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The Devil in the Details: Materiality and the Spirit in a Trinidadian Village

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ABSTRACT

Illness and other misfortunes were commonly attributed to the Devil in the Trinidadian village where I undertook fieldwork. These explanations included an understanding that both the Holy Spirit and demonic spirits could dwell within and change the nature of bodies and objects. Spirits within the body guided actions, thoughts and feelings but also caused, or cured and protected, individuals from illnesses. A good Christian lifestyle was necessary to maintain the healthy body for the Holy Spirit to dwell within while neglect left the body open to malevolent spirits. These conceptions of health and illness linked to understandings of Caribbean sorcery (*obeah*) and cultural conceptions of the body, as well as Evangelical Christian approaches. Two types of bodies were constructed in these understandings: the healthy maintained body in which the Holy Spirit dwelt and the unhealthy disordered body in which devilish spirits could be found. These bodies differed not metaphorically but in actual substance, they were materially different bodies. Bodies, spirits, health, illness and morality were thus connected in everyday village life and to gather a more nuanced understanding of this I attend to the concrete aspects of these interactions. Drawing on approaches in medical anthropology focusing on practices and the material, I examine the role of devilish spirits in illness causation and how relationships between spirits and bodies were lived. I argue that through the material body immaterial cosmological understandings were expressed, understood and impacted on practices. This was cosmology as lived, embedded in everyday experience and practice, not in abstract belief.

Joseph was a maxi-taxi driver in his fifties, and a senior member of the Pentecostal church as he had a “first-hand relationship with Christ”. He lived with his wife in a large house with some land. God had called Joseph to a ministry where he could teach others and he usually led bible studies classes before the Pentecostal service began. Many of these classes drew on the Book of Revelations which was Joseph’s area of specialization, and he linked contemporary world events to biblical passages to demonstrate the coming of the End of Days. As the End of Days came closer, the Devil was becoming more active on the earth and more visible, causing many of the problems of contemporary times. This included evil spirits working for the Devil entering people’s bodies, possessing them and controlling their actions. Joseph told me that those who were possessed by the Devil did “weird stuff”, either because someone had sent a spirit on them or if their body was empty (without the Holy Spirit dwelling within it) “demon spirits who roam the world may come inside and live” [inside it]. Joseph had had some experience with people who were possessed and he told me that they emitted a very bad breath, and through a process of spirit removal spirits may be either vomited out or removed through the navel. He had been involved in many deliverance services and like others in the village told me that the Holy Spirit could be felt working through the body while undertaking such services and when those people with a gift for healing worked on the sick. Joseph told me that spiritual healing was like the woman in the bible who touched Jesus in order to be healed from her problem with bleeding, Jesus could feel his “virtue” being taken in order to heal and although he didn’t see it he could feel it. It was therefore possible to feel the Holy Spirit moving through one’s body to heal and it could be felt entering others during healing. Joseph described other occasions where God’s power was effective against evil spirits. To protect his vegetable crops Joseph blessed them in the name of Jesus which would mean that they grew well and were protected from evil spirits and from blight. Joseph had previously experienced a neighbour trying to damage his crops through obeah [practices which involved using spirits to work for one’s own benefit or to afflict others, viewed locally as Caribbean sorcery]. He had found the rotting carcass of a chicken buried in his garden with its feet upright from the ground- a sign of obeah work. Joseph left the garden immediately to pray and through these prayers, and as a child of God, Joseph was not affected by the obeah spirits which could have otherwise entered him and possibly killed him.

Father Peters was an Anglican priest in his sixties who lived in the village with his wife and his grown-up children lived nearby. Like his father before him he had grown up in the village and knew the area well. As well as leading the Anglican Church services, part of Father Peters’ role was to bless cars, houses and boats to thank God for providing these. However people came to request such blessings to protect these items from obeah spirits. Father Peters told me that in Trinidad culture, evil was “parallel to Christianity”; it ran alongside it, particularly now as a nation Trinidad was “ruled by Hindus”. As Father

Peters was “grown in the Holy Spirit”, he heard and felt the Holy Spirit leading him from within: “simple things happen, [such as] looking for something and you pray and then you find it”. He told me that the Holy Spirit guided people and protected them, perhaps guiding them not to go out on a certain day or at a certain time in case “something bad happen...when you live in Christ, you can see that everything is against that [Christ]”. The Devil was ever-present and it was important to listen to the Holy Spirit as it guided you. This faith and connection to God could also heal. Father Peters told me of the testimonies on the Pentecostal radio station he listened to of people who were diagnosed with cancer and who had no treatment but through the power of prayer when they returned for their medical appointment “at hospital they can’t find the cancer”. Through asking in prayer, God had removed the cancer from the afflicted person’s body. Father Peters had himself undertaken two “healing masses” since becoming priest eight years previously.

Raquel was a student teacher in her twenties who had also grown up in the village and because of her job was one of the few younger people who was able to stay in the local area and commute to work as it was not too far. She lived in her boyfriend’s house with her seven year-old daughter and like many other younger people did not attend church although she did believe in God. She told me that there was a local saying, “closer to church, further from God”, people who went to church were only going “to get what they want”, they were going to benefit themselves to get jobs for example and they did not do anything good for anyone else (as a good Christian should). Raquel was Anglican by background although her mother’s brother’s family were Evangelical Christians and her mother’s sister’s family were Spiritual Baptist, all of whom also lived in the village. While it was mostly older people in the village who were thought to be familiar with bush medicine, Raquel was able to list a range of bush medicines for a range of different ailments. She like many other people locally “don’t go to the doctor unless [very] sick, so keep body clean, keep everything flowing”. It was important to look after your body, to keep an eye on it and maintain it. If the body was allowed to get too hot, the blood within it thickened and needed cooling and there were many bush medicine plants that helped with this. “Old stuff” [food] could gather in the colon, for example when one ate a lot of sweet things. This needed to be purged but if too many purges and too much cooling were taken it would be easier to become pregnant [in the sense of becoming more empty left individuals more open]. Bush remedies could also be used for spiritual illnesses and when Raquel’s daughter was a baby she used a blue bag to protect her from mal-jo (evil eye). These bags typically contained a silver coin or key, garlic, a block of blue [blue washing powder] and camphor. However there were some illnesses that people suggested were spiritually caused which were not, and if a person in the school Raquel was teaching went “mad” people would say that someone had “put something on them” using obeah, it was the “first thing people blame, they never say is the stress”.

The examples presented above illustrate some of the interactions between people, spirits, bodies and objects in the Christian Trinidadian village where I undertook my fieldwork. Through these interactions, understandings of health and illness, and methods of healing emerge, but also glimpses of interpretations of events at local, national and international levels. Both good and evil in the form of spirits were seen to be able to enter and work on bodies and objects, altering not only the actions of people who were touched by these but also the material nature of bodies and objects themselves. Through these vignettes spirits, bodies and objects were connected including with the material, and it is the material nature of these interactions that I wish to draw attention to in this paper. I argue that in order to gain a more in depth and nuanced understanding of these relationships and the connectedness of bodies, spirits, health and illness, we need to attend to the material impacts of spirits on the body and other objects. Understandings about the working of spirits were not merely conceptual, they were entities that caused material effects- spirits lived within and changed bodies, causing, removing and/or preventing illness. Bodies became sick or healthy not metaphorically but in physical actuality. Through the presence of different spirits these bodies were visually, experientially, and materially different bodies.

In order to examine these conceptualizations, I focus on practices - what individuals did or described doing, rather than merely their descriptions of their beliefs. Following the understandings of other practice theorists (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Ortner, 1978; 1984) focusing on practice allows an examination of how understandings are lived and embodied. These approaches also propose that understandings and meaning are *created* by people in practice. Rather than a more psychological understanding of a rational, thinking and “believing” brain independent of context, or structural-functionalist models that view the social and the cultural as existing outside the person, through practice theory approaches people are embedded and involved in creating the worlds they inhabit. Practice approaches have particular salience in studies of lived religion where a focus on beliefs may miss how understandings are connected (or not) to everyday actions, and how actions themselves may generate, or reinforce, particular understandings. Focusing on what is done also moves away from the difficulties and pejorative aspects of terming other people’s understandings as “beliefs”. Where do beliefs end and knowledge start? What happens to beliefs when people draw on different and competing ideas at the same time and in different contexts? Importantly too, practice approaches allow an incorporation of the material without sectioning off the biological from the social, something far harder to do when looking through the lens of belief. Drawing from Annemarie Mol’s work on the construction of bodies and diseases in biomedicine I look to incorporate material interactions to gain a more nuanced understanding of how bodies, objects and spirits were *done* in the village.

In medical anthropology, the body has frequently been viewed metaphorically but less attention has been paid to its more material qualities. Nature and the biological are typically separated from culture and the social, the latter being seen as the domain of anthropology while the former has been the realm of doctors and clinicians. Challenges to this nature/culture divide have been

assisted by approaches from Science and Technology Studies (STS), which look at how the natural world is constructed through the scientific method and suggest that nature, as well as the social, is a culturally constructed process. Annemarie Mol is one theorist who draws on STS and anthropological understandings to look at bodies and disease. She suggests that there is not one nature, one body that all experience but rather that different approaches and practices construct different bodies, the body for the clinician is different to the body for the scientist which is different to the body for the patient, for example. When Mol talks here of constructions of the body, she is looking at how bodies are enacted: the different sets of practices and relations that clinicians, scientists and patients undertake in relation to the body. Through these different enactments, different bodies are produced- the enactment of the body, body parts, illnesses etc. by the scientist is different to the enactments of the body by the clinician and by the patient, even if it is the same body, body parts or illness that is being focused on. Mol suggests that the body is therefore multiple, an entity enacted through multiple different practices. Mol's analytical approach focuses on practices to look at these different enactments, and this includes the material elements involved in practices. The pathologist examining atherosclerosis in a dissected limb is enacting a different atherosclerosis to the operating surgeon, the clinician assessing the patient, or the patient struggling to raise their legs. This is the same disease done differently, enacted through materials and material practices. For Mol, these different enactments of atherosclerosis construct different natures and even if we don't go as far as this, Mol's general approach allows an engagement with the body which sees its nature as constructed through practices, and with material differences. If we move from how science constructs its objects to how people in the village constructed their objects, the importance of spirits in creating a particular body, and indeed a particular person becomes clear. We can view the body with the Holy Spirit and the body with devilish spirits as constructed differently as they were enacted differently- they contained, interacted with, and were led by different entities. The practices that created these bodies were Christian or non-Christian activities, bodies were maintained or neglected, healthy or sick. These bodies were morally and materially distinct- they were different types of bodies. Through the enactment of practices in the village, these two different bodies were constructed.

The vignettes above come from relatively informal but long and in-depth interviews with people living in my field-site, a small rural village on the Northeast coast of Trinidad. Like many others, these interviews were with people I interacted with numerous times throughout my stay in the area. Of the fifteen months of PhD fieldwork I undertook in Trinidad, I spent twelve months living in the village, staying with a local family and undertaking interviews and participant observation throughout my time there. This included attending services and activities in all local churches and participating in other aspects of daily life such as social events, activities and clubs and visiting workplaces. I spent time speaking to and in the company of people from all local church denominations, including those I would see on an almost-daily basis in the village. I spoke to local healers, church leaders, shopkeepers,

teachers and fishermen among the many other informal interviews, long discussions and general conversations I participated in during my stay.

The vast majority of local residents were of Afro-Trinidadian descent, as opposed to the more mixed population or Indo-Trinidadian populations elsewhere in Trinidad. Through the history of slavery, colonialism and migration to Trinidad, various groups have brought different religious practices to the island so that particular ethnic groups have also been associated with particular religious affiliations (for further details see Lynch and Littlewood, 2014), the current government being viewed as largely Indo-Trinidadian and therefore largely Hindu. Within the village, virtually all inhabitants were Christian, although there were many people who did not attend church. There were eight churches situated in or nearby this village of around 2000 people: Catholic, Anglican, two Spiritual Baptist churches (with different approaches), Independent International Baptist Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Evangelical and Pentecostal. While all local churches were attended, the most popular churches in terms of attendance were the Catholic, Pentecostal and Seventh Day Adventist churches, and it was services in these churches that I also attended most frequently. The Seventh Day Adventist church in particular saw itself as having the healthiest and therefore most moral congregation and services included advice on healthy eating and exercise. Approximately once a month the Pentecostal church held a deliverance service which focused on health and healing. Other churches elsewhere in Trinidad were seen as specialist places for healing and local people attended services if needed. There was a local biomedical clinic in the village and within the area there was also a strong tradition of the use of bush medicine- medicinal treatments largely drawn from locally-found plants. While some illnesses were seen as more amenable to particular forms of healing (coughs and colds were often treated by bush medicine while bodily traumas were taken to the biomedical clinic for example), people also used more than one form of treatment for the same complaint.

Relationships between the different churches in the area were not clear-cut- individuals had family members and friends attached to different churches where they attended services, people changed affiliation through their lifetime and some individuals attended more than one church on a regular basis. Husbands and wives could be attached to different denominations and within the same family children might be baptized or blessed in different churches. Denominational differences were not always clear both in the understandings held by people and in the actions they undertook, although on occasions these differences were extremely important (for example, Seventh Day Adventists keeping the Sabbath on a Saturday, although I knew of at least one Adventist who often also attended another church on a Sunday). Evangelical Christian influences could be found more generally in the village- a Pentecostal radio station was one of the few channels that could be picked up in the area, and other stations also broadcasted Evangelically-based Christian shows. Evangelical Christian music could be heard playing in many houses whichever church the inhabitants attended, as well as in communal places such as the village internet café. Many people also watched Pentecostal and Evangelical television shows and read books and leaflets

from Evangelical Christian groups. Personal spiritual experience was seen as more important than church attendance or involvement and there were differences in perspective of those from within the same church. Despite attending different churches, but perhaps unsurprisingly given the connections between them, there were broad cosmological understandings that were largely shared by local people, as Meyer (1999) also found in her work in Ghana. Many of these understandings appeared to be influenced by the more Evangelical Christian approaches as well as by general Trinidadian understandings.

Fundamental to shared local cosmological understandings was an underlying conception of God and the Devil, good and evil, engaged in battle over human souls. God was the stronger of the two, controlling all that happened, but the Devil was viewed as always present and at work on the earth, causing all that was bad in the world. The extent to which the Devil could harm individuals depended on their closeness to God and individuals living a morally appropriate Christian life had bodies in which the Holy Spirit could dwell. A moral Christian life was undertaken through practices, through “living good”- not drinking and smoking excessively, not indulging in casual sex with multiple partners, maintaining a close relationship with God through prayer and following the Holy Spirit. Closeness to God and the presence of the Holy Spirit within people gave a level of protection from the influence of the Devil. The greater an individual’s involvement in immoral behaviour however, the closer the individual was seen to be to the Devil and the Holy Spirit did not dwell inside such individuals. Instead, people who drank a lot or engaged in similar unchristian behaviour and did not spend time and effort on a personal relationship with God were potentially open to devilish spirits residing inside them. Crucially, God gave humans agency to follow God or the Devil, whether to behave morally or immorally and therefore whether they opened themselves up to having the Holy Spirit or devilish spirits dwelling inside them. Being healthy or being ill therefore often reflected the individual’s moral positioning, whether they “lived good” and whether the Holy Spirit dwelt within them or if they were “empty” or had devilish spirits inside them. Through such understandings, the body and health were linked to spirits and morality but also fitted in with cultural conceptions of the material nature of these.

Bodies as containers

Local Trinidadian understandings of the body viewed the body as a container in which excesses could build up and needed to be released, an understanding also found by both Sobo (1993) and Payne-Jackson and Alleyne (2004) in Jamaica and by Littlewood (1988) in Trinidad. “Studying” something too hard (focusing on something too much), or letting “pressure” (such as everyday stresses) build up in the body without release, were seen as accumulations which could damage the body if these were not dealt with. Excessive studying was linked to mental health problems or breakdown and intense pressure build-up could be linked to incidences of high blood pressure. In both cases people suggested to me that they tried not to “take

on” particular problems or issues, such as a neighbour’s anger for example as this could be taken “on” [into] the body and would need to be released.

Build-up in the body was seen to create too much heat within it, something that could also occur through eating too many heat-giving food-stuffs (such as hot peppers), or sitting on a hot surface. As Raquel mentioned, this heat was transferred particularly to the blood, which could also become “thick” or “sticky” and signs of having too much heat in the body included getting rashes or feeling a burning sensation when urinating. This heat needed to be dealt with so that the body was cooled. Once symptoms that an individual’s blood was too hot or too thick were exhibited, bush medicines such as bush teas or particular food stuffs, were prescribed for “cooling” (Sobo, 1993; Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004; Pavy, 1993 [1987]). There were many local bush medicine treatments for cooling the blood and many also for purging or “clearing out”. These included *mini-root* and *wonder of the world leaf* for cooling and wild senna, pawpaw and Epsom Salt to purge. Older people in the village told me that when they were at school, they always had to “clean out” their bodies through purging before the school year started in September, so that the sweets and treats they had consumed over the summer holidays were removed before school started. Most bush medicines were taken orally as the ingredients were steeped in hot water to make a medicinal tea, although sometimes these treatments could be applied directly to the skin. During the course of my stay people sought out various plants for medicine, borrowing and seeking advice from neighbours as to what was suitable. Some people were known to keep particular plants that others would borrow (for example a neighbour near where I lived grew lemongrass that was useful for colds) and people who were knowledgeable about bush medicine were asked for advice. Individuals were therefore responsible for paying attention to their bodies to maintain its temperature and health, many causes of build-up being due to an individual’s own actions. Those bodies in which such problems were neglected were less healthy and more susceptible to disease.

Eating well was seen as crucial to health, and people told me that it was the most important thing to do in order to keep healthy. I heard older people comparing their good health (and therefore what good moral lives they lead) on the basis that they could still eat good sized portions and could eat whatever they wanted as they did not suffer from “sugar” (diabetes) or “pressure” (high blood pressure). Sea baths and sweating were seen to cleanse pores in the skin both being forms of “detox” through which “build-up” could leave the body. Bush medicine could also be used to address illnesses that weren’t “natural” but were of a “spiritual” nature, such as mal-jo and other afflictions caused by an *obeah* spirit that was “put on” someone. “Bush baths” were a means by which spirits could be removed from the body, again the spirits seen to leave the body through the skin’s pores. Much attention was therefore paid as to what entered and left the body, and again a real need to monitor and maintain this. To some extent, substances entering the body were almost inevitable so it was a self-awareness and the removing of these that became important. Bodies were seen to express an individual’s practices and therefore moral positioning, the inside of a person being expressed through its outside. For example, people sometimes remarked that a particular

person was looking very thin, or had lost a lot of weight. The implication of this was that that this person was suffering from AIDS and while this was a point of gossip and some sadness, the person had no doubt brought it on themselves through their own immoral actions. A girl seen to be “developing too fast” through suddenly developing a shapely figure with a waist, breasts and hips at a young age was seen to be engaging in sexual intercourse before she should be. Looking healthy, strong and peaceful were indicators of the Holy Spirit dwelling within the body and some people told me that particular emotions expressed through the body, for example anger and malice, came through the Devil working through the flesh. To some extent these understandings of monitoring and maintenance of health and the body also linked to public health messages that were promoted more broadly in Trinidad (and in public health more generally) such as taking individual responsibility for health through looking after yourself – not drinking, smoking, eating excessively or engaging in sex with many different partners. These “unhealthy” practices were all actions that were also viewed locally as unchristian. Morality maintained by practices – living a good Christian life which included (and enabled) regular communication and cultivation of a close relationship with the Holy Spirit was therefore linked to health and wellbeing and was reinforced through these messages.

Spirits within the body

The container-body which allowed space for spirits to dwell within, whether these were good or evil, was something which was central to understandings of relationships between humans and spirits and was found in Caribbean understandings of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostals (Austin-Broos, 1997), Spiritual Baptists (Laitinen, 2002), and in Orisha, Santeria, Voodoo and *obeah* (Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2011). In particular, the notion of the body as a vessel which needs to be clean and pure for the Holy Spirit to dwell within was described in Austin-Broos’ work on Pentecostals in Jamaica, and she explains how bodies were kept clean through moral living (1997). Evil spirits within the body that caused illness were also described in Csordas’ work on Charismatic Catholic healing in the United States (1997), which notes that foul breath was produced by evil spirits in the body, as Joseph also mentions above. Into this “container body” therefore, both the Holy Spirit and devilish spirits were able to enter, although they did not do so at the same time. The presence of the Holy Spirit meant that it was difficult for devilish spirits to enter or attach themselves to the body where they could otherwise cause sicknesses which directly affected individual agency- such as spirit possession or oppression. When an evil spirit oppressed an individual, partial control over actions was lost and an individual’s agency was restricted. This had happened to Skeeter, a member of the community who was unable to stop himself drinking. He told me that an *obeah* spirit had been put on him by a jealous neighbour and he could no longer stop himself consuming alcohol. Full spirit possession meant that an individual had lost all agency as was seen in the case of the brothers Davey and Louis, both of whom heard voices, shouted out and could get very angry very quickly, particularly if they had not taken the medication prescribed for them by the psychiatric services.

Maintaining the body, and living a good Christian life (“living good”, which also helped to maintain the body) meant that the Holy Spirit might be able to dwell within it, while neglecting the body instead left it open to be entered by evil spirits. As part of this maintenance the relationship with the Holy Spirit had to be continually strengthened so that as well as undertaking moral practices in order to keep the body healthy for the Holy Spirit, regular communication with God was important in retaining the spirit in the body. Such conceptualizations fitted in with understandings of the body as being in need of continual monitoring and maintenance but also linked to Evangelical understandings that devotion to and communication with God needs to be renewed daily (Meyer, 1999) and the wider Protestant value in self-scrutiny and moralization of personal actions (Weber, 1992 [1930]). The contents of the container body could impact on individuals’ abilities to interact and engage with the spiritual however. It was hard to engage with God and the Holy Spirit if there were devilish spirits within a person, and these devilish presences could be brought to the fore in the presence of God. This was what was understood to have occurred during deliverance services and exorcisms, evil spirits started to “act up” in the presence of such Godliness so that individuals felt them, or they started to express themselves through individual’s actions. An important part of preparation for deliverance or exorcism practices was readying the bodies of those conducting healing and spirit removal to deal with the potentially difficult and strong evil spirits they were likely to encounter. I was told that individuals would fast and pray in preparation, fasting meaning that it was easier to engage in communication with spirits. Fasting to make prayer more effective was an understanding shared across the churches and many people told me how restraining from food made them feel lighter and more spiritual—food in the body made the body heavier and it was harder for “your spirit to operate”. Fasting therefore allowed the blood that would usually digest food in the stomach to go to the brain, meaning that the brain could more effectively engage in prayer, meaning that prayers themselves were stronger (see also Lynch, 2014).

Part of the way that spirits influenced individuals was through feelings. Both the Holy Spirit and devilish spirits communicated with the person they were within, guiding their actions and their thoughts, but individuals described much of the communication as being through what they felt. Individuals described *feeling* what the Holy Spirit wanted them to do, as can be seen in both Father Peters’ and Joseph’s accounts above. The Holy Spirit and devilish spirits could not themselves be seen but they could be felt. Both the Holy Spirit and devilish spirits could also guide a person and communicate through dreams. It was important to therefore learn discernment—how to distinguish which type of spirit, good or evil, was communicating. I was told that if the dream or the feeling involved anything bad or negative, this was the Devil as God would never be involved in anything evil, even if the individual may not be sure why the Holy Spirit was leading them to do something. The feelings of being led by the Holy Spirit or something more demonic could also be different. Lucinda, now a senior member of the Pentecostal church but who had previously been a practicing member of the Spiritual Baptist church (a practice she now saw

as being “devilish”) compared the experiences of spiritual manifestations at both churches

“Anointing of the Holy Spirit operates in the individual spirit, the comforter leads us to all truth. You alone [the person experiencing it] can describe the experience, [it is an] experience more than [an] explanation. Anointing [is] such an amazing experience, [it] feels like [you] could die and go to heaven... [In the] Spiritual Baptist church, [you] get a feeling but different to anointing of the Holy Spirit...completely different experience, [they] may look the same but certain signs you have to look for [demonstrate a difference]. Anointing of the Holy Spirit [you] can't experience when you have sin, anointing convicts you not to sin, it will feel guilt in you, feel urge to repent and don't feel like want to go back, it not like that in Spiritual Baptist [services], living together and not being married don't affect manifestation [of the spirit within you]” (Conversation with Lucinda, April 2012)

Before becoming Pentecostal, Lucinda was not married, and when she first started going to the Pentecostal church she did not feel manifestations in her body. However shortly after she was married she requested a Christian song to be played on the radio and when it was played she started to dance and then she felt the manifestation throughout her body. Following her marriage Lucinda knew that she was now experiencing a manifestation that was different to what she had previously felt while at the Spiritual Baptist church. When she “came out of it”- when she no longer felt the manifestation in her body at that time- Lucinda understood that God had made this occur. He had allowed her to *feel* the difference that getting married made through the difference between the manifestations of different spirits. In relation to her earlier manifestation experiences Lucinda told me “Satan is a dictator, [he] doesn't talk to you, Satan demands from you, you sense it in your spirit, feel the uncleanness of spirit... [Satan is an] aggressive force, known as enemy, turning like a snake. Satan has communication between you and hell and demons, like God's angels to heaven”.

People could then feel a difference in which spirit was in their body, whether it was good or evil as well as feeling compelled to do something or unable to stop themselves. Bodies themselves could physically alter interactions with spirits, not only in which spirit dwelt within but through increased blood in the brain making prayer more focused and therefore more effective for example. Bodies were communicators and receivers of communications, as well as hosts for spirits. Spirits could shape bodies through feelings, actions and material changes, but bodies could also shape how spirits operated in terms of remaining present or how they communicated. Through these understandings, bodies as containers and spirits as dwellers and communicators were constructed as “things”, they were both entities which, when they met, interacted and shaped each other. This was not an even shaping, spirits impacted on bodies more than bodies impacted on spirits for example, but the interaction did have important material aspects.

Spirits and objects

The ability of spirits to inhabit the body not only related to Trinidadian understandings of the body but also how spirits interacted with objects. In the Trinidadian context, spirits were viewed as free-floating entities which could attach themselves to people or objects and very much “things” themselves. Spirits were different to a notion of a soul having a presence that could be felt and experienced and which had a material impact. They were not an essential part of the body and people were not born with a spirit inside them, nor were they necessary to life. However people could choose to cultivate a relationship with or lay themselves open to spirits. Multiple devilish spirits could inhabit a person (and it was possible to count these as they were removed), and the only way to ensure that a devilish spirit could not enter the body was to cultivate a strong relationship with the Holy Spirit which instead dwelt within.

Spirits did not only attach themselves to bodies but could also dwell within or be placed on other objects. Spirits may choose themselves to reside in particular preferred places, for example the sea or in rivers, or an *obeahman/woman* might instruct them to attach to a particular object. *Obeah* was said to be most often used locally by fishermen who placed spirits on each other’s boats to stop other fishermen from taking too many fish, and on their own boat to make their personal haul more successful. Sometimes spirits might be put on cars and houses by jealous or angry neighbours, or spirits might enter these themselves and affect those within them. The blessings conducted by Father Peters could remove such spirits and stopped other evil spirits from working on these. Prized possessions might also have *obeah* placed on them so that if they were stolen the spirit would move to inhabit the thief. Such spirits could compel a person to continually steal things or drive them mad, so spirits could enter the body of the thief and cause spirit oppression or possession. I was told that stealing something like a chicken or a dog would make a person walk or talk like a chicken or a dog (this was why a woman in a nearby village clucked like a chicken when she talked). This tended to happen more in the past in the local area as people now placed more emphasis on the protection of God over their possessions, as is visible in the case of Joseph’s crops.

However in other places such as Tobago, which was known for its *obeah* use, *obeah*-protected mango trees and other fruit trees were found more frequently. Spirits moved between objects and people through touch so picking up or handling an object with a spirit meant that this spirit could be transferred to the body. A particular person could be targeted in this way and therefore a spirit could be placed on an object a particular person might pick up. I heard people warning each other not to pick up anything left at the side of the road, especially money (on which spirits were often placed). This was a key way through which evil spirits were transferred into people and it was also for this reason that often the very spiritually powerful were not charged for the things they bought, the money they handed over to pay with likely being full of spirits which could then enter the body of the vendor. In the past, these spirits

were malevolent but through more Evangelical Christian interpretations such spirits were seen as explicitly devilish.

As well as devilish spirits operating through objects, the Holy Spirit also moved through the material. It was through touch between individuals with the gift of healing to afflicted individuals that the Holy Spirit could move to heal, driving out evil spirits and the associated affliction. Another example of the Holy Spirit working through objects can be seen in a story related to the Seventh Day Adventist congregation one Saturday by the Pastor of the church. Pastor Frederick told us how he prayed every lunchtime at 12:30, and that he had set the alarm on his cellular phone to remind him to pray at that time every day. One day however, he had no remaining battery charge so this phone was off and yet the alarm sounded at 12:30 anyway. He prayed as he always did, and then thought that he would try to make a call however when he tried to use his phone, he had no charge on it at all. He told us that the Holy Spirit worked through his phone, bringing enough battery for the alarm to work for him to pray. This was a case of the Holy Spirit changing the nature of the phone itself, making it briefly functional for a holy purpose. On this occasion the phone was the mediator for the Holy Spirit, rather than the Holy Spirit working on the Pastor directly and guiding him to pray.

The Holy Spirit could also work through the material in treatment for illness, including through biomedical pills or therapy. I was told that medical treatments, be they based on bush medicine or biomedicine, only worked if God allowed them to and that the Holy Spirit might be active through a pill making it effective in treating a body. A book written by a clinical doctor and Baptist Preacher from Georgia (USA) was also released in Trinidad during my time in the field. This described how the Devil worked to cause cancer in the body at a cellular level. Devilish spirits did not only dwell within the body-container therefore but could work in individual cells. Biomedicine or bush medicine that did not work could also be indicative that God was not working through these. For example, while anti-psychotic medication taken by the possessed brothers Davey and Louis was able to control them somewhat, this and other medication did not cure them. Like other cases where treatments were not effective, this was evidence that the cause of the illness was spiritual not "natural". In these cases, spiritual treatment (and a change of lifestyle that embraced God, the Holy Spirit and involved good Christian living) was needed to fully remove the demonic spirits causing the sickness.

Spirits therefore did not only enter an object, they changed the nature of that object. Pills become effective or were ineffective, objects become functional again or could pass on evil spirits and characteristics, cancer could be created or removed, bodies were healthy or unhealthy. The objects were not metaphorically different but actually different through the presence or working of a spirit. This again calls attention to the material nature of spirits and of the entities they interact with as through spirit-object interactions and practices different types of bodies can be seen to emerge.

Different spirits and different bodies

Through the examples above I have attempted to show the connectedness of spirits, bodies and objects and the material impacts they produce, particularly in relation to health and illness and the treatment of these. Through these relationships a morality also emerges demonstrating differences between good and evil, right and wrong and how life should be lived. Morality was not only embodied through spirits and bodies but created particular *types* of body. Christian practices created a healthy and maintained body where the Holy Spirit could reside. However neglected less moral bodies were not fit for the Holy Spirit, they were bodies of a different type, potentially or actually sick. These two types of bodies were *materially* different, healthy or sick, but also differed in the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit changing the nature of the body itself. Through the material body then, immaterial religious understandings were expressed, understood, and produced material consequences. Morality was expressed in the material body but it also altered that materiality, suggesting not only that we take the materiality of the body seriously but also the relationship this has with the spiritual.

Spirits impacted on objects and the meeting of spirit and body was an interaction between two entities which shaped each other. This material aspect was important in looking at health, illness and healing where the creation and removal of cancer by the Devil and the Holy Spirit respectively were not conceptual or representative but physiological changes. How health, illness the body and spirits were experienced and understood included these physiological changes, which involved blood, skin, the brain, cancer cells for example. These material elements also constructed these understandings; an illness that did not respond to medical treatment was an illness caused by evil spirits, a healthy body and recovery from illness were evidence of the workings of the Holy Spirit (as of course were plants protected from *obeah* and phones that worked without power). The material body demonstrates the presence of a good or evil spirit and individual morality, but also that the Devil can cause cancer and that God can cure it. To “do” (in Mol’s terms) the body in Trinidad therefore includes the relationship of spirits with bodies as a central component and to look at how spirits work on bodies, how they move and interact, it is not enough to look only at beliefs. By ignoring the material aspects of the body and of spirits we potentially risk reducing the presence and removal of illness to a psychosomatic event and spiritual afflictions to a cognitive expression experienced by a person rather than the meeting and interaction between entities, spirits and bodies. Such approaches do not take the understandings and experience of those affected seriously, privileging Western biomedical explanations as what “really” occurred and separating the biological from the cultural.

Good (1994) argues that typically biomedical explanations have been understood to reflect “nature” while the explanations of patients or others are seen as merely “beliefs”. This categorization demonstrates cultural distinctions between “knowledge” and “belief”: biomedical sciences create objective empirical knowledge while patients and cultural others have subjective and less valid beliefs. This division reinforces a separation of nature and the

biological from culture and the social, nature being an assembled universal reality for science to reveal (knowledge), the cultural being constructed of different perspectives on nature (beliefs). Work from within medical anthropology, sociology and Science and Technology Studies, as well as medicine itself, have challenged this clear distinction between nature and culture noting that the social impacts on, shapes, and constructs the biological and vice versa, including in scientific discovery (Latour, 1988; Mol, 2001). Blurring the separation of nature and culture suggests that it is difficult to separate knowledge and belief in such a manner. In Trinidad, spirits as well as the social and cultural milieu shape and construct the biological, and to see local understandings as “beliefs” rather than “knowledge” creates a separation that makes it difficult to focus on how these are connected and form each other. Bodies, spirits and morality are not static, disconnected and separate from their contexts but instead are embedded and relational, dynamic and changing. This follows an understanding of the body promoted by theorists such as Mol (2002) and Ingold (2012) who encourage a more lively and fluid understanding of the body- as Ingold suggests, the body can be thought of “not as a sink into which practices settle like sediment in a ditch, but rather as a dynamic center [sic] of unfolding activity...to think *from* rather than *about* the body” (2012, p. 439). Such an approach is more open to the inclusion of spirits in the analysis of bodies, health and illness than a biomedical perspective that splits nature and culture, and also allows consideration of both their connectedness and materiality. A focus on the material impact of spirits as they interact with the body moves away from understanding spiritual afflictions and possession in cognitive and/or more functionalist terms to view experience and material consequences- the immaterial is produced and expressed through materiality and has material results.

Through practices in a Trinidadian village therefore, two types of bodies were constructed: the body with the Holy Spirit and the body with devilish spirits. These bodies were materially different, they were felt and experienced differently and had a different physical make-up. These differences were not a symbolic but actual, the presence of these spirits altered the material nature of bodies as it did with objects. Morality in the village was thus as much a physical and material issue as it was a conceptual one. Health, illness and healing, direction from God or punishment for stealing could impact on individual bodies. Local understandings of national and world events such as governments, crime and earthquakes could also be understood in this way - the Holy Spirit or devilish spirits working on other individuals or objects to create order or disorder. This was how God and the Devil were seen to work on the earth, the coming of the End of Days and devilish spirits in the Hindu government were real and physical problems. Understandings of interactions between spirits, bodies and objects were fundamental to local cosmology- not merely restricted to a sectioned off conceptualization of the “religious” but encompassing understandings of health and illness, politics and economics, agency, and individual and community interactions. Cosmological understandings were expressed, constructed and reinforced through the material, they were not about supra-organic beliefs (Durkheim, 1915) nor internally held (as in psychological approaches) but how cosmology was *lived*, and that was very much in the material world.

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