional herbal and nutritional therapies with this analysis. The exchange occurred as Shirley tried to explain the concept of *livity* through the presentation of a popular local narrative told about Bob Marley, the quintessential international reggae superstar and Jamaican musical celebrity. Her point was that although one can build *livity* through *I-tal* living, in healing contexts there are certain ways in which *I-tal* foods should and should not be used. Bob Marley showcased his ignorance of this important fact and called into question his own *livity*, by sending an offering of the wrong kind of *I-tal* foods to a *Nyabinghi*, which is a ceremonial gathering

and site for healing. I offer an excerpt from this exchange, not to discredit Marley's musical artistry, but to use narrative about his life in Jamaica to encapsulate a pivotal moment toward understanding *I-tal* food as medicine.

Marley's Big Mistake

Shirley: . . . Well [Marley] know I-tal Rasta, natural Rasta, live *daily* on fruits and vegetables. And one day he said he was sending foods and things, fe keep a Binghi, but what come down was a truck of *pure* banana-yam. [Those present at the Binghi] were so *insulted* Bob Marley did that—.

[Throws her head backward and acts like she is snoring . . .]

Mandy: Why were they insulted?

Shirley: They don't *court* those things! *You* should go up to Nyabinghi and listen to them things! Most the food, is a *livi* – is a *spiritual* thing. People don't need no yam and banana fe go to *sleep*!

[Mimicking a snore again . . .]

Mandy: What should he have sent then?

Shirley: [Banana and yam] are heavy foods, like gungu too. You're not going to sit up all night for *days* eating all these starchy foods. What it a go do for you? You're at a *spiritual place*. And what's for spiritual? You need God's food, God's drink, make tower – fruit juices, vegetable juices, things that keep you going, stuff like that. "*Angel food*" them a call it. Yam and banana is *not* angel food – that is *maintenance food*. [When] you have to do hard work, you eat that at *home* – that's your *daily bread*. It's not something that's to be—. Ah well, you don't carry those to Binghi. Even some men carry *fish* inna Binghi, and them go and get *chase out*! You don't carry fish inna Binghi – you carry spiritual food! Because this is not a gathering where people *live*, this is like how people go to *church*. You don't pay money a go there, you go there to concert with your spirit, make tower, or to enhance it or whatever . . .

Shirley implies here that the individual's belly is not the only conduit for healing, but so is the spirit, when treated during special journeys and *sojourns*; however, the health of all bodily conduits is achieved through *flow*. Although Shirley does not differentiate between food and medicine, she does categorize certain food-medicines as *maintenance food*,

which strengthens *flow* and supports physical work, and *angel food*, which maintains *flow* during spiritual work. This implies that *I-talists* use a system for determining which foods treat the body for certain ailments, and that certain foods are used in particular phases of the bodily healing process. I discovered from observation and discussion, that the foods Shirley calls *angel foods* are used in both daily maintenance contexts and special healing retreat contexts. And yet, while *angel foods* and *maintenance foods* tend to compliment one another in the building and strengthening of body for physical work, during spiritual work, I found that *angel foods* actually supplant *maintenance foods*.

Maintenance Food: Building and Strengthening

Bananas and yams are used in the narrative above to epitomize what Shirley calls "maintenance foods" – those foods which are eaten daily in order to build strength and replenish energy, and which are especially important when doing physically demanding work. *Maintenance foods* function, primarily, in building what Rastafarians refer to as the "structure" of the body. In this section I focus on the *maintenance foods* of Rastafarians – the fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, and herbs which are used both as whole foods and in fluid mixtures (teas and tonics) to strengthen the blood and thereby build the body's *structure*. I concentrate on vegetarian foods (and this includes herbs and wild plants), because although some Rastafarians eat certain meats at particular times, especially in the context of managing depletion – as discussed in Chapter 3 – vegetarian *maintenance foods* are a uniting group of foods used by Rastafarian *I-talists* to build bodily *structure*.

In many ways, Rastafarians are putting into action Jamaican ethnomedical and ethnobotanical folklore when they use whole foods and herbs to prevent illness and build a strong body. They, like many other Jamaicans, think of bodily *structure* as supported by

blood in particular and by *flow* in general. One eats *maintenance foods* to add necessary components to the blood and thereby alter and maintain aspects of *flow* – its temperature and pressure. The idea is that as blood circulates, it assimilates what is consumed by the body and becomes transformed. Laguerre (1987), writing about Afro-Caribbean ethnomedical traditions, claims that "when the blood loses its balance by being in one of the extremes, below or above its balanced state, the body experiences illness (71-72). This statement applies in the context of Rastafarian nutritional therapy, in that Rastafarians believe that *I-tal* foods can be used to alter, strengthen and bring balance to the blood. "Eat up right foods and you nah need doctor," I-nty states boldly.

When "feeding up I-tal," *maintenance foods* build and strengthen blood which has been depleted of important elements. Sobo (1993b) writes that in "Jamaican common usage," food serves to "build body and fill belly" (30). Rastafarians privilege the building body function of all *maintenance foods* over the filling of belly; therefore, much attention is paid to balancing types of *maintenance food* so that the belly is never overly full. They control the intake of staples – the starchy foods like yams, potatoes, cassava, corn and grains, plantains, bananas and breadfruit, what Jamaicans sometimes still refer to as the "bread kind" (Beckwith 1928: 38), and legumes as well. Plus, they try to achieve variety in what staples they use for daily maintenance. Other fruits and vegetables with less starch and more juice or flavor, like tomato, chocho, cucumbers, green vegetables, and so on, are used plentifully when seasonally available. Fruits are considered to be most nutritious not when they are ripe, but rather when they are closer to "fit," which is a term used to describe the point in time when the produce is ready for picking – just as sweetness starts to develop. I was warned more than once by *I-talists* in the field about

eating too many ripe and overripe mangoes and bananas, which they told me contribute to diabetes. There are standard ideas about how many days to let different fruits sit and ripen in a cool place after being picked, in order to get the best of both flavor and health. Raw fruits and vegetables are valued for their intact and active enzymes and vitamins, which are usually damaged at least somewhat by the cooking process, also for their fibrous components, which remain strong in a raw state (Robertson 1982:6).

Rastafarians credit whole foods – eaten raw or cooked properly and in the right combinations – with having medicinal power. Herbs and spices are also medicines ingested for daily maintenance. Whether herbs are palatable or not, because they are used to strengthen body *flow* and *structure* they are thought of in terms of "food." For this reason, Rastafarians speak of herbs and spices with medicinal properties and uses as "foods" and not as "drugs." I-nty tells me, "I and I don't do drugs. If the I speak of ganja, well ganja is a food and a medicine as natural as fruit and vegetable. But drugs now, them things disconnect the I-rates [mind] and bring a confusion to the heavens of your structure." Most herbs, including *ganja*, have culinary as well as medicinal applications; in fact, most of the information I have collected about herbal medicines so far, I have drawn from either the kitchen setting in the context of preparing meals and snacks, or the garden setting, helping gather foods for cooking.

Spices, like cayenne, ginger and cinnamon, generally appreciated as flavorings, are also considered by many to be very healthy for the blood, as they can speed circulation, generate heat and strengthen *flow*. Some foods like lime and coconut, on the other hand, balance and strengthen *flow* by cooling blood, and combinations are often used to offset the extreme influence of one or the other on *flow*. Some spices, like garlic,

are also valued for antibiotic effects, as are some herbs. An important point about all spices and herbs valued as "food" is that they are generally thought to have power for promoting human digestive functions, which are tremendously important to maintenance of *flow* (Robertson 1982:32-33, Beckwith 1928:5-47). By easing the pain of stomach aches and indigestion, and by stimulating appetite and/or fostering better assimilation, herbs and spices are inseparable from whole foods used for maintenance. *Ganja*, eaten, smoked, or taken as tea (Dreher 1982:69-71), is used in this way for maintenance, although it is not the only herb used to encourage appetite and digestion – allspice, celery, cinnamon, ginger, comfrey, sarsaparilla, and quassia are some of the many others used for this purpose (Robertson 1982:17-33). Even the purgative food-medicines discussed below are, in the long run, used to help promote digestion, because after cleansing the body with these substances, appetite is restored and the process of normal, everyday maintenance can begin again.

In the kitchen, herb and spice foods are combined with other foods in one-pot meals, especially soups, stews, and sauces, and rice dishes. Often delicate, leafy herbal material is dropped gently on top of boiling or steaming broth inside a pot to infuse the liquid without actually cooking the herb matter. In many of the vignettes offered in the previous chapter, herbs and spices were combined in *I-tal* meals for flavor and/or maintenance in this way. Of course, herbal food-medicines are also frequently ingested alone or in combination with other herbs. One method is to prepare a "tea," which is an infusion of fresh or dried flowers and green soft parts (stems, leaves) from the plant, steeped in boiling water for a short time period. In Chapter 3, I-nty prepared *ganja-*

peppermint tea this way. Shirley kept bunches of dried lemongrass, comfrey, and mint in her kitchen for making teas on a daily basis.

Another way to ingest herbal food-medicines is in a decoction called "tonic," which can be made by boiling down over time the fresh or dried roots, barks or other hard vegetal matter from the herb(s), in either water or in alcohol such as white rum, vodka or wine. (Robertson 1982:5, Sobo1993b:57-58, Beckwith 1928:7). *I-tal roots tonics* are made with water. Whereas teas are often made for drinking at home, tonics made from roots and barks – called "roots tonics," "roots wines," or simply "roots" by Jamaicans – are a class of food-medicines which I frequently encountered in both the semi-private spaces of kitchen and *yard*, and in more public spaces where social gathering and recreation occurred, such as rum shops, store porches, and busy market streets. Recall the *roots mothers* selling tonics and tea bundles at the *Supper of Rastafari* (Chapter 3). There are a variety of brands of locally produced, bottled and distributed tonics, and I collected labels from six major brands – Daniel Roots Wine, Baba Roots, Mother Nature Livity Wine, Put It E'en Wine, Lion Power Roots Wine Tonic, and Zion Roots Tonic – although there are many more. All of these brands use water as the liquid for decoction, and all but one contain molasses and/or honey, in addition to a list of anywhere between four to twenty-three other ingredients as well, most of which are herbs. Rastafarians promote the consumption of these products as *I-tal* substitutes for sodas or alcoholic beverages, as in the following tape-recorded exchange between I-nty and me:

Mandy: Why do you drink roots wine, why do you like it as a recreational drink?

I-nty: I show the I first, anything that I take inna I structure, I see it as medicine. I nah deal with garbage, or a bellyful. I a deal with *medicine*. Whatsoever [you] boil in the roots, and what [you use as] the ingredients,

clean you and build you. Alcohol [is] a something where it get you irritated, it nah make you normal no more. And when I drink roots I nah get that way. So it better, much better. Something that clean I and build I, and never make I feel no *weird* or *bad*.

I-nty, among other Rastafarians, sees *roots tonic* as a healthy recreational drink – one which strengthens blood and builds *livity* in *flow*. Shirley states that as a healer she treats weakness with roots before trying other therapies:

Let's say that somebody comes to me [for treatment], and the only problem they have is weakness – weakness in the joints, weakness in the blood, weakness in the – but this weakness becomes more than physical because it drain them spiritually, psychologically, whatever, because there's no energy. First thing you can think about is roots, because roots *strengthen* you. Not every root does, but there's yam, sweet potato, sarsaparilla, ginseng, beetroot. Eat up enough roots, it strengthen you.

Rastafarians also encourage drinking *roots tonic* because the drink distills the preservation of traditional Jamaican culture. The practice of making and drinking *roots tonic* is *root-ical* [from "radical"], in that the craft is an old-fashioned one, with a firm place in Jamaican ethnomedicine and popular culture. This adds to its *I-tal* quality. Many non-Rastafarian Jamaicans enjoy drinking *roots tonics* for similar reasons as well, even those who are not be particularly opposed to alcoholic beverages. Sobo expands on this double meaning of the term "roots" in Jamaican idiomatic usage:

The word 'roots' refers to nature, the bush lands, the earth, and her bounties. Anything 'roots' is 'real' and 'natural' as opposed to things made of chemicals or grown with fertilizers. 'Roots tonic' is prepared from things set on this earth for human beings by God, so it is both good and necessary. And 'roots tonic,' from nature, is for 'nature': it promotes vital libidos by enriching, cleansing, and strengthening the blood. (Sobo 1993b:221)

Most people I met who had any knowledge of using herbs and other food-medicines mentioned having at least one family recipe for *roots tonics*, while claiming to have certain personal favorites – peanut wine, chainy *roots*, sarsaparilla were some – and

a preference for homemade over store-bought *roots tonics*. I should note that some *roots tonics* are considered to have aphrodisiac qualities as well, and they are often marketed to tourists under this guise; however, *roots tonics* are an important part of the *materia medica* of Jamaicans in general and Rastafarians in particular, appreciated for all of their strengthening and maintenance functions. Likewise, Sobo generalizes for all Jamaicans:

Taking 'tonic' is not limited to those with sexual concerns: 'roots tonic' promotes good health in general because it enhances circulation, blood quality, and so the whole body. People take 'tonic' whenever they like as a health maintenance measure. Too much can dangerously overheat the body, but it takes a lot for this to happen. (1993b:57-58)

While some food-medicines like tonics, teas, and soups and spices provide balance for blood and maintenance for body *structure*, others aid maintenance by speeding up the cleansing process.

Angel Food: Loosening and Cleansing

Rastafarians view both the building of bodily *structure* with whole foods, tonics, and teas, as well as the periodic purification of *structure* with other food-medicines, as interrelated processes fundamental to strengthening *flow* and maintaining body on a daily basis. Here I discuss the separate set of *I-tal* food-medicines ingested and applied topically in purification processes like fasting, cleansing and bathing, valued because they rid the body of toxins, poisons, and clot. These might be called "angel" foods because they free the body of whatever over-accumulation weighs it down and keeps it from being able to move freely, whether that has happened because a body has come into contact with or consumed some polluting substance, or as a result of the normal pooling of *maintenance foods* which happens when foods are not assimilated completely and builds up, causing the *clot* of *flow*. The manifestation of the subtler type of over-

accumulation is what Sobo says Jamaicans call "mucous" or "cold" (1993b:44). She writes, "No matter where it forms, if not passed out through the bowels excess 'cold' can move throughout the body, 'sleep' (harden up), 'caulk' (clog) any tube, bind any joint (as in arthritis), or wrap around organs" (1993b:44).

One important method for cleansing the *structure* is the control of food intake, which Rastafarians can achieve through fasting and cleansing practices, in which food-medicines often serve as aids. Any time the wrong kinds of foods (flesh foods, junk foods, anything odious or unacceptable) are eaten – often in times of shortage, when *I-tal* foods are not plentiful or accessible – Rastafarians will likely consider undergoing periods of fasting and cleansing while they are not keeping *I-tal*, and they do this to cancel out any negative effects that the poorer diet has incurred on their bodies. After cleansing, appetites for impure or "no-tal" foods are less controlling to a person and maintenance is more efficient. Even when keeping strictly *I-tal*, periodically fasting for a day or two (sometimes more) is still considered to be a health-promoting practice which builds *livity*, and some people refer to fasting as a "duty" (Jah Bones 1985:25-28). Fasting is a freeing experience as well, because it represents a choice not to dwell on day-to-day food anxieties and rather to spend time on spiritual reflection and enhancement, through prayer, reasoning, retreat or meditation. Rastafarians conceive of body *structure* as a "temple" (Homiak 1998:149, Owens 1976:118) – or as Shirley said above, in the narrative above about *Binghi* foods, a "tower" – so periodic cleansing is a reverent act. Fasting is also a sort of embodied retreat. During the fast, a person shifts from doing work on the physique to doing work on the spirit. *I-talists*, therefore, see fast as both

remedy for health problems and reward for health progress; usually after fasting, *I-talists* feel refreshed and inspired about their health.

Mildly cleansing teas are often taken during a fast, especially when the fast lasts for more than one or two days, and these teas work in soothing the belly, suppressing appetite, and encouraging elimination. Hot beverages not only ease indigestion and gas, but also "'melt' out the 'slime' of 'cold,'" promoting "the free flow of fluids throughout the body" (Sobo 1993b:44). Efforts to cleanse without fasting usually involve a more vigorous use of cleansing aids – stronger teas and "bitters" (which are usually tonics made from herb barks and *roots*), in addition to a variety of purgative food-medicines, may be used. *Bitters* are generally not as purgative in action as are certain food-medicines that "flush" the system, like aloe and dirt. In the more vigorous type of cleanse, the idea is not to "drain" the body, but on the contrary, to help the blood release, or "flush," restricting substances and thereby be nourished the body more efficiently. A cleanse, thereby, refreshes the body's energies and capabilities by bringing a "balance" to *flow*. Sobo writes in detail about the common, periodic use of purgative food-medicines in flushing body, a sort of cure-all treatment called "washout." They "ensure proper 'belly' function and enhance the purity of the individual and his or her blood and system as a whole" and are taken "once a month, just like menstruation, is advised" (1993a:41).

At *I-rie Cabins*, I learned about using a mixture of water and the juice and gel from the aloe vera plant (sometimes called "sinkle-bible") for a cleansing aid on a daily basis. Aloe is usually the first plant named in talking about cleansers. Bitter citrus fruits and coconut water are often blended with aloe juice, as they are considered cleansing as well, and they make aloe more palatable. Cocktails made with more than one cleanser are

common, and these can be quite tasty. Soursop, lime, and noni fruits are other cleansing food-medicines which support certain body functions – soursop supports female reproductive processes, lime supports blood pressure, and noni supports smooth movement in the joints and tendons. I-nty also included grapefruit as a good cleanser as well. When I asked him how and why he *flushes* his system, he replied:

Get some aloes, sinkle-bible, and some grapefruit, and blend that together, and drink that, and wash out the blood stream. Clean out the structure, clean out the core. I and I take enough medicine. Whole heap a year I eat flesh you know, but you have fe wash out fe that same amount of year, you know. Fe clean out your core, and so you free and clean. Fe be an I-talist, man, you have fe clean out fe 15 year [there], and trod the same amount more I-lah. Flush out by taking some bitters, and there is many ways to take bitters. And if you don't have bitters, you can just take a coconut and grate it and drink it, and it wash out your system same way.

Apart from control of daily intake, the expulsion of poisons is a major motivation for cleansing practices. A much less frequently used cleansing method – except in cases where a person suspects he or she has an intestinal parasite – is to ingest dirt from a pure place in the ground. Shirley also has used dirt, which she refers to as "clay," in various remedies to counteract the ingestion of poisons. Children growing up in rural areas are known to love to eat it so much that they become sick and have to visit the doctor, and pregnant women crave it. But I am told that the ingestion of dirt is reserved for extreme cleansing. For many Rastafarians, the "good" dirt that one seeks for cleansing purposes embodies *naturality*, and has a hidden and protective aspect to it which makes it particularly *I-tal*. In the following exchange with I-nty, who regards dirt to be an extremely thorough wash-out, perhaps the most effective and purgative, he explains how he finds it and eats it.

Mandy: Can you explain why you sometimes eat dirt?

I-nty: I and I sip dirt, for a medicine. Any something can be a medicine to the I self, you know. But I dig a feet deep [a foot down] to get that dirt.

Mandy: Where? Anywhere?

I-nty: Not anywhere. In the hills, inna the mountain. Somewhere where I know nah pollute, a clean environment. And I dig one feet down still, to get that dirt.

Mandy: So it's not a particular kind of dirt, just deep good dirt?

I-nty: No. Just deep, the deeper you go, the more that dirt have iron, vitamin. So you get to that dirt, chop it up, drop it inna your water, a likkle [little] bit of water, make it melt, and just sip that. I and I chew it, like when them suck a sweetie, I sip a lump of it. Ca' whenever you find that dirt down in that direction, you gwan find it moist, you know, like wettish. So I and I make it dry a little bit, make it get a toughness, and suck it like a sweetie. And that is a part of washout, you know. Clean out the I system, you know. Like a worm and them something deh, when it get inna your temple. You get that dirt and wash out.

Mandy: So it's an intestinal cleanser, even to get rid of parasites and things. Are there other things you might use it to treat?

I-nty: It's more like cleaning your body out, if you feel you have something inna you what needs to flush out.

Drawing out poisons is a chief concern in bodily maintenance and healing, for *I-talists* and for others. Other than through eating and drinking dirt, people can also bring poisons to the surface of the body with the application of poultices made from bruised and heated herbal matter (often leaves and stems) directly to the affected part of the body, which may be swelling. Swelling is an indication that poison needs to be drawn out of the body. Clay may also be applied topically to bring toxins to the surface of the body. Steam baths are used in opening the pores of the body and loosening clots, so that poisons or toxins can then be worked out by following the steam with teas and/or massage. Robertson writes that steam bath, also known as "bush bath" or "hydrotherapy" is commonly used to "calm and stimulate the mind and body, open pores, relieve itching

and pains" (1982:6). Below, I offer my experience at Shirley's hut, *Zareeba*, where she practices a synthesis of traditional Jamaican and African styles of steam bath and massage, to serve as an example of how steam is used. I have only undergone this therapy once myself, but I have talked with four other people, who were staying on the Genus *family land* and receiving therapy from Shirley during the summer months when I lived there, and their stories corroborate my experience.

The Cleansing Comforts of Zareeba: Herbs and Steam, Rescue, and Anointment

January 8, 2003. "Aunty" Jean, Frankie's wife, knocks on the door of my room at *I-tal Rest* to let me know I am still invited to go with her group on their walk *back seaside* early this morning. I decline her offer only because I am anxious about my treatment with Shirley, scheduled to start within the hour. Jean tells me that Shirley is already down by the hut. I walk onto the porch outside my room, peer through the trees in the yard of *I-tal Rest* toward *Zareeba*, and watch and listen for signs of activity. As Jean leaves my porch, memories of my summer stay next door at *I-rie Cabins* come into my mind's eye – the frequent sight of Shirley and her helpers walking toward *Zareeba* along footpaths, carrying herbs and grasses in stacks and bunches; the talk between family members and guests about who was visiting for treatment; the worried weather-watching; the altogether serious and hurried mode of organization and arrangement. I walk toward *Zareeba*, and Shirley greets me as she passes going the other way. She tells me I can come down to the hut whenever I am ready, and we continue our separate ways.

Approaching the open front doorway of *Zareeba*, I meet a middle-aged woman dressed all in white as she works near a tall black pot of herbal infusion, which sits covered on an open fire (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). I greet her, and she smiles at me but does not speak.



Figure 4.1 View of *Zareeba*, hut and gardens, looking toward the front door.



Figure 4.2: View of *Zareeba*, showing pot for preparing herbal incense.

Entering *Zareeba*, I look up at its domed thatch ceiling, and then at the smooth, polished wooden massage table sitting in the middle of the room and the open wooden booth attached to a wall to my left. A short stool and a large-mouthed *yabba* sit inside the booth (see Figure 4.3). The walls of Shirley's hut are decorated with wooden carvings,



Fig. 4.3: View inside *Zareeba*, massage table and steam booth. (Photo copied from www.treasurebeach.net)

and many pieces from her collection of colorful paintings are displayed there as well. Enjoying these canvases, which I have not seen before, I am drawn to one canvas in particular, picturing a woman walking along a hilly green landscape, holding in her right hand a cane or pole with a doll attached to the top of it. The doll is dressed completely in white, as the woman outside the hut is dressed, with long white dress, shirt, apron and head covering. The image is reminiscent of photos which I have seen in books, picturing Jamaican Revivalist healer-women and congregations of Revivalists as they participate in

a baptism by a spring or river. I remember how Shirley distinguished her practice from the balming practice of Revivalists: "[Revivalist mothers] give you a bath at their balm-yard, fe wash your body outside and fe spiritual sickness. I give you a bath to detox, to cleanse and to purify. And it doesn't matter who say how safe it is, it should be true."

Shirley and two helpers – the woman in white and a man now as well – enter the hut. As her helpers pour steaming liquid into the pot inside the booth, Shirley tells me that when I am ready I can undress, enter the booth, put a fresh towel on the stool and sit there, and wait for her to return. As I sit and wait in the booth, the smell from the pot saturates my palate, one complex and unique aroma and flavor fill my senses. I stare into the steam coming up in waves from the pot, trying to distinguish which herbs I am inhaling, without much success. When Shirley returns, she covers the open side of the booth where I sit with a dark tapestry. She hands me a long wooden pestle and tells me that I should stir the pot of herbs continually to assist the release of steam from the herb mixture, breathe deeply, and call for her when I feel like I am ready to leave the booth.

As I stir and breathe I am entranced by the aroma and the moist heat, now and then caressed by what I remember her calling an "incense of herbs and steam." I can hear familiar voices outside, as Shirley and some of her kin are standing out front talking lowly. Their voices seem rhythmic and peaceful, and I start to feel very safe. Time seems to liquefy. I feel full of joy and purpose, stirring and cleansing, but after some time I notice that I am actually crying and that sweat is pouring out of every part of my body. When Shirley calls to me and asks me if I am ready to leave, I tell her no. She brings me some herbal tea in a mug and tells me to stop stirring the pot and to sip some tea slowly, also that I should not stay inside the booth much longer as I have already steamed for

almost forty minutes. I drink the tea and start to come back to myself, feeling overwhelmed by the experience. Calling to Shirley, she returns inside the hut and tells me to come out from behind the curtain. As I stand I notice that I am very weak, but upon leaving the booth Shirley catches me in a crisp, cool, clean white sheet, which she winds around my body. I try to speak to her but can only say "thank you." She holds me up and leads me to her table, where I sit and then lie down. The sheet, she says, will bring my temperature down and prepare me for massage. It is then that I realize I am feverish.

As Shirley does her bodywork, folding the sheet which I lay wrapped inside to expose the parts of my body she massages, and searching carefully in those places for knots and tense spots, her hands are firm and slick with homemade massage oils – I can distinguish almond, lavender, comfrey. I think of how she described *flow* and bodily ecology to me last summer, and I imagine the fluids in my body systems moving like the tides, animating and nourishing my life force. I envision her hands working like waves, licking and pulling a sandy coastline in rhythmic repetition. Shirley stops as something alerts her about a tense spot in my back and asks me if I have had some trouble here, or if anyone has examined this particular spot before. I tell her about a spinal asymmetry and the muscular problems it causes. She tells me that everyone has asymmetries, but that I should try to pay more close attention to this part of my body and have it worked on frequently, because it is like a pit for toxins where *flow* can back up. She shows me how to rub the area and then continues with her massage.

As she touches my head and face gently, she lets me know that we are finished and that she will leave now but that I can stay here as long as I like. I feel very still, and as I gradually open my eyes an image comes into focus – the eye of Ra, which someone

has drawn with a black marker near the top of the hut's center pole, located very near the table. I sit up, dress, and walk back to my cabin, where Eric, I-nty, and Shirley now sit on the porch, reasoning. Upon approaching, I-nty and Shirley say to me, "I-rie." When they greet me I feel like this is the first time I have ever been greeted. My retreat to *Zareeba*, my meal of steam and the *I-tal* comforts I have been given have refreshed me in a truly indescribable way.

As I sit and adjust to my environment, I recall now Shirley telling me that she spent many years studying various systems of traditional medicine but found great difficulty in trying to integrate this knowledge with the ethnomedical knowledge she already practiced as a Jamaican. When she discovered what she calls the "African way of thinking about health and the body," through research and five years of seminar training in the 1990s, she was immediately able to start working this style of healing with steam bath and massage into her current practice. She said that one of the main reasons this way of thinking about therapy seemed so "clear" and came so naturally to her was that it emphasized the social aspect of health and healing. She told me how fundamental it is to our health that we feel comforted and protected, and that we help others feel the same way, also that we have foresight in knowing who our kin are and how we must welcome them when we meet them. The healer can help a person nurture this kind of disposition toward the social environment. Shirley once told me that *Zareeba* is an African word which refers to the idea of "enclosure" and, in particular, to the structure where ritual healing work occurs. Located in the center of a village, a *zareeba* is protected by the houses and other buildings, all the familiar elements which surround it. Her *zareeba*, likewise, is a space that is located centrally on her family's land, where she has created it

as a kind of retreat – for Jamaican and international tourists and for others who she does not consider tourists, some of whom in each category are familiar and some strangers – where visitors can undergo professionally administered, traditional therapies and become rejuvenated by the *I-tal* arts of bodily cleansing.

I-tal Retreats, Healing Journeys, and Spiritual Work

Barry Chevannes, social scientist at the University of the West Indies, writes that for Rastafarians, "a general belief is that there is no illness for which nature provides no remedy" (1998b:24), accurately emphasizing that they promote the use of what their environment has made available to them in treating illnesses which affect the body. Yet, Rastafarians frequently regard the healing of illness and dysfunction as a complex process that depends not only on physical work – treating *flow* through the therapeutic use of food-medicines – but also spiritual work as well. Combining both kinds of therapeutic work can be a powerful strategy for repositioning oneself in relation to one's physical and social environment. This reorientation is experienced as an embodied kind of "healing." In this section I show how nutritional therapy articulates with other types of therapy in healing contexts. Also, I consider how Rastafarians, particularly *I-talists*, view the commoditization of healing practices for tourist consumption. I look at how people who offer these services struggle to define what they do as *I-tal*, and thereby challenge critiques of their work as "selling culture."

Rastafarians value periodic retreats to places where they can "sojourn," because in these places they can "sight" (envision, become inspired about) healing work and/or embark upon it. A *sojourn* is, thereby, often thought of in terms of a healing journey. The most thoroughly healing journeys involve combinations of *I-tal* physical work and

spiritual work. These journeys can be either solitary or social events. Remote, mountainous locations are often sought as places of solitude, reflection, and observation or appreciation of the natural world. These are places where one can *sojourn* from daily work, and the *sojourn* can be as quick or long as they like, unlike the *Nyabinghi* retreat, which follows a certain routine and almost always lasts for days. I-nty speaks about going to the mountain to "I-ditate" [meditate], and that he has done this ever since he gained sight of his identity as a Rastafarian – knowledge that although he had been "I-lected" before birth to be Rastafari, he still had to discover this for himself before he could begin to "trode in the path of Rastafari." The mountain, for him, is therefore a place of becoming. He chants on my recorded reasoning with him,

There is a place that I and I love to be,
far away from the city,
up inna I mountain,
under a mango tree,
by a spring,
holding I and I meditation.

He describes his *sojourns* to the *hills camp* as healing experiences, and he often undergoes periods of fasting there, when not doing heavy work in his garden. On his first "trode inna the path of Rastafari" I-nty learned how to nourish himself, keep clean and well, build things, and to make artworks using only natural materials. His retreat was a kind of apprenticeship with nature. There, he was able to "sight" it, that inventiveness in practical life skills follows logically from an acceptance of local ecological knowledge. He says that it was here in the bush, on this first *trode*, that he realized that social life is not separate from natural life; rather, that sociality is part of nature. He came to understand how little help he was giving his family before, and that he had a "dangerous attitude" toward life, of which he needed to cleanse himself. In the hills he came to realize a higher

way of living a social life – to approach other people with a "positive vibration," especially members of his family. When he returned to his *yard*, he was refreshed and was better able to become an *I-talist*, dedicating his life to family farming, cooking *I-tal*, and to creating natural artwork. I understand these efforts to be *works* of inspired reverence, living memorials to his healing journey, and a self-determined means for making money.

Shirley also retreats to a place in the hills to gather energy and receive inspiration for healing and artwork, a place she and many others in the Great Bay area call "*back seaside*." This place is remote from town, on top of the Pedro Bluff. Here, she says, are *ancient*, giant cacti and all sorts of plants one can never see on the plains, as well as every natural color of the spectrum, present in the plant life. Sometimes she goes alone, but she often takes company, and occasionally she guides people staying at the guest houses. The *sojourn* away from daily work (in the garden and at *Zareeba*, especially when tourist demand for her work is high) and *yard* life is a refreshing experience to her. Whereas she spends a great deal of time, especially during high tourist season, treating others, on her retreat *back seaside* she can concentrate on her own rejuvenation. Going *back seaside* includes a brisk cleansing walk and climb, during which one can breathe in the sea breeze and look out over the desert of the ocean. During her *sojourns* on the bluff, Shirley makes close studies of the natural beauties of the bush, and here she frequently derives inspiration for painting.

These two *sojourns* include processes of fasting and cleansing. Shirley and I-nty *sojourn* in the hills not to gather food, but to refresh the spirit, gathering inspiration and energy from the natural fertility of those places. Sojie tells me that most Jamaicans see

the hills as a place of fertility, solitude, purity, and *naturality*. The hills are also reminiscent of history, and thereby function in the replenishment of livelihood. Sojie tells me that although the hills to him are symbolic of farmers' backache, the place also brings to him a pride in the collective spirit of poor farming people, their self-sufficiency, and their endurance in periods of slavery and poverty. In these days, he says the hills also exist as a retreat from the tourism of seaside villages and from the "urban progress" of towns and cities, and that it is refreshing in that way as well.

Nyabinghi I-ssembly, Haile Selassie's Birth-Light Celebration

July 23, 2002. I-nty, Eric, and I leave from *I-rie Cabins*, journeying to Clarendon Parish this afternoon to attend an *I-ssembly* being held at a *tabernacle* in Scots Pass. The event will take place over 7-10 days starting today, which is Haile Selassie's birthday, but our plans are to spend one night there. The people we have informed of our plans to go to the *Binghi* have seemed very surprised and have given us serious counsel on how we must conduct ourselves as visitors. We assure them that we do not intend to try to interview anyone there or to tape the music and chanting performed at the *tabernacle*, and we are advised not to even bring a camera, as it might be confiscated and/or destroyed. They tell us that the *Binghi* is sacred to Rastafarians because it is a collective retreat from *Babylon*, from everything that comes to oppress a Rastafarian in the world. The *tabernacle* and all the surrounding area behind the "gates" is protected space, where Rastafarians can commune with one another as family and with their own spirits, a place where they perform the healing work of fasting and cleansing, meditation and reflection, where they offer "I-ses to the King" (to Haile Selassie), and where they can "hold focus" upon *repatriation* – the ultimate Rastafarian healing journey.

One aspect of modernity in Jamaica, from which Rastafarians feel the need to retreat, is tourism. Shirley's brother Frankie warns us that many tourists – both white and black people – have tried to attend over the years, that he has guided some of them there himself on occasion, but that these people have usually been turned back at the gates. He tells me that Rastafarians in attendance there will likely watch us very closely and challenge us verbally, in order to try to determine our intentions. We should expect the possibility that some people might want to call attention to us, in using our presence as a sounding board. We are likely to hear proclamations like "burn tourism" or "overthrow whitey" thrown our way. Some will express disapproval of our presence, some might even express disgust. At the very least, we should expect people to signify upon us in conversation, treating us more as symbols of the system which they oppose than as the genuine seekers of knowledge which we may be. I-nty cautions me about the formality of dress which people attend to, especially the *sisters*. I dress accordingly, in a long skirt and head kerchief. Shirley wishes us the best as we leave her *yard*, saying that she admires us for taking the *trod*, regardless of the amount of warning we have received from various people in her family. I tell her I am going to find out more about *I-tal* healing, and to add to what she told me about cleansing and *I-tal* food, by seeing and knowing for myself.

It is early evening when we arrive at the gates, which are not really gated by any architectural element but rather by people, acting as greeters and guards. As we approach, I-nty shouts "Hail Selassie I, King Alpha, Lion of Judah and Father of I-ration." We pass unchallenged and start our walk along the wide, unpaved road leading to the *tabernacle*, speaking gently to people as we make eye contact along the way, "I-ses" and "I-lie-I" (praises and hello). Many are dressed in long white robes tied at the waist or draped with

"I-tes,¹ gold and green"-colored sashes (reminiscent of the Ethiopian flag), and others wear African batiks and fabrics fashioned into formal garments and robes. Many of the *Ihon I-tes* in attendance wear, not the burlap garments which they wore at the *Sup'* in Montego Bay, but rather pressed, clean khaki shirts and pants with colored belts and neck and shoulder sashes. Very few men wear tams (knitted caps) to cover their dreadlocks, and very few women do not don head coverings. I-nty tells me two days later in our interview that these are some rules that younger Rastafarians see as useless, that they want to bring these customs of separating men and women to a committee of *Nyabinghi* elders and reason about them, to see if they can be changed (see Chapter 3, *Supper of Rastafari*). Yet, *Binghis* are some of the only real centers of Rastafarian orthodoxy, and this dress code has been held over from the first *Binghis* in the 1940s and 1950s (Edmonds 1998b), a time which predates the women's movement (1970s)..

Some people are more informally dressed in t-shirts and jeans or slacks, although most people, even those dressed informally, wear various "badges" of Rastafarian and Ethiopian alliance – the colors, also pins, buttons and handcrafted wooden jewelry like the kind I-nty makes and sells, some of these bearing images of Selassie, Empress Menen and the Royal family, Marcus Garvey, Mau Mau warriors, and the Lion of Judah, others bearing sayings such as "Repatriation is a must," "Organize, centralize, unify" and "Down with oppressors." Badges like these and other objects are also being sold by Rastafarian vendors along the path, especially near the gates. The activity along the path is generally very festive. At the foot of the hill which leads to the *tabernacle*, we pause as I notice two structures which look like concession stands, but I see that there is no activity inside the booths.

¹ I-tes means red here.

As we reach the top of hill, various crowds of people are setting up camping spaces, tents, and canopies near the trees lining the outskirts of the large clearing which surrounds the *tabernacle*. Some automobiles are parked along the outskirts as well. In the middle of the clearing sits the *tabernacle*, and emanating from the gathering in and around the structure is the sound of drums, beating the *Binghi* one-two beat – the "do good" beat as I-nty calls it; women, men, and children chant and sing as well. As we move toward the *tabernacle*, we are stopped frequently by people who know I-nty, and we are asked who we are, but in a generally good-natured and interested way. As they converse with I-nty about family, and craft and farming work, I look around the space, noticing some other booths and people supplying the people inside with large sacks of oranges and limes, pineapples, and jelly coconuts. I recognize the citrus as the *angel foods* Shirley spoke of when talking about *Nyabinghi* food-medicines. Visiting one of the booths and asking to buy some fruit, a man tells me that these booths will stay open throughout the festival, as long as fruit is supplied to them for distribution. The fruit they sell is very cheap – I pay only about 10 cents American for an orange. I am told that the other booths down the hill along the path will be open in the mornings, and there, people will prepare and sell soups and rice and peas for any *sojourners* who think they need to break fast.

Approaching the *tabernacle*, I am impressed by the scene, being struck by how different the place seems compared to the empty Malvern tabernacle which I-nty took us to visit and study (see Figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6) weeks earlier – where many remnants lay on the altar but where there were no people, music, or healing interactions. I am still not sure when the altar objects at the empty tabernacle (see Figure 4.4) were placed, although

I suspect that they were left there either after the last *Binghi* or by people visiting the space during the interim between *Binghis*.



Figure 4.4: Altar space around center pole inside Malvern *tabernacle*, with offerings and left objects – calabash bowl, empty roots wine bottle, orange, corn cob, dried aloe leaf on a chopping block, nail and a notebook of chants.

In the context of *I-ssembly*, the objects on the altar are much less of a focal point, as the place is full of singing, dancing people. Yet the altar inside the *tabernacle* still warrants mention because the objects there are food-medicines used in *Binghi* healing therapy.

Looking there, I distinguish a bottle of water, a bottle of honey, a few limes and an orange, a Bible, framed and unframed pictures of Selassie, a map of Africa, corn husks (for rolling spliffs), *ganja* stalks and flowers, and some leaves of aloe vera. During the *I-ssembly*, head chanters ceremonially use these objects in feeding themselves and some others gathered in the *tabernacle*.



Figure 4.5: Outside view of *Nyabinghi tabernacle* at Malvern. (Photo by E. Dickerson)

During the *I-ssembly*, two fires are blazing – a large bonfire outside in the clearing and one on a fire stack inside the *tabernacle* (see Figure 4.5), which looks to be built much like the one in Kingsley's kitchen shed (Chapter 3), but on a larger scale. Significantly, neither of these fires are used for cooking during *I-ssemblies*, as fire takes on other meanings and uses in this context. Cooking on campsite ground fires is disallowed as well. Fire, in this setting, is symbolic of the cleansing power of both the destruction of internalized oppression and the inspiration that occurs through *I-tal* work on body and spirit. The lighting of *ganja* is the only allowed use of the *Nyabinghi* fires. Fire used in this way is symbolic of the initiation of healing, and it is done by lighting a

piece of corn husk and then transferring the fire to the smoking apparatus, whether that is a spliff, pipe, or chalice.



Figure 4.6: Raised hearth inside Malvern *tabernacle*. (Photo by E. Dickerson)

The entire space which I now look upon is filled with people – five drummers are seated in a line and perform a steady beat, and three others stand and do the same; head chanters stand near the center pole, directing the spiritual songs with arm gestures and forcefully announced words. Everyone inside the *tabernacle* sways in unison to the music, some putting vigorous motions and stomping into their dance. Some people wave flags, and some clasp their hands together making a star of David pattern with their fingers. Many sing very loudly, emotively, and many have their eyes closed and pray aloud. Two elders, dressed in exquisitely embroidered robes, glide slowly around the crowd inside, greeting people as they sing and clasp hands and arms with them,

celebrating the moment and frequently bestowing flowers of *ganja* as they give greetings. "Jah, Rastafari! Ever living light!" and other short ecstatic proclamations punctuate the group-chanting, the phrases randomly delivered by various people as they become moved by the experience. As music, song, and dance heat up, people begin to jump and stomp feet, and some men toss their heads, making their dreadlocks fly. It occurs to me that perhaps the reason for the difference in dress code, suggested above, signifies that male energy can be released inside the *tabernacle*, while female energy must be contained.

As I take my place beside some other women in the *tabernacle*, they greet me happily and encourage me to sway with them and hum along. One woman takes me by the hand, and teaches me, through body language, the side-to-side step and hip motion. Another sings more loudly now, and I start to understand the words of some of the songs being sung . . . "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, over I . . . By the rivers of Babylon, where we lay down, and there we wept, when we remember Zion . . ." No one seems angry that I am there, but I do meet some suspicious glances, and I try to diffuse tension when I feel it by speaking kindly to those who seem upset with or distracted by my presence in the *tabernacle* space.

The praise, fellowship, and celebration continued all night and extended into the morning. I never once heard a break in the music, neither drumming nor chanting ceased completely the whole time, although people moved in and out of the *tabernacle* throughout the night. As people left the *tabernacle* alone or in small groups, I saw them sitting down on the grounds in the clearing. Some sat alone cross-legged, meditating and sometimes praying aloud, while others in small groups would talk to one another, pray

with one another, or share a snack. People entering the *tabernacle* often walked briskly inside, as if refreshed, and I saw many laughing, talking, and holding hands as they entered. I understood the need to take periodic breaks from the intensity of the inner *tabernacle* scene, and as I finally lay down and covered myself to rest, I remembered being amazed how full and busy the scene still seemed. The next morning, children were allowed to sit in for the drummers, and they kept the beat going while the others took a nap, went down to a spring to bathe, or sat and snacked on fruit. Although I did not talk to anyone directly about *I-tal* food, I was able to observe certain things about food in this healing context, and to elicit information on people's attitudes toward *I-talism*. I learned that although food was not a focal point of the event in any way, consultation about health and nourishment was ongoing, as people talked to one another about their home lives, how they had been feeling lately, what troubles they had been suffering, how their children were doing. The atmosphere around the booths at the bottom of the hill was generally upbeat and positive; no one was being censured for breaking fast.

Substantiating Shirley's stance on the indecency of banana and yam, though, the only bananas I saw were small finger-sized bananas, and I never saw any yam at all. Shirley was right about the place being a site for fasting and cleansing, and for concentration on spiritual work. It is also a place where one can experience the powerful effects of both social integration and spiritual healing.

Using I-tal Works or Selling Culture?

The *Nyabinghi I-ssembly* is a ceremonial and social type of retreat which compares nicely with the solitary mountain *sojourns* taken periodically by my informants. *Nyabinghi tabernacles* are located in rural areas and away from centers of

tourist activity, as are the natural settings of the mountain retreats. While healing work in the *Nyabinghi* is necessarily social and interactive, in the hills spiritual work is done by meditation and appreciation of nature. The experience of meditation in a mountain setting requires fasting and includes cleansing as well as a feasting of the eyes on nature and its bounties, which is a visual kind of replenishment. During the *Nyabinghi*, fasting and cleansing take place simultaneously with feasting on *ganja*, music, fellowship, and spectacle. In both settings, the *sojourners* channel their energies and concerns away from the everyday work – cooking, eating, caretaking – and undergo the extraordinary. In so many ways, these retreats are *I-tal* healing journeys.

In addition to these structural similarities, these retreat spaces are also generally protected from tourist manipulation, in efforts to keep them *I-tal* and therefore preserve their therapeutic roles in healing. With the mountain meditations, Rastafarians protect retreat spaces due to a desire to keep the places pure, undeveloped, private. These are personal favorite places, and if they are hidden it is to keep them from being spoiled by modernity. *I-talists* are stewards there. But mountain retreats take on a sacred aspect as well, because of their roles in healing and inspiration. *Nyabinghi* *tabernacles* are sacred for similar reasons, for in the context of *I-ssembly*, "earthforce" or "the cosmic energy that pervades the universe" is tapped and "unleashed" upon those labeled oppressors (Edmonds 1998b:356). *Nyabinghi* – as a space and an experience – is systematically protected from exploitation by tourists, media, and government (Turner 1999:80).

Yet, while these retreats are sacred and protected, outsiders (non-Rastafarians, tourists, etc.) are permitted. Shirley and I-nty take outsiders to *sojourn* with them, but only after scrutinizing the intentions of the outsiders over time. They generally associate

tourists with *Babylon*, because of their association with money and wealth, and with disrespect in many cases. And as a group, they are suspected by Rastafarians because so often tourists seek to take advantage of or defame the traditional cultural practices of poor Jamaicans and thereby insulted the sensitivities of those culture bearers who kindly introduced them to these practices. Tourists are not the only ones to be scrutinized and challenged as trust-breakers. As cultural tourism gains force in Jamaica (Hawkins 1999), Jamaicans formerly uninterested in the Rastafarians and their practices are now claiming Rasta identity because they see the profit to be made from selling Rastafarian experiences and products – e.g., "selling culture."

Due to the protective attitude of *I-talists* toward their healing spaces, the mountain and *Binghi* retreats may seem very different from the retreats tourists are allowed to take at *Zareeba*, which Shirley directly markets to tourists through partnerships with certain resorts in the Treasure Beach area. But does protection from exploitation equal protection from commoditization? I do not think so. Shirley, while intentionally commoditizing ethnomedical healing practices, still protects the specificity and meaning of her practice from exploitation by tourists and other outsiders. She asserts that although many tourists come to her for spiritual work, she does not sell this. She says no one can sell this to them, because they alone manage their own spiritual work. What she does at *Zareeba* is treat *flow* through cleansing. Perhaps this motive is behind her naming the place "Zareeba," which means "enclosure." She does the same with walks *back seaside*, even more so. By scrutinizing her clients, by monitoring tourists in the area, and by and controlling therapy experiences at *Zareeba* and *back seaside*, Shirley guards the *I-tal* quality of her retreats, in efforts to preserve these places.

I have to say that she works hard to create and maintain a position where she can maintain control over the commoditization of her craft. These days, as so many people are pushed to move to cities for work, many Rastafarians – and many Jamaicans in general, for that matter – do not have the privilege of belonging to a close-knit family with sizeable land holdings in the country. And even when they do have access to land, they are seldom able to find a way to do profitable, sustainable work there. But due to the success that Shirley's family has had in securing a place for themselves in the local, small-scale tourist development industry in the Treasure Beach area, she is able to create something of her own in *Zareeba*, which is remarkably fulfilling for her and valuable to a small set of tourists whom she chooses.

In contrast, I-nty's position is much less stable and his *I-tal* crafts much less sustainable, but he refuses to say that he is "selling culture" to tourists, or that he is being exploited by tourists when he sells *I-tal* food and guidance on healing journeys. He makes use of material culture to supplement his income and help his family, while controlling what and to whom he sells, and providing for himself opportunities to travel, visit with Rastafarian friends, and to market from his "store" of *I-tal* crafts – a collection of natural jewelry and badges, calabash purses, and his father's handiwork (knitted shoes and tams). His family lives in the hills and survives on farming and whatever unsteady work they can hire out to do. They have little access to the revenues from coast tourism, except through I-nty. He commoditizes the healing experience through cooking and acting as a Rasta guide, but insists he is not exploiting his own culture in doing so.

Despite attempts by some, the *Nyabinghi* experience has still been commoditized. Bob Marley was the first person to help this happen on an international scale, although

many other Rastafarians have followed his example. While Marley is thought of, world-wide, as a prophet and musical healer, he profited from the *Nyabinghi* retreat while he was alive. Shirley tells the story,

We [around my yard] know that, too [that it was Bob Marley's livity that killed him]. But we don't *scandal* him for it, because he's dead and gone now and have a family. But most Rasta people do not *even* have Bob Marley record inna they yard. First thing: Bob Marley used to have one Rastaman – and I meet the Rastaman – who come with him *cassette* and tape every word he sing in the Binghi, [because] Bob Marley don't go to Binghi himself – not that I know of, I've never seen him *at* one. Well this Rastaman would tape them off, and Bob Marley would write upon it – upon the reasoning – and that's how Bob Marley showed himself *Rasta*, is from the reasoning, if you want to *call* it that. Ca' when I telling you – some of [the regulars at the Binghis] were so *angry* with the Rastaman they want to *ban* him from coming [to the Binghi], and I was at the Binghi at that time, so I'm telling you what I see going on, you know. And after Bob Marley died this same Rastaman said, "Shit – and *I* live inna poverty and *never* him provide for me?!" Cause this guy is in poverty with *Big Dollar Man* . . . If I meet a hundred Rasta man, maybe two – or several – will give [Marley] a chance. But ninety-eight is *gonna kill him!* We call him the "big parrot" and the "traitor of Jamaica." Except for in the music business, I never met *one* Rasta man who said Bob Marley was a good man.

Shirley tells how Marley made use of what he saw to be profitable – writing music based on *Nyabinghi* songs, chants, and reasonings. And it was a successful attempt for him, because now, his family lives very well in Jamaica. But *I-talists*, and others who identify first as *Nyabinghi House brethren*, blame Marley for exploiting a healing journey, and for thereby "selling culture." Even though Marley is a native son and "showed himself Rasta" *Nyabinghi brethren* see him as treacherous for surreptitiously taping *Binghi* music and using it to profit not the group, but rather himself. What Marley did, and how and why he did it, were not *I-tal* in their opinion; moreover, the space of *Nyabinghi* retreat has become more guarded because of his actions, due to efforts to protect the people

genuinely seeking healing there from being exploited. Brad Weiss write about the tricky phenomenon of commoditization:

The meanings of commoditization and of particular commodities often do pose challenges to those who are engaged in this process. In particular, the experience of agency – a person's or commodity's sense of their own capacity for making the world – can be undermined or enhanced through the commoditization of things and persons." (Weiss 1996:8)

Rastafarian culture bearers work to guard *I-tal* healing practices from being over-exploited and taken out of their hands as a source of sustenance and medium for internal social exchange. Behind various Rastafarian motivations to heal and to keep healing *I-tal* is a general desire to be able to start anew, to rid the body of what burdens it and start again, building *livity* in all *works*. This process cannot come to fruition in the context of exploitation, so any commoditization of *I-tal* journeys is carefully negotiated and critiqued by the larger Rastafarian collective.

Diane Robertson, a Jamaican pharmacist who has collected nutritional and herbal lore in the interest of advocating Jamaicans' use of this knowledge in improving health, praises Rastafarians along with other "folk medicine professionals" for their resourceful use of traditional food-medicines in cooking and medicine-making, expressing concern over the loss of traditional knowledge about food-medicines throughout her book (1982:3). Rastafarians share this concern, because of the portent which that loss holds for the bodies of Jamaicans. They revitalize ethnobotanical and ethnomedical knowledge and practices in their uses of *I-tal* food-medicines for primarily this reason. They articulate the traditional, natural wisdom of poor farming people with the practical value of whole foods and herbal foods (gardened and wild). Yet, they also protect this knowledge in various ways, as part of keeping it *I-tal*.

Most of the information I have been able to collect so far in building a *materia medica* and an embodied understanding of *I-tal* therapies, I have come by through observing and interacting naturally in the settings of kitchen, garden, and retreat, also in the context of asking for medical advice. Direct inquiries about healing knowledge and techniques are generally met with suspicion or by evasive responses when dealing with practitioners of traditional medicine in Jamaica, and while outsiders are not banned completely from coming to "see and know" *I-tal* healing therapies, cultural details are more often guarded and incorporated into practice by Rastafarians than they are sold. In the last two chapters I have sought to show that food-medicines are used for a variety of healing and culinary purposes, and that for Rastafarians the line between the two realms – food and medicine – is actively blurred. Whether *I-tal* is used in maintaining or cleansing physique or spirit, and regardless of the healing context, a meal or a fasting retreat, Rastafarians believe food-medicines treat the balance of *flow* in the body and therefore nourish life. Also, the taste for *I-tal* shapes and is shaped by practices but also creates possibilities – such as commoditization for those who identify as or with Rastafarianism. During a time when cultural tourism (Hawkins 1999) and the global spread of Rastafarianism (Savishinsky 1994) have become major coercive forces on the healing experience, Rastafarian culture bearers struggle to own and preserve the traditions which they have "grown" themselves, and to use these traditions in ways which are wholesome and sustainable, and therefore *I-tal*.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Being Rasta mean you can put a stop to all that [negativity], be a new person, be free, start to realize it's not all been said. There's a lot more that was never said – a half never been told. Rasta look forward to what wasn't said, and put it into practice.

– Shirley

Early in the evening at the *Supper of Rastafari*, Iion Flames Lightning took the stage at the *Iion Station* to announce this year's winner of the "Keep on Doing What You Are Doing Award." Sister I-Peace was called to the stage, and Iion Flames acknowledged both her work organizing the festival and her decision to come to Jamaica from America in order to work with Jamaican civic groups and projects of social advancement. After thanking her for all of the *Iion I-tes* members, Iion Flames presented I-Peace with a thatch palm satchel, just like the one I had previously seen I-nty carrying on our *trods* through the hills, in which he carried and preserved the provisions he collected from field and garden. Iion Flames called this satchel a "Solomon Basket – genuine, Jamaican, and made from St. E¹." As he handed it over, he welcomed I-Peace into their fold, saying, "Everyone in Iion carry one, 'ca Sister I-Peace – we make a tell her publicly, there is a space around the Iion I-tes table, yeah, for Sister I-Peace! So everyone 'round just give applause fe Mama and the effort fe make [the festival] happen." As I-Peace put the basket on her shoulder and laughed a little uneasily, Iion Flames encouraged and challenged her simultaneously, with these words: "Yeah, mama – real hard and ugly, you know. All the way from *St. E-busy-beth* you know. So just keep busy upon the *works!*" In the transfer of this meaningful symbol which the *Iion I-tes* associated with *I-tal works*, tradition, and naturality, Iion Flames communicates a valuable message to those gathered for the

¹ St. Elizabeth Parish

festival: that *I-talism* – the natural farming, the daily devotion to healthy and artful cooking, the persistence in battling for land rights, sustainability, and wellness, and the commitment toward self-improvement and *livity* – is not a project which one engages in to gain usual esteem or conventional markers of success. *I-talism* is rather a project with a difference, and it becomes a respectable one for Rastafarians because it necessarily includes humbling and tiring, but rewarding, *works*.

From my participant observation in and gradual *over-standing* of the Rastafarian lived world in Jamaica, I have sought to explain here how Rastafarians use food-related practices and preferences as ways of using, protecting, and transforming their shared local environment and their individual livelihoods. I have sought to detail what ethos inhabits food-related practices and preferences and thereby contextualizes them – that is, a taste for *I-tal*, shaped by a history of struggle against oppression, an ideology supporting resistance for the purpose of improvement, various theories which connect physical and social bodies to land, and a set of collective therapeutic goals. *I-tal* practices are used as modes of everyday struggle against a continuing history of inequalities, and against alienation from normal, healthy land and from solid family relationships. The taste for *I-tal* is embedded in both the Rastafarian agenda of reappropriating what they believe have always been strategies of everyday resistance to oppression in Jamaica, and their new appreciation for *naturality*, which encompasses both conservationism and traditionalism in land use and nourishment strategies. The first dissenters gained some measure of control over health, family life, and their community-based systems of land use and exchange in remote areas, by living on a normally vegetarian diet, and by using ethnomedical knowledge for treatment of illness; likewise, Rastafarians seek to gain

control over erosion of physical and social health by engaging with the projects of *natural living*.

I-talists engage in an active, creative use of what they have at their arms reach on *family land* – their "roots and culture" – for living and for nourishment. *Naturality* involves preserving familiarity with land, taking a role of stewardship in farming, and abstaining from all manufactured or poisoned foods. Traditionalism involves the preservation of familiarity with people and with treasured bodies of knowledge (heritage), also the continuation of systems of internal exchange and marketing. It almost goes without saying that any taste, as "the capacity to differentiate and appreciate" among "practices and products" (Bourdieu 1984:170), evolves over time as some customs gain force and authority over others. I have stressed in this work that taste for *I-tal* has crystallized out of sustained appreciation for traditional patterns of land use and nourishment. Weiss writes that food practices are "processes through which meanings, values, and orientations are generated, embodied and concretized—but also debated, subverted, and dislocated" (1996:226). I have worked to orient *I-tal* food practices by showing how and why Rastafarians turn to a traditional lifestyle of producing and consuming the products of a rural farming life on *family land*, in efforts to debate, subvert and dislocate the associations of these lifeways from their negative associations with backwardness. As Laura Osbourne writes in her introduction to *The Rasta Cookbook*:

As Western man has set himself against the many essentials of the nature from which he was born, so he yearns to find peace with the world, to arrest the destruction of things which are natural, of himself. Where better to halt the destruction but at the point where the body interfaces with nature, with the food we eat? (1988:13)

"The doers are the righteous ones," Shirley tells me. "Even Rasta, if he does nothing he is not righteous, even with all the *reasoning*." I hope I have shown that *reasoning* about ideals for food-related behavior cannot and does not equal doing-cooking or doing-healing. No matter how tough individuals may talk, in actual practices, Rastafarian *I-talists* never merely reproduce these rules, nor do they actually want to. *I-talists* do not like to be constrained by conformity or expectation for orthodoxy; on the contrary, Rastafarians in general value autonomy very highly, and they encourage creativity, improvisation, and flexibility in practice. Therefore, I have argued that *I-talism* is less of a critical, accusatory set of rules and more of an imperative approach to human health, a monitoring system, and a set of reminders. Beyond this statement though, the daily troubles of individuals should not be underestimated or overlooked, and I hope I have been sensitive to this in analysis of food practices. Most Rastafarians experience daily dilemmas when engaging in *I-tal* food practices, but this does not necessarily mean they are not doing *I-tal*.

In addition to making a fair reading of what is typical about *I-tal* food production and consumption, and orienting the taste for *I-tal*, I have sought to place cooking and eating within a broader frame of Rastafarian nourishing practices. *I-tal* refers to more than just culinary practices; in this study, I have shown how important it is to tie in other modes of nourishment – namely land use, social interaction, and maintaining and cleansing body. For *I-talists*, medicines are foods as well because they help maintain body, balance *flow*, stimulate appetite, and cleanse the body for better maintenance. I have argued that, beyond maintenance, cleansing, fasting, bath, retreat and social healing are all foundational to understanding use of *I-tal* for physical and spiritual healing. *I-tal*

body work nourishes balance, health and *livity*, as do planting, cooking, and eating. In work on the physical body, the focus is on the production of food-medicines and the desired effect is on digestion and nourishing body through belly and blood; in spiritual work, food-medicines are conceived of as aids and are located outside of the place where spirit is cleansed and maintained.

I also have tried to show how *I-talists* negotiate the "problem" of commoditizing *I-tal* food and healing practices. My informants castigated other Rastafarians for "selling culture," meaning that those sellers were unwittingly inviting exploitation by allowing trespassers to enter a sacred enclosure. At the same time, they commoditized their own services regularly, not faulting themselves for doing so, explaining that they use what they have available to them for their *works*. They feel they are making use of their *roots* and culture while maintaining control over how and how frequently their products are consumed. I have sought to illuminate many of the ways in which Rastafarian culture bearers struggle to own and preserve the traditions which they have "grown" themselves. Rastafarian *I-talists* reason that everything one consumes should be a medicine and should thereby improve health (physical and social). When a group of people – a family, a village, a nation – focuses on the goal of health through *I-talism*, Rastafarians say that those people really achieve growth. I hope that by historicizing and then by evoking a sensorial awareness of Rastafarian production and consumption of *I-tal* food-medicines, I have told some of the half never told. I can guarantee that there is still more to be told – and tasted – even now, and I look forward to it.

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APPENDIX A INTRODUCTION TO THE GLOSSARY

When transcribing interviews, I encountered some difficulty in representing Rastafarian language on paper. Because many words my informants use have special meanings, which are likely foreign or ambiguous to the reader, I have provided a glossary of words in Appendix B, which for the most part, should facilitate understanding their language as it is rendered in this text. I found that at least two levels of dilemma present themselves in transcribing Rastafarian language: consistently representing Jamaican Creole – what Jamaicans themselves usually call *Patois* – as people use contextually variable Creole or English words and constructions in speech, shifting back and forth along a spectrum existing between standard English to what Beryl Bailey calls a "kind of Proto-Creole" (1966:1); also, accounting for the distinct Rastafarian use of what Velma Pollard calls "Dread Talk" (1983:46), which Rastafarians themselves give various names – i.e., *I-lk* or *Word-sound-power*. Rastafarians use *I-lk* in addition to *Patois*, combining lexicons and grammatical forms from both, and Jamaican English.

Bailey talks about an "extensive cross-interference" in Jamaican language, where there are both Creole "intrusions" into a language associated with prestige and modernity, and English "intrusions" into Creole, which results from poor language training in English and lack of sophistication in using English in social settings (1966:1). I adapt this model by saying that Jamaican people infuse more or less English or Creole into their speech, depending on the interlocutor and the social situation. Thus, there is no uniform way to transcribe all speech of all Jamaicans; rather I must make compromises in order to represent their speech as truthfully as possible while not obfuscating meaning in doing so. I usually spell cognates using standard English orthography, except in instances like *mi*,

inna, beca, nah, and gwan. Fe is a tricky word that corresponds with both English prepositions "for" and "to" as well as functioning as a kind of infinitive marker, as in "want fe travel" (want to travel).

I deal with the dilemma posed in transcribing *I-lk* by using Pollard's system of representation. She defines standard elements of this "Dread Talk" lexicon, in three categories: 1) "known items bear new meanings," as with I-nty's use of the word "bumboclaat" to refer to the *I-tal* garments which he and the *Ilon I-tes* wear in public (see Chapter 3); 2) "words bear the weight of their phonological implications," as with adapting "understand" to "over-stand"; and 3) the use of "I" for both subject and object first person, as a replacement for parts of words which bear negative connotations (1983:46-60). I add to her interpretative system of categorization several major points. First, as a common rule, Rastafarians creatively substitute morphemes in English or Creole words for morphemes bearing negative connotations. Alternately, they substitute "I" in the place of phonemes which are not necessarily negative or even meaningful in isolation from the rest of the word (as with phonemes which are also negatively connotative morphemes), but are instead parts of words which bear meanings that Rastafarians wish to change. They use this second rule of "I" substitution in order to craft a new *word-sound* which bears new meaning, while reminding listeners of the original word by retaining some phonemes. Making a new *word-sound* while leaving a clue to its etymology is a process which signals to listeners that the meaning of the original word has been called into question and endowed with new sound and meaning. An example of this is the innovation of "I-ration" from the word "creation." The word "creation," for Rastafarians, indexes Biblical creation written down in the Book of Genesis. Rastafarians

pronounce that the world's genesis could never be accurately recorded in or depicted through the written word, and that this *word-sound* has the power to elude people about the nature of this event. Rastafarians also use the word "I-rate" to speak of their own acts of invention, which they endow with *I-tal* power. Third, Rastafarians give special value to the first person pronoun "I," attempting to rid *I-lk* of the objective pronoun "me." Also, Rastafarians frequently change the first person singular and plural "I" and "we" or the second person singular and plural "you" to an *I-lk* expression very dear to them – "I and I." In using this expression, they stress their belief in the kinship between all people and unifying power of social and linguistic interaction. Often, Rastafarians completely erase the linguistic distinction between first and second person (as ego and other), speaking of "the I" instead of saying "you," "I", or "we." The generous and versatile use of "I" is a striking feature of *I-lk* and signifies both Rastafarian efforts to create social unification through linguistic interaction, and their emphasis on the power of agency, autonomy, and self-determination.

In my text I have consistently set off *I-lk* and *Patois* words with italics, except where these words appear in titles and headings, and where used by someone I am quoting. I choose to do leave foreign words in plain font in quotations because I can find no other way to distinguish between foreign words, emphasized words, and words which are both foreign and emphasized. I make another exception with people's names, which I italicize on first use and then leave plain. Overall, the reader may trust first, that when a foreign word appears, its meaning is provided in Appendix B and second, that when reading quotations, words are italicized to show that the speaker stressed them in utterance.

APPENDIX B GLOSSARY

Anciency. (I-lk) Used to refer to and accentuate connection with one's ancestors – not only biological ancestors but also all African forebears – and their lifeways. Also used to tie Rastafarians to the royal Ethiopian lineage to which Haile Selassie belonged through bonds of fictive kinship. Can also be used more generally, when referring to old-fashioned and traditional practices.

Angel food. (I-lk) A name which Shirley gives to cleansing food-medicines in general, and more specifically, the only food-medicines which may be used during spiritual work.

Babylon, or Babylon system. (I-lk) Rastafarians believe that the African American experience of captivity, forced exile, and slavery parallels the Hebrew experience during the Babylonian captivity. *Babylon* is the name Rastafarians give to the enemy which subjected African ancestors in colonial Jamaica and which continues to oppress them to this day. Babylon is not just the British colonialists who constituted the planter class in pre-emancipation Jamaica, but rather includes a whole host of others who have subjected African Jamaicans to the agendas of a capitalist economy by exploiting their labor and environmental resources at the expense of their human rights, health, and livelihood.

Back seaside. (Patois) An area located on the Pedro Bluff, where Shirley (and some others) goes to commune with nature.

Balm-yard. (Patois) A place designated for healing in Jamaican ethnomedical and Revivalist practices.

Beca, or ca. (Patois) Because.

Birth-light. (I-lk) From "birthday."

Bitters. (Patois) Purgative tonics made from bitter herbs and roots.

Brethren. (I-lk) What Rastafarians call their male kin, even those not related by blood.

Bumboclaat. (I-lk) From "bum cloth."

Callaloo. (Patois) Green leafy vegetable, similar to spinach or collards.

Cassareep. (Patois) Cured cassava juice.

Chalice. (I-lk) Name for a ganja pipe, made out of clay or from a coconut or a bottle, which is smoked ceremonially in the company of kin. "Licking the chalice" is an act treated as a sacrament in some instances and as a facilitator of sociality, fellowship, and goodwill in others.

Cho-cho. (Patois) Common name for chayote squash or mirliton.

Cutlass, or sometimes *'lass.* (Patois) Multi-purpose tool, with short, broad metal blade and a wooden handle. It is an I-talist's favorite chopping, carving and dicing tool.

Cyaan. (Patois) Means "cannot."

Dasheen (Patois) Starchy root vegetable.

Daughter (I-lk). Synonymous with "sister."

Duppy. (Patois, I-lk) Someone's wandering ghost.

Drugs. (I-lk) Substances that confuse the mind and contribute to bad health.

Family land (Patois) An area of land which is held collectively by a family. See Besson on family land as attained through the Jamaican system of "land tenure" (1984).

Fe. (Patois) Corresponds to English prepositions "for" and "to."

Fish and bammy. (Patois) Fresh steamed fish and cassava fritters traditionally fried in homemade coconut oil.

Fit. (Patois) When produce is ready for picking, it is said to be "fit." Ripeness refers to a state between fitness and spoilage.

Ganja. (Patois) Common name for marijuana plant and its products.

Ground. (I-lk) Grounding is a social mode of interacting and networking which usually includes traveling to the *yard* of one's *brethren* or *sistren* for a visit and long sessions of *reasoning*.

Gungu. (Patois) Green and brown pigeon peas.

Gwan. (Patois) Can mean either "going" or "go on."

Higgler. (Patois) A middle-person who, by profession, markets and trades food and other tangible goods, buying from the farmer/supplier and selling to the buyer. Some Jamaican higgler use their own automobiles to transport and vend goods, while others transport goods using cab, bus, and/or human power and vend in urban, tourist, and/or market areas.

Hills camp, or *Hills.* (I-lk) A place nearby the hilly fields where farmers work, which may be used for lodging when a structure is present or built on site, and which usually features an outdoor kitchen. Farmers working neighboring fields may gather together at these camps to share breaks and meals.

House. (I-lk) An organized group of Rastafarians, as in "Nyabinghi House."

I-dem. (I-lk) Means "them" or "you" (plural).

I-ditate. (I-lk) From "meditate."

I-ganic. (I-lk) From "organic."

I-gelic I-tes. (I-lk) A group of Rastafarians who helped to promote, develop, and codify *I-tal* food practices and preferences. See Homiak (1998) on their history.

I-gher. (I-lk) From "higher." Usually pronounced "I-yah."

Iion Flames Lightning. (I-lk) From "Lion Flames Lightning."

Iion I-tes. (I-lk) From "Lionites." This is a group of Rastafarian families who *ground* in Flower Hill near Montego Bay and identify themselves as strict *I-talists* by espousing various customs of *natural living*. Members living in or near Montego Bay run at least two *I-tal* restaurants. This group organizes and hosts the Supper of Rastafari festival – which they call a "holistic health function" – annually, in order to teach the public about the importance of using *I-tal* to manage health.

Iion Spice I-tal Kitchen. (I-lk) From "Lion Spice I-tal Kitchen." Festival space for cooking food at the *Supper of Rastafari*.

Iion Station. (I-lk) From "Lion Station." The space constructed for the *Iion I-tes* broadcast of music, chanting, and public speaking at the *Supper of Rastafari*. May also refer more broadly to the whole festival area, including the kitchen space, created as a station for *I-tal* healing.

I-l. (I-lk) From "oil." Refers to traditionally prepared, homemade coconut oil.

I-lahful. (I-lk) From "beautiful."

I-lahful Iion. (I-lk) From "beautiful lion."

I-lah greens. (I-lk). From "callaloo greens."

I-lected. (I-lk) From "elected."

I-lie I. (I-lk) From "hello."

I-lk. (I-lk) From "talk." A word used by some Rastafarians to refer to the language they speak.

I-mato. (I-lk) From "tomato."

I-neyard. (I-lk) From "vineyard."

Inna. (Patois) Can mean "inside" or "in," "in a," and/or "within."

I-ney IIon. (I-lk) From "Chiney lion" or "Chinese lion."

I-nty IIon. (I-lk) From "Bounty Lion," where "I" replaces the morpheme "bow." This is the name of one of my key informants, whose birthname is Dwayne, but who earned the nickname "Bounty" from his family members. He later changed his nickname from "Bounty" to "I-nty" as a way of calling attention to his Rastafarian identity and his embrace of *I-talism*.

I-ration (I-lk) From "creation."

I-rie. (I-lk) From "I-ration" or "creation"

I-rie Cabins. (I-lk) A group of three lean-to cabins located on Genus family land. The place I called "home" in the field.

I-ses. (I-lk) From "praises."

I-shankh IIon. (I-lk) From "Ankh Lion."

I-stant IIon. (I-lk) From "Constant Lion."

I-tal. (I-lk) From "vital" or "total." Used when referring to a food, meal, environment, social atmosphere, or way of living which is organic, wholesome, lively, and therefore healthy and nourishing for humans.

I-talist. (I-lk) A Rastafarian who regularly and deliberately espouses the customs through which *I-tal* food-medicines are produced, consumed, and otherwise used for nourishing and healing physical and social bodies.

I-tal Rest. (I-lk) Large guesthouse on Genus family land, run by Frank Genus.

I-tral I-tes Juice Station. (I-lk) Place where IIon I-tes displayed fresh oranges, sugar cane, pineapples, and coconuts as their natural drinks for sale.

Jelly coconut. (Patois) Young coconut.

Likkle. (Patois) From "little."

Livi-cate. (I-lk) From "dedicate."

Livity. (I-lk) Refers to one's quality of life, or livelihood, the amount of liveliness a person or other living thing embodies.

Lockswoman, or Locksman. (I-lk) A Rastafarian person with dreadlocks.

Maintenance food. (I-lk) Foods which help a person to maintain the strength required for physical work and proper nourishment.

Mi. (Patois) My.

Nah. (Patois) Not, is not.

Naturality. (I-lk) Cleanliness and sustainability in land use practices and diet.

Natural living. (I-lk) Living on family land in remote areas away from urban centers, espousing traditionalism and self-reliance.

Nyabinghi I-ssembly, Nyabinghi, or Binghi (I-lk) Ceremonial gatherings of Rastafarians at various "tabernacle" sites around Jamaica. They are festive retreats where Rastafarians go to participate in the ritual activities which they believe facilitate social communion and spiritual healing. *Nyabinghis* are organized by members of the *Nyabinghi* House, and they usually last for more than one day. They are often held in celebration of special days on the Rastafarian calendar.

Nya shed or Nyabinghi tabernacle (I-lk) A thatch-palm and bamboo structure built on a foundation of concrete or dirt, used for staging drumming and musical event.

Nyam. (Patois) Means "eat."

Over-standing. (I-lk) From "understanding."

Patois. (Patois) Word commonly used by Jamaicans to refer to Jamaican Creole.

Pears. (Patois) Avocadoes.

Pepperpot. (Patois) A traditional Jamaican soup. See Chapter 3 for detailed description.

Pine. (Patois) From "pineapple."

Rasta-urant. (I-lk) From "restaurant."

Repatriation (Patois, I-lk) For many Rastafarians and black non-Rastafarians, repatriation entails returning to Africa, the rightful home of black people in diaspora.

Rice and peas. (Patois) A traditional Jamaican one-pot dish. See Chapter 3.

Root-ical. (I-lk) From "radical."

Roots. (I-lk, Patois) A word used to describe everything traditional and natural.

Roots mothers. (I-lk) Women who produce roots tonics, herbal medicines, and who are experts in Jamaican ethnomedical knowledge and practice.

Roots wine, or roots tonic. (Patois) Jamaican ethnomedical products made by boiling down fresh or dried roots, barks, or other hard vegetal matter from herb(s), in either water or in alcohol such as white rum, vodka or wine.

Reasoning. (I-lk) Intense discussion, through which Rastafarians seek to inspire one another and encourage one another to build *livity*.

Saltfish. (Patois) Common name for cod. Jamaican cookery still incorporates this food into many dishes, but care is taken to wash and scrape as much of the salt off the meat before using it.

Seat up. (I-lk) Means to place oneself on a seat, and thereby rest.

Seen. (I-lk) An emphatic word used by a speaker to call their listener(s) to respond affirmatively to what has just said. Similar to "do you see?"

Selah. (I-lk) A sacred word which signals a profound, reverent pause.

Set-up. (Patois) A ritualized preparation of a festival or ceremonial space.

Sinkle-bible. (Patois) Aloe vera plant and its products used in cleansing.

Sistren. (I-lk) What Rastafarians call their female kin, even those not related by blood.

Sojie. (I-lk). From "sojourn." The nickname of one of my key informants.

Spliff. (I-lk) A hand-rolled marijuana cone for smoking. The cured ganja flowers may be rolled inside a piece of paper, or inside a natural substance such as a dried corn husk or an onion skin.

Structure. (I-lk) As in "body structure," or the physique.

Supper of Rastafari. (I-lk) Festival, hosted by the Iton I-tes, which was both a "holistic health function" and a public demonstration of *I-talism*.

Tabernacle. (I-lk) The central structure and stage in an *Nyabinghi I-ssembly*.

Temple. (I-lk) Synonymous with body *structure*.

Trash. (Patois) Vegetable peelings.

Trodding. (I-lk) Word that may come from either "tredding" or "trekking" but means a mixture of both – to take a trip over the countryside, as least partially by foot.

Washout. (Patois) A Jamaican ethnomedical practice of using purgatives to cleanse body *structure*. Also, the medicines themselves are referred to as "washouts."

Word-sound-power. (I-ik) Another way Rastafarians refer to their language and the way they speak it.

Works. (I-ik) Any set of practical crafts, trades, and daily engagements, through which one presents oneself as a productive member of society and interested in the project of building *livity*.

Yabba. (I-ik) An earthenware vessel.

Yard. (Patois) Synonymous with "home." Calls attention to the social fact that living space extends into surrounding outdoor areas. See "house-yard compounds" in Pulsipher's discussion of women's roles in ordering domestic space (1993:50-51).

Zareeba (of unspecified African origin) An enclosed space. See Chapter 4 for Shirley's definition of the word.

VITA

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