

**“Return to My Native Land”
Vodou Jazz in Post-Occupation Haiti**

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The United States marines occupied Haiti from 1915 - 1934. During the occupation, US marines helped introduce and popularize jazz music to Haitian youth. By the 1930s, several Haitian jazz groups took root, often intermixing the imported American form with folkloric garb, songs deriving from the vodou cultures, and gestures to the anti-occupation *indigénisme* movement. In Caribbean countries (not unlike the United States), music often assumes what Gérard Béhaugue has called “counterhegemonic strategies toward the elimination of political and economic subordination.” Despite the music’s arrival from United States armed forces, young Haitians identified the music as their own, and simultaneously as an expression of an African diasporic consciousness. Some even contrasted jazz to things foreign: One popular group, *Jazz de Jeunes*, asserted that “*Jazz des Jeunes* is the Haitian people’s treasured child. Their pride, their dignity, is to eat their own food. Living from their Garden, they love being ancient. By extolling the foreign, you betray only yourself.” This paper illuminates how these meanings of jazz took root for young Haitians in the interwar period, and the political valences of negritude and *indigénisme* that it became associated with. In doing so, it illustrates larger intra-national trends regarding the communicative and organizing powers of Black Atlantic music.

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1.0

INTRODUCTION

The year is 1946, and it is a watershed moment for the Haiti. The Afro-Haitian peasantry struggle to retain their semi-autonomy gained in the 1804 revolution, while the executive power of the government lies in the hands of a mulatto (*milat*) elites whose power is dependent on an international (and capitalist) order and not the popular support of their own people. The peasantry had practiced self-sufficiency for over a hundred years, largely resisting the logic of plantations, but the United States marine occupation from 1915-1934 partially changed that: it helped to complete the process of state formation that *milat* elites were too divided or weak to finish. Suddenly, Port-au-Prince, and how it rules, affects everyday life in new and disruptive ways. Thus the united front of radical students, labor unions, cultural-political movements (known as the *indigénistes* and *noiristes*), and Haitian armed forces that overthrow the presidency of *milat* Elie Lescot is a historic moment. So is the subsequent election of Dumarsais Estimé, the first Black head of state since the United States occupation. A schoolteacher of relatively humble origins, Estimé promised to put Afro-Haitians and the peasantry above the interest of American capital and European empire.

Port-au-Prince's *milat* business owners, who refer to Estimé as the "mulatto eater," close their businesses for the annual carnival celebration. Carnival had historically been a site where

political conflict is performed and revolutions are rehearsed—in 1930, the annual Carnival celebration was boycotted by the Afro-Haitian movements, and the Carnival’s Queen personally returned her crown to American commission authorities sent by President Hoover. But this particular carnival is different. It is as if Haiti would be punished again as it had been in 1804: cut off from flows of capital and technology that it has come to rely on. Business owners do not contribute any electricity for amplification, and bands have to play acoustic.

The power may be shut off, but the mood is still electric. Haitians have finally rejected American political power in their national boundaries, but the music performed proved that one could love (African) American culture and still practice self-determination. *Le Jazz de Jeunes*, a group that fused North American big band jazz arrangements, Cuban-influenced brass sections, and ceremonial music from *rara* traditions (known in popular parlance as “Vodou”¹), ignite the celebrating streets of Port-au-Prince with a unique sound that manages to give sonic expression to an emergent national consensus.

In “Cote Moun Yo,” that world is sounded explicitly: bamboo trumpets known as *Vaskin*-s play complex and interlocking counter-rhythms, a technique known as hocketing. Their timbre resembles higher didgeridoos, with more articulation and resonance. In the song, the interlocking *Vaskin* pattern sets the rhythmic foundation. These instruments tend to be tuned either a minor third or semitone apart, and in this instance it seems the semitone creates the primary rhythmic drive.² With the various *rara* drums and percussion that accompanies them, the song makes a

¹ In this paper, I use the spelling “Vodou,” as opposed to Voodoo or Vauduaux, the dominant usage amongst the contemporary intellectual community.

² Gage Averill tells us that “Normally in a *rara* band several *vaksin* of different pitches sound in alternation to produce an ostinato hocketing pattern. They exploit approximate minor 3rd intervals (creating tritones and arpeggiated diminished chords, but without a harmonic intent),

clear reference to the soundscapes of ritual life in peasant Haiti, where such music accompanies long processions during Lent season. In the middle of this rhythmic polyphony, a full horn section emerges, furiously punctuating the rhythms of the *rara* ensemble, yet also breaking out of rhythm and holding notes across the bar line. This introduction climaxes and decays into the melismatic singing of the lead male voice, whose vocal style approximates the northern peasant cultures known in common parlance as Vodou.



Figure 1: Cote Moun Yo, mm. 1-11.³

“Cote Moun Yo” is fascinating because of the musical commentary that occurs in relation to the prominent presence of *rara* musical tradition. The piece begins suddenly, perhaps midphrase, almost distorted caused by an entrance mid-tape, as if one were listening in to a field recording

with two of the *vaksin* often tuned approximately a semitone apart.” In this example, three *vaskin-s* are playing, yet one is an octave lower. Averill also explains that the percussion we here is likely actually tapped on the *vaskin* while they are being played: “The player blows in energetic puffs, producing a low-pitched note; players also tap the bamboo with sticks in order to add an additional layer of percussion.” See Gage Averill, “Vaksin,” *Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 304.

³ Transcribed from Jazz des Jeunes, “Cote Moun You?” *Super Jazz des Jeunes*. <https://soundcloud.com/strut/super-jazz-des-jeunes-cote-1>

excerpted from a significantly longer *rara* processional. This aesthetic, which is quite common in Alan Lomax's field recordings from Haiti in the 1930s,⁴ could have informed the sort of start the recording takes.⁵ *Jazz de Jeunes*'s decision to simulate such a gesture in the context of a recording studio—a deliberate “riff” on Western ethnographic representations of Haitian peasant culture that had accelerated around this time—perhaps demonstrates an awareness of cultural framing of Vodou in Western constructions of Haitian difference.

Yet the piece is not only deconstructionist play. The arrangers of *Jazz des Jeunes* alternate between the two rhythmic subdivisions happening concurrently. For instance, the dramatic saxophone entrance in the sixth measure, which occurs at the same time as the lower *Vaskin* voice, an immediately striking and intense gesture. The intensity of the entrance, two accented offbeats arpeggiating a C minor chord, intervenes into this construction of the ethnographic “past” of *rara* ritual, suggesting these cultures are not frozen in time. The trumpets,

⁴ Alan Lomax, *Alan Lomax in Haiti 1936-1937*. Harte Recordings, 2009. While this particular recording was probably not circulated amongst members of *Jazz des Jeunes*, the band their colleagues in philosophy and literature were engaged in active debate over the appropriations and representations of folkloric Vodou performance. See Chapter 3 of this paper for an in-depth discussion.

⁵ See, for instance, Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), particularly pp. 161-189. See also Averill on the subject: “There was a peculiar relationship between the Haitian ethnographic project in this period (both local and foreign) and the lurid accounts of Haitian Vodou/Voodoo and zombies produced by occupation-era authors, accounts that were often deeply complicit in the justification for occupation. William B. Seabrook, who might be described travel writer with a persistent interest in the occult, produced the touchstone work of the period, *The Magic Island* (1929).

Parenthetically, Seabrook's assistant for a period later in the 1930s was a young Trotskyist artist and filmmaker from Greenwich Village named Maya Deren, and her exposure to Haiti through Seabrook's writings fueled a passionate interest in Haiti on her part, which she next indulged by becoming the volunteer personal secretary to Katherine Dunham. Deren's book on Haiti, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953) and her still shots and film footage, produced while in Haiti on a Guggenheim Fellowship, have become some of the most durable and compelling ethnographic works on Haiti.” From Gage Averill, “Ballad Hunting in the Black Republic: Alan Lomax in Haiti, 1936-37.” *Caribbean Studies*. 36.2 (July-December 2008), 5.

four in total, answer powerfully in unison voice, and their climatic phrase in m. 9 aligns almost exactly with the *Vaskin* ostinato. Yet the second saxophone line—emerging as a response to the primary melodic line played by the trumpets—answer simultaneously with a drum octaves lower. This drum well may have been a tambour drum, used sometimes in *rara* contexts. Its sudden appearance with the saxophone indicates that the *rara* elements of the piece are not simply “background” or “the past” of the song, but in fact interact with the melodic elements in unpredictable and intense ways—not dissimilar to the liberal use of the snare drum amongst bebop drummers in North American jazz, happening concurrently at the time this track was recorded.

The lyrics add another dimension to this interpretation. In “Cote Moun Yo” is actually a well-known peasant *rara* song that translates to “Where are the people?”

Cote moun yo, woy?
Mwen pa we moun yo e
Cote moun k ap pale moun mal? .
Mwen pa we moun k ap pale moun mal
Woy devan byen, deye mal o!

Where are the people? I don't see the people
Where are the people slandering others?
I don't see the people insulting others
Nice to your face, nasty behind your back!

The commentary has been linked to tradition of “adversity songs” in *rara* peasant music in which a singer proselytizes against a perceived enemy. However, another plausible reading was that the singers of the group were critiquing dominant “folklorist” presentations of peasant life and vodou culture more specifically. “Where are the people?” could be asking, “where are the people who are supposedly represented here?” In connecting them with Cuban *son* and jazz bands, the group rejects an ossified reified of Vodou culture and suggests that peasants were

cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and syncretic.

The beauty of *Jazz des Jeunes*'s use of such proverbs, adversity songs, and deconstructive play is that they could be used in a variety of contexts depending on the situation. Not only were international ethnographers, but the Lescot administration (which had banned vodou practices in Haiti itself) had invested significant financial and cultural capital in producing representations of Vodou ritual abroad, suggesting to audiences Vodou remained Haiti's past, and not its catholicized and Europeanized present. In fact, the Elie Lescot's first lady, Audre Lescot, was a trained opera singer and helped craft the state's policy on cultural production—and what culture was prohibited. The Lescot administration passed an ordinance that specifically declared a countrywide ordinance that “not a single ritual note” would be permitted to be performed, unless as a state sanctioned event.⁶

Althée Rivera, one of the daughters of Rosendo Rivera who ran unsuccessfully for office,⁷ sings in the chorus of *Jazz des Jeunes*. Althée Rivera was active in Haiti's *indigéniste* movement which sought to valorize Afro-Haitian peasant culture, and studied with Jean Price-Mars, perhaps the most famous ideologue of the movement. Price-Mars advocated that the “the religious sentiment of the rural masses,” objectified in Vodou ritual and social practices, should serve as the cultural foundation of a Haitian nation. While such formulations were “not unproblematic,”⁸ they marked a sea change from the attitudes of a previous generation. Althée Rivera and Audre

⁶ Kate Ramsey, “Without One Ritual Note: Folklore Performance and the Haitian State, 1935-1946,” *Radical History Review* 84.1 (2002): 7-42.

⁷ Althée Rivera's father ran against Estimé. See Louis Carl Saint Jean, “Hommage à Althée Rivera,” *L'Haiti Observateur* (19 Oct 2011): 12.

⁸ See Ramsey's discussion of Price-Mars's essentialism and appropriation of scientific explanations of race in Kate Ramsey, “Without One Ritual Note: Folklore Performance and the Haitian State, 1935-1946.” *Radical History Review* 84.1 (2002): 7-42.

Lescot stood on different sides of this divide, and demonstrated the relation of Haiti's political classes to artists and performers.⁹ Similarly, the artistic practice of bands such as *Jazz des Jeunes* point to the political charged meanings of aesthetic signifiers. Althée Rivera surely would have been well aware of Lescot's ordinances *Jazz des Jeunes* was breaking by their encoding of "ritual notes" in publically performed music.¹⁰ Michael Largey and Peter Manuel describe this contradiction succinctly: "At a time when actual Vodou ceremonies were banned in Haiti and elite Haitians disapproved of all things associated with Vodou, Vodou jazz thrived among middle-class black audiences in Haiti."¹¹

In the context of the 1946 carnival that celebrated Lescot's ouster from power, such a song may have had different meanings, and could easily have been directed at the deliberately absentee *milat* elite. It is in fact this radical, protean flexibility that allows me to make the central argument of this paper: the Vodou Jazz¹² movement was uniquely effective in responding to the crisis of national identity following the U.S. occupation.¹³ It was able to do

⁹ Also of note is that Katherine Durham, the African American dancer who spent many years in Haiti, was once the lover of Dumarsais Estimé.

¹⁰ For more on Althée Rivera, see "Althée Rivera" in *L'Haiti Observateur*, June 6, 2001.

¹¹ Peter Manuel, Kenneth Bilby and, Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), 169.

¹² I use the term "Vodou Jazz" in accordance with literature on the subject of Haitian big bands of the 1940s and 1950s who were inspired by North American Jazz, Cuban *danzon* ensembles, and the musical cultures of the Haitian countryside. See Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunter, a Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 56-80.

¹³ Averill discusses this in some detail: "In Haiti, the neocolonial status of Haiti while under direct American control (1915-1934) engendered a simmering resistance to American hegemony and a growing resentment of the Haitian elite for their failures to govern. Jean Price-Mars's indigeniste manifesto of 1920, *Ainsi Parle l'Oncle* (Thus Spoke the Uncle), a collection of essays, called for an appreciation of African traditions and a renewed emphasis on Haiti's cultural difference from Euro-American states. Price-Mars placed responsibility for the American Occupation squarely at the feet of those who shunned Haiti's distinctive character and

so in a way that was able to meaningfully sound the contradictions, historical processes, and agency of social groups vying for power and representation in a coalescing nation-state. Specifically, Haitian jazz musicians' ability to build cross-class and transnational musical collectives were successful example of what contemporaneous efforts of intellectuals, anthropologists, activists, and political figures strove to do.¹⁴ Their success relied on three different tactics: a creative and collaborative approach to working with the neo-African materials of Vodou ritual and *combite* work song traditions; the fusion of Afro-Cuban popular music traditions that was adopted by Haiti's peasantry through the circular flows of Haitian migrants to and from Cuba; and a re- appropriation of an African-American musical legacy that could have been synonymous with the occupation, but instead was transformed into an expression of politicized resistance.¹⁵ In doing so, Haitian musicians and their audiences

engaged in a national 'Boavaryisme.'" In Gage Averill "Ballad hunting in the black republic: Alan Lomax in Haiti, 1936-37", *Caribbean Studies*. 36.2 (July-December 2008), 3. For more on this crisis and the loss of the *milats*' right to govern, see Matthew J. Smith, *Red, Black and Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 11-35; see also Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*. (New York: Monthly Review, 1990), 15-41.

¹⁴ In a related way, *Jazz des Jeunes* was unique in their combining of several different rhythms associated with the musical culture of the Haitian peasantry. As Morton Marks wrote, *Jazz des Jeunes* "introduced vaccines, bamboo horns played in a hocketing style (successive pitches played by alternative instruments), into their rhythm section in the early 1950s. This brought African-rooted peasant music of the countryside, associated with combits (collective work groups) and *rara* (holy Week) processions, into the urban dance band format." See Morton Marks, "Jazz Des Jeunes 50th Anniversary." *New Routes: Traditional Music and Dance in America*. (Summer 1993): 10.

¹⁵ Importantly, les Jazz des Jeunes was intentionally creolizing Cuban *son*, big band jazz orchestration, and the rhythms of *combits* and *rara*. In this sense, the music was simultaneously both cosmopolitan and localized. Madrid and Moore have made the same point about Cuban *danzon* and it applies equally well in our case: "Caribbean contradance traditions, and later derivative forms such as the *danzón*, are distinguished by stylistic fluidity. Their very openness to external influence has transformed the repertoire into sites of contestation in which representations of class, race, gender, and generation are continuously negotiated." Alejandro L

demonstrated a remarkable capacity to gain interpretative agency over the seismic disruptions that the United States's military occupation inveighed against the Haitian peasantry and the elite's self-perception. Such performances of self-determination helped generate historical awareness and self-confidence on the part of peasants and poor urban Haitians to fight for their autonomy in the political sphere, and fight for the location of Afro-Haitian culture in the national cultural sphere. The cultural responses of musicians in the Vodou jazz movement had regional consequences for beyond Haiti for other Caribbean polities, which were also responding to aggressive strategies of American Imperialism and the historic racism that had silenced their African-descended cultural influences.¹⁶

This thesis will address each of these tactics in chronological fashion. Chapter 1, "Vodou and Self-Governance: Peasant Resistance to Commodity Production," will offer an overview of peasant production and cosmovision in Haiti from its independence to the time of the U.S. occupation. Specifically, the meanings assigned to Vodou, and the uses of ritual music to assert autonomy and historical memory, will be analyzed to provide greater context to

Madrid and Robin D. Moore, *Danzón: Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance*. (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2013), 25. Jazz and Vodou jazz suggest that musicians in Haiti were mediators of such "negotiations," in this case, of rural folkloric culture and the increasingly mass popular cultural forms that urbanization and modernization called for.

¹⁶ Raphael Dalleo, while not citing either jazz or Vodou Jazz, argues that the occupation of Haiti crucially shaped Caribbean politics and cultural production from outside of Haiti between 1915 and 1950. These years were the period when modern Caribbean political and cultural movements coalesced. "A new form of anticolonial politics emerg[es] in the Caribbean during the 1920s and 1930s," which included trade union organizing in Cuba and Trinidad and the founding of the People's National Party in Jamaica, points to these influences. Crucial for this discussion, "This period is also considered the beginning of the region's modern literature that first sought to take Afro-Caribbean culture seriously and speak in the name (and sometimes the voice) of the islands' majority inhabitants: négritude in Martinique, negrismo and afroantillanismo in the Hispanic Caribbean, the Beacon group in Trinidad." Quoted in Raphael Dalleo, *New World Studies: American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism*. (Charlottesville, US: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 2.

the cultural work that the Vodou Jazz movement performed.

Chapter 2, “We Struggle, We Dance and We Enjoy: Haitian Migrants in Cuba and the Politics of Cultural Co-Creation” will unpack an equally influential aesthetic to these musicians: the impact of *danzon* and *son* genres in the Haitian countryside and urban centers. Haiti’s peasants, far from being passive recipients of state policy, demonstrated remarkable agency in contesting and responding to forces from above. While not a preferred option for all, many opted to work in Cuba as migrant laborers. The historical experiences of the *Viejo* (a term in Haitian discourse for Haiti’s migrant laborers who worked seasonally in Cuba) were valorized as expressions of an emboldened and empowered Haitian by writers in the *Indigénisme* movement. There were many reasons for this: *Viejos* conversed in multiple languages with their counterparts in Cuba, Jamaica, and Dutch Aruba; they sang creolized songs in Spanish and English, deeply influencing the culture of the Oriente province in eastern Cuba; they participated in transnational communist organizing; and some evidence suggests they developed higher rates of literacy as a result of their time abroad.¹⁷

This case, then, demonstrates the need for a dialectical paradigm to explore the relationship between diasporas and homelands.¹⁸ This thesis points towards such a model through examining the collaboration between Haitian composer Issa El Saieh and the Cuban

¹⁷ Matthew Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, unpublished manuscript, 2014. For discussions on multi-linguistic capabilities, see p. 140; songs, see p. 141; cultural change in Oriente, p.43; communist organizing, p. 127-130; increased rates literacy, p. 131. Haitian migrants also suffered, during specific periods especially during the end of peak Haitian immigration to Cuba before its ban outright in 1939, tremendous racism, physical abuse by employers on plantations, and excessive administrative control.

¹⁸ J. Lorand Matory, *Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*, (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 2009), 72.

virtuoso pianist Bebo Valdes. Their interaction sheds light on the ways that the Vodou Jazz movement's success was in its willingness and ability to capture the transatlantic connections between Haitians and Cubans during the early – mid twentieth century.

Chapter three, “New Desires and Forcible Soothing: Haitians and African Americans together against the Grain,” will conclude this work by examining the ways African-American derived jazz music created a space for articulations of Vodou to have a popular-musical character. Clearly, Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American culture interacted in dynamic ways that had a particularly powerful effect in Haiti during a crisis of national legitimacy. The implications of music's ability to generate coeval experience will be discussed.

2.0 CHAPTER 1

VODOU AND SELF-GOVERNANCE: PEASANT RESISTANCE TO COMMODITY PRODUCTION

Law toujou genyen yon zatrap ladan.
--Haitian proverb, ("Law always has a trap inside of it.")

"I am of the opinion that the urban elite never achieved anything like hegemony in rural Haiti. While Haitian peasants have strategically adapted to the monopoly of the elite on affairs of the state, there is no solid research to show that they accepted an ideology that justified domination...or the "naturalization" of their subordination. To the contrary, there is ample testimony in informal discourse (especially proverbs, peasant songs, and folktales) that reveals a sophisticated class analysis and an ironic and playful commentary on the rationales and mechanisms of their subordination."¹⁹

--Gage Averill

Following the Haitian Revolution, the majority of Haiti's population transitioned from slavery to a rural. Peasantry. This peasantry's relationship with the centralized state ranged from indifferent to hostile. Their vision of self-sufficient agricultural production and collective work practice was at odds with the elite's designs. Haitian independence leader Toussaint L'Overture, for example, supported restoring plantation modes of agricultural production to create crops for export. How was the peasantry able to resist these plans? Part of the answer lies in its alternative administrative regime, much of it expressed through social and

¹⁹ Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunter*, 1997, 7.

organizational rites linked to Vodou practices.²⁰

Any account of the neo-African ritual cultures of which Vodou is a part must address the discourses in which it has been framed: as a folk practice at the opposite pole of rational modernity. Yet such dichotomies belie the interdependence of these concepts. As Stephan Palmié reminds us, Vodou and other such traditions were born out of the processes of slave regimes across the Americas and are today “as modern as nuclear thermodynamics.”²¹ The pantheon of Afro-Atlantic religious forms emerged from diverse, proletarianized plantations. These spaces were home to multiple linguistic and religious systems, which had to forge a belief system that resonated widely and inclusively.

²⁰ Here I employ Eqbal Ahmed’s framework for analyzing guerrilla movements in revolutionary conjunctures. While the peasantry were not necessarily an active guerrilla movement fighting for state power, I argue that the peasantry’s links between Vodou and administrative practices precisely informed the state’s multiple attempts to suppress it. It follows the same principles Ahmed lies here: “Once a revolutionary movement enters the guerrilla phase its central objective is to confirm, perpetuate, and institutionalize the moral isolation of the enemy by providing an alternative to the discredited regime through the creation of “parallel hierarchies.” The major task of the movement is not to outfight but to outadminister the government. The major target in this bid is the village, where the majority of the population lives and where the government’s presence is often exploitative.” .Eqbal Ahmed, “How to tell when the Rebels Have Won,” in *The Selected Writings of Eqbal Ahmad*, ed. Carolle Bengelsdorf, Margaret Cerullo, and Yogesh Chandrani, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 17-18.

²¹ Palmié writes: “What I aim to demonstrate is that, far from designating even only typological opposites, the meanings associated with the terms *Western modernity* and *Afro-Cuban tradition* represent mere facets of perspectival refractions of a single encompassing historical formation of trans-continental scope...It is only by disembedding Afro-Cuban religious knowledge from the historical context out of which it emerged that we can juxtapose it to what we have come to designate as *Western modernity*. Whatever else Afro-Cuban religion is, it is as modern as nuclear thermodynamics, or the superstitions about the nature of our world that underlie DN sequencing, or structural adjustment policies, or on-line banking. For the same reason, I have found it useful to think of Western modernity as a configuration of thought and practices that might profitably be understood as culturally specific...tradition in its own right.” Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban modernity and Tradition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 15-16.

Another caveat is the etymological conceit of the term Vodou. While “Vodoun” is the word for spirit in the West African languages of Fon and Ewe, Vodou had a different set of meanings in the gazes of colonial regimes, whose racialized discourses used the word to refer to a wide range of (often imagined) practices associated with African savagery and barbarity. What has been referred to as “Vodou” must be understood as communally and regionally specific forms of religious and cultural activity. “Vodou,” McAlister explains, “has grown into a creolized blend of African and (to a lesser extent) Europeanized knowledge, focused not on texts but on embodied forms of spirit work. Rather than speak about ‘A religion called Vodou,’ practitioners will more likely explain that they *sèvi lwa* (serve the spirit).” These spirits are highly differentiated according to township and kin, and Gerald F. Murray notes that specific family lineages have corresponding spirits that they honor, functioning like an oral and ritualized archive.²²

These regionally specific forms of Vodou practices met local needs and filled a wide range of functions. One commonality between them lies in overlapping legal regimes that were embedded in these religious forms. Many rural Haitians, for instance, had access to the alternative judicial institutions that existed before the contemporary nation-state of Haiti emerged. Jennie Smith has argued that the oldest civic organizations in Haiti are the *soeyte* that are responsible for the collectivizing of agricultural labor. In addition, the *soyete* “often provide members and their communities with an informal justice system, thereby allowing locals to regulate interpersonal disputes without having to appeal to the Haitian court system—

²² Gerald F. Murray, *Beyond the Myths of Culture: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Eric B. Ross (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 316

renowned for humiliating and exploiting poor Haitians.”²³ While the *soyete* intermixed collective work processes with civic participation and judicial administration, it appears that Vodou religious organizations have also functioned as administrators of land tenure and inheritance. Gerald F. Murray notes how the practice of *sèvi lwa* (to serve the spirit) informs land tenure systems reveals “the somewhat unexpected but empirically convincing and critical role which Haitian-peasant Voodoo plays in contemporary land tenure system.” Murray goes so far to suggest that, “[T]his cult was found to function as a partially camouflaged resource-circulating mechanism,” but takes pain to avoid generalizing this backwards or forwards in time to apply to a transhistoric theory of Vodou ritual.²⁴ What is more important to Murray is the changing function of Vodou to fit the needs of its practitioners, and the “integration of these constituent elements (of ritualized Vodou practice) into other nonritual lifespheres”²⁵—that is, those associated with work and social labor. “Vodou is not a discrete aspect of social life,” explains Kate Ramsey, “bounded off from realms such as healing and law. Rather, Vodou encompasses and internalizes legal concepts and processes in complex ways that defy

²³Jennie Marcelle Smith, *When the Hands Are Many: Community Organization and Social Change in Rural Haiti*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2001, 46.

²⁴ It should be noted that this analysis was applied to the region of Cul-de-Sac over a specific period of 21 months in the early 80s. Murray warns that “It would be theoretically and empirically unwarranted to seek the *origins* of Voodoo in terms of the twentieth-century land-circulating function.” But Murray does use his analysis to suggest that “the functions of the cult—its linkages with nonritual spheres of its practitioners—appear to have varied over time, adapting themselves to the specific problems of a given generation of practitioners...during the early stages of the final insurrection that began in 1791, the cult played a a revolutionary role, providing both the symbols and the leadership around which insurgent slave groups mobilized.” Gerald F. Murray, “Population Pressure, Land Tenure, and Voodoo: The Economics of Haitian Peasant Ritual.” in *Beyond the Myths of Culture: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Eric B. Ross (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 316.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 318.

compartmentalization.”²⁶

The overlap of rural Haitian’s defense of their self-determined legal systems with their religious freedom was particularly striking during popular political-religious mobilizations in the 1840s. The Piquet Rebellion of 1844 against the authoritarian government of Charles Rivière-Hérard is one instance where these concerns converged. The movement demanded he uphold the liberal constitution, and the black rural majority demanded land and economic reform, universal education, and the end of Rivière-Hérard’s martial law.²⁷ The demands on the Haitian state were interweaved in the form of a “mystical and magical movement” in which peasant bands “were mixing religious claims with sociopolitical ones.”²⁸ The movement’s charismatic leader, Louis Jean-Jacques Acauu, was denounced by the French consuls in Haiti for his preaching of “Black communism”—his analysis of bodies “raced” was linked to privilege and education (or lack thereof) and not skin color.²⁹ This discourse seemed to make him particularly dangerous to French authorities. Yet his proclamations for land reform and peasant autonomy also had a religious dimension, according to one observer for the French, who suggested that he had seen him perform Vodou ceremonies dressed in all white.³⁰ The government fell and oligarchs attempted to retain power, unsuccessfully attempting to ban Vodou, and often paradoxically strengthening it.³¹ The intertwining of political and religious

²⁶ Ramsey, Kate, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁸ Manigat, *La révolution de 1843*, 21.

²⁹ Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 73.

³⁰ D’Alaux, *L’Empereur Soulouque et son empire*, 112-113, quoted in Ramsey, 73.

³¹ D’Alaux reports that Vaudoux practitioners were “emboldened” and Adolphe Cabon cites a letter from the Catholic church in 1845 regretting that “all the old superstitions that the strong government of M. Boyer was able to contain, that it had nearly suppressed, had appeared again

discourses demonstrates Kate Ramsey's point that "Vodou is not a discrete aspect of social life, bounded off from realms such as healing and law. Rather, Vodou encompasses and internalizes legal concepts and processes in complex ways that defy compartmentalization."³²

Within the context of Haiti, Vodou was an alternative legislative and cultural system that reflected the philosophical and cosmological principles animating the peasantry's practices of self-determination. Vodou was a crucial space for the enactment of the autonomous dimensions of rural Haitian life. The attempt by Haitian elites and, later, US authorities to eliminate it can be read as attempts to subordinate Haiti's peasantry the designs of state. Vodou practices held a special location for the transmission of "common sense," and song and proverb were critical forms that encoded communal knowledge. Jamaican theorist Carolyn Cooper has suggested that such utterances are "evocative metaphors for...[the] dispossessed who refuse to be squeezed out of existence."³³ McAlister reaffirms the same point: "Above all, Vodou is a religion of survival, which produces meaning and protective strategies for the poor who cope, on a daily basis, with the traumas of poverty and insecurity."³⁴

Yet, as the discussion below hopes to demonstrate, this survival has been not only material but also spiritual and social. Vodou song and ritual has constituted a space for popular history to be told and retold, for class-consciousness to develop, and decisions about collective

with more ardour than ever."

³² Ramsey, Kate, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 16.

³³ Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*, (Warwick: Warwick University Caribbean studies, 1993), 45.

³⁴ Elizabeth A. McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 10.

economics and legislative decisions to be negotiated. Music was a highly active site for the production and reproduction of social life and cosmological belief. These musical vignettes presented below will help explain the Vodou Jazz movement's ability to resonate with Haiti's migrating peasantry following the United States occupation.

"Vodou is not a discrete aspect of social life," explains Kate Ramsey, "bounded off from realms such as healing and law. Rather, Vodou encompasses and internalizes legal concepts and processes in complex ways that defy compartmentalization."³⁵

Ceremonial Music and Historical Memory

Vodou related practices were sites of music making. One specific procession associated with Vodou ritual is known as *rara*. A religious march that takes place during the Catholic practice of Lent, the practice is characterized by colorful costumes, political satire in the streets through street theatre, and an especially collective form of music production in which hocketing by large groups of *Vaskins*, brass instruments, and drums is the norm. The practices are closely tied to the Vodou religious systems.³⁶ *Rara* festivals often influence agricultural work and collective work processes as part of the processional activities. Elizabeth McAllister suggests that "viewed along a play-to-work continuum, *rara* is a time of all-night play during which short periods of work occur."³⁷

As urbanization accelerated, *rara* pilgrimages were also ways to escape the social structures and political struggles of the formal Haitian nation-state. As one Haitian explained to

³⁵ Ramsey, Kate, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 16.

³⁶ Manuel, Peter, and Largey, Michael. *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. Philadelphia, US: Temple University Press, 2016, 158.

³⁷ McAllister, Elizabeth. *Rara!*, 57.

McAllister, “We escaped the political insecurity of Port-au-Prince in 1992 by hightailing it to the lush mountain district of Fermathe.”³⁸

In such contexts, it would seem to be no coincidence that political issues are discussed and sung from the perspective of non-elite Afro-Haitians.

Current events in Haiti that affect everyone can be part of the metanarrative of a *Rara* band. The rise and fall of political figures is a common theme, and many satirical songs are written by Carnival street bands (or *rara* bands who function as Carnival street bands before *Rara* season). During *Rara* season these songs can be passed along from band to band...Songs present new material that speaks to current situations in order to attract potential fans each year.³⁹

The last point is especially important—that audiences demanded and expected *rara* bands to incorporate political critique into their works. This was certainly one aspect of *rara* ceremonial music that *Jazz des Jeunes* and others adopted.

Often these political critiques were humorous and sardonic. For instance, Smith explains that “pointed songs,” or *chante-pwen*, employ symbolism to chastise, and comment critically on individuals or social groups. “Weaving contestation and nuance into poetic drama is an art that is particularly popular in the countryside,” she explains. “[I]t is not surprising that we find some of the most masterful *chante pwen* composers and performers among the peasantry.”⁴⁰ Such *cante pwen* have migrated into urban spaces via public peasant performers. Some of these songs include humor, others are unironic narratives of struggle and self-determination. An example of the latter, “*Raraman*,” is a historical account that connects enslaved Africans’ use of music to

³⁸ McAlister, *Rara*, 40.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Jennie Marcelle Smith, *When the Hands Are Many: Community Organization and Social Change in Rural Haiti*, (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2001), 46

the generation of resilient communities. The song also suggests *rara*'s music a space of historical memory, and enacts this belief this by making these powerful points within this *cante pwen*:

Jouk nan kè Lafrik bato yo vin chaje

Sou do Kayayib eklav yo debake

*Yo pa gen ansyen poy yo te pote
Sèlman ti mizak yo pou yo te chante
Woy, yo se raraman, woy, yo se raraman*

*Byen alèkile stati yo vin chante
Sepandan yo pa janm sispann chante
Depi ou tande, lannwit la rive
Kote gen tanbou se la yo ransable*

Woy, yo se raraman, woy, yo se raraman

To the very heart of Africa the boats came to fill up.

On the back of the Caribbean, the slaves disembarked

They couldn't carry anything with them
Only songs for them to sing
Woy, they're *rara* men, woy, they're *rara* man

Since then, their status has changed
However, they've never stopped singing
Listen, when the night falls
Wherever there's a drum, that's where they'll gather

Woy, they're rara men, woy, they're rara men

The song demonstrates not only a powerful historical account of music and social memory of the African diaspora, but also the self-awareness on the part of musicians that their craft was as much about the production of historical self-awareness as it was to produce joy, catharsis, and community. ⁴¹

⁴¹ Jennie Smith, *When the Hands are Many*, 48.

Rara ceremonies were often transnational, speaking to the need for the Haitian diaspora to re-converge. Individuals “could be reclaimed by Rara” to their country of origin, and failure to do so would cause spiritual sanctions. As one Haitian remarked,

Some Haitians live abroad. When they see *rara* is coming up, even if they don’t want to return home, there are *iwa* in the *rara* that brings them revelations in their dreams. They say that they are required to come home for the *rara*. They are obligated to come. If they don’t come, they get sick, they have a lot of problems.

Haitian returning for *rara* pilgrimages would also have been one way that transnational music exchanges may have taken place—an example of a diaspora affecting homelands.⁴²

Vodou and Ecological Labor

While Haitian lands became distributed amongst peasants, its land ownership was rarely privatized in the classical economic sense. *Combite* labor practices, in which individuals worked together in exchange for food and future reciprocity, ensured that labor was collectivized. Rather than ownership by individuals hoping to endlessly expand surplus, *combite* practices of land cultivation ensured that surpluses were under the control of families and communities within the Haitian peasantry. The land’s productivity was reaped by the communities who worked it.

The *combite* likely had Kongolese or Yoruba roots. Valerie Kauseen suggests that the *combite* was based on Yoruba antecedents, but warns that “the ideal of the small farm was no pre-lapsarian fantasy, no attempt to return to an idyllic pastoral time of a lost Africa.” Afro-Atlantic cultural forms were shaped by, and shapers of, the material and social conditions of the

⁴² It would not surprising if the musical aesthetics of Afrocuban-based popular music forms *danzon* and *son* travelled with returning *rara* pilgrimages, or became aspects or *rara* performance during periods of peak Haitian migration to Cuba, as during the occupation. For an account of *rara* festivals among migrant Haitians working as cane cutters in the Dominican Republic, see Manuel and Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. (Philadelphia, US: Temple University Press, 2016), 156.

lives they found themselves in: “Slaves’ African cultural retentions were integrated into the New World sugar plantation system, and their utopian dreams were most certainly derived from the modern transcultural experience of enslavement and revolution.”⁴³

Music was also a medium in which cultural retentions were transformed and integrated into new world social conditions: song would function as the communicative and ritual glue for these *combite* practices. In 1963, anthropologist Alfred Métraux documented the existence of *combites*, which he suggests organized the return of Haitians to working the land immediately following the 1804 revolution. Suddenly without the punishing and violent discipline of a French-employed overseer, this work was organized by a different rhythm: work songs, *vaskins*, conch shells, all combined to coordinate repetitive movement and communal well-being. Musicologist Martin Munro suggests that these songs and rhythms were so important that they served as markers for different regions, villages, and communities. “Each society,” he writes, “was distinguished by the kind of instruments played and the drum rhythms they preferred.”⁴⁴

Music and rhythm were forms of social organization that connected the emergent subsistence peasant and the new post-slavery mode of production in Haiti. “Rhythm had been a supplement to slave life and had become...the motor of a model of self-sufficient labor generated by the people that operated outside the control of the state.” Similarly, Melville Herskovits describes the collective agricultural work of the *combite* in the Haitian community of Mirebelais, in which music plays a central role:

The scene in a field where a large *combite* is at work is an arresting one. The men form a

⁴³ Kaussen, Valerie. *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and U.S. Imperialism*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008), 9.

⁴⁴ Munro, Martin. *Different Drummers: Rhythm and Race in the Americas*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2010, 71.

line, with a drummer in front of their hoes. The *simidor*, who leads the singing as he works with the others, adds the rhythm of his song to the regular beats of the drum, thus setting the time for the strokes of the implements wielded by workers...its sound can carry far, however, and thus not only beats the time for the hoes, but notifies all concerned that the *combite* is underway. The size of the *combite* is judged by the number of drums and *lambi*, or conch-shell horns used, for where two or three of either are required, an especially large group of workers are assembled.⁴⁵

Music and rhythms, whether associated with Vodou or with the collective work projects, played a role in the coordination of labor and the social reproduction of the community. As such, they were instrumental to the relative autonomy of the Haitian peasantry following the revolution, and to their unique mode of production.⁴⁶

Ritual songs also literally encoded both practical agro-botanical knowledge, as well as injunctions to maintain the oral traditions that transmitted that knowledge. Within the corpus of Vodou song is “Twa Fey,” meaning three leaves:

<i>Twa fey</i>	<i>Three leaves</i>
<i>Twa rasin</i>	<i>Three roots</i>
<i>Jeté blyé</i>	<i>If I throw down I forget</i>
<i>Ranmassé songé</i>	<i>If I gather them I remember</i>
<i>Mwen gen basin lwa</i>	<i>I've got a basin lwa</i>
<i>Mwen twa fey tonbé ladan'n</i>	<i>My three leaves fell in it</i>

Many have interpreted *Twa Fey* as rooted in a Kongolese cosmovision.⁴⁷ It is also a comment on

⁴⁵ Melville J Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (Princeton Markus Wiener Publishers, 1964), 72.

⁴⁶ Mats Lundahl, for instance, has referred to the decentralized holdings of the Haitian peasantry as “Latin America’s only multifundia nation.” In Mats Lundahl, *Peasants and Poverty: A Study of Haiti* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 263.

⁴⁷ See for instance *Digital Library of the Caribbean*, s.v. “Twa Fèy, Twa Rasin,” <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004160/00001/1j> (accessed April 12, 2017). “The song presents the Kongolese notion of the universe as though it were speaking of three worthless leaves falling into a pool. In reality, the leaves and the pool are both symbolic, and their meanings can be understood by reviewing Kongolese beliefs taken to Haiti during the 17th and 18th centuries.”

For a definition of “cosmovision” as opposed to cosmology, see Alfredo López Austin, “Cosmovisión y Pensamiento Indígena,” in *Conceptos y Fenómenos Fundamentals de Nuestro*

memory and social history, stored in song. As Laurent Dubois elegantly suggests, “The song, in a few short words and images, captures the power and necessity of connection and memory.”⁴⁸

Here memory was “healing” in the multiple senses: Vodou songs contained quite literal descriptions of the specific herbs and plants that could be used for medicinal benefit. Such a corpus of songs came into being as enslaved Africans from different communities and nations traded and shared information regarding the medicinal qualities of their ecological worlds. Bonnie Thomas-Stevenson demonstrates the common sense need for this technology when she explains: “All of the slaves traded their expertise in healing because of the plantation milieu and dire necessity in staying alive.” Music was a space where such knowledge could be exchanged easily and memorably.⁴⁹

Tiempo,” (Mexico City: UNAM, 2012), April 2012: “el conjunto estructurado de los diversos sistemas ideológicos con los que el grupo social, en un momento histórico, pretende aprehender el universo, engloba todos los sistemas, los ordena y los ubica.” (a structured set of diverse ideological systems with which the social group, within a [particular] historical moment, tries to understand the universe, encompassing all systems, the order, and the environment.)

⁴⁸ DuBois, *the Banjo*, 130. *Twa fey* can also be understood as a proverb, in that it sets to music carefully developed information over time. As Walter Ong says in *Orality and Literacy*, “In primarily an oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retained and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped readily for oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antithesis, in alliterations and assonance.” See Ong, Walter J., and John Hartley. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. (New York: Routledge, 2012).

All of which is to suggest the links between music and shared ideas about land, herbal knowledge, and creolized Kongolese and Ibo worldviews likely permeated in both ritual music and music for work projects. It was one way of encoding knowledge for both present and future generations. Proverbs must be musical language, or language uttered musically. It would not be such a stretch to suggest that proverbs are spoken extensions of mnemonic strategies developed in the very practice of knowledge production via music. As Pollard suggests, “the ability of folk to manipulate language not only effectively but within a certain distinctive style that is part of a tradition of verbal art that is within or outside of a performative context.”

⁴⁹ Another example of a song encoding knowledge of healing are presented by Michel Laguerre, who recounts a Haitian woman who makes sings of a cure for her stomach ache:
"Sam, bring me some mint!

Vodou and the State

Having demonstrated the importance of Vodou ritual spheres to peasant autonomy, and the power of music therein, this discussion now turns to the role of the Haitian elite to Vodou ritual practice. To do so, a discussion of the political relationship between Haiti's peasantry and the political classes living in urban centers is required.

Beginning with Haitian independence from French rule in 1804, the Haitian state repeatedly criminalized Vodou religious practices. Its ability to administer peasant life was a threat to the designs of the state. The battle between the supermajority of Haitian peasants and their elite is complex. Haitian history Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued its root was in their contrasting visions of land: how it would be administered and for what purpose. "The black leaders who arose in the battle against the slaveholders were in complete agreement with the masses of slaves on one point and one point alone: that slavery should be abolished." Making a distinction between Haiti's administrative state with its rural nation, Trouillot suggests that the peasantry "measured its liberty in Sunday markets and in the right to work on its garden plots," whereas the state "was firmly attached to the plantation system."⁵⁰ And as Sidney Mintz has

Make Catnip up an' sage tea!

I goes an' gets her all them things

But she throw 'em back up to me."

in Michel S. Laguerre, *Afro-Caribbean Folk Medicine*. (South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1978), 45.

⁵⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation*, (Monthly Review Press: New York, 1990), 44. Mats Lundhal supplements Trouillot when he explains that "Peasant production aims mainly at consumption, not so much at reinvestment and expansion of activities. This establishes the dividing line between peasants and farmers. The latter regard agriculture as a business enterprise...not so with the peasants...[whose] basic aim is provide his family with goods and services to be consumed either for the purpose of subsistence or to enhance the peasant's social status in the community." Mats Lundahl, *Peasants and Poverty: A Study of Haiti* (New York: St.

written, “Haiti’s history of slavery, and of access to land through revolution, has given a special symbolic significance to landowning. Land is valued above all else.”⁵¹

The state’s relationships with Vodou seemed to have prompted several violent regime changes and in-fighting amongst the Haitian oligarchs well into the twentieth century. One self-anointed emperor, Faustin Soulouque, who ruled from 1847-1859, was ridiculed by a French commentator Gustave d’Alaux, who accused the emperor of practicing “African freemasonry, of which Soulouque is one of the high dignitaries.”⁵² Soulouque banned Vodou but did not do so completely, as he forbade officers from “molesting the good people who wanted to enjoy dancing the arada [*rara*].”⁵³ The perception of Soulouque’s tolerance of elements of rural Haitian religious traditions led to a deluge of European critics, who linked state sanction of Vodou to the decline of civilization in Haiti. David Scott has suggested that during this time, “raced discourse” shifted from “the optimism and humanitarianism of the abolitionism...to an aggressive and openly derogatory racialism undergirded by the new science of anthropology.”⁵⁴

These ideologies had an effect on Haiti’s ruling class and helped produce the impetus for General Fabre Nicolas Geddrad’s 1859 overthrow of Soulouque. One of Geddrad’s first acts was to decree a Concordat with Pope Pius IX that established Roman Catholicism as “the

Martin’s Press, 1979), 31.

⁵¹ Sidney Mintz, “Introduction,” in James Leburn, *The Haitian People*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), xxvii.

⁵² quoted in Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 78.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of the Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 81-82.

religion of the great majority of Haitians.”⁵⁵ Kate Ramsey suggests that the concordant was a tacit call to arms to attack sites and spaces of Vodou worship: “[A]lthough the pursuit and eradication of ‘superstition’ were not explicitly mentioned in the convention...these goals, along with the allied project of expanding a system of primary instruction across the country, seem to have been understood by both parties [the Haitian state and the Pope] as a principle function of the church’s work in Haiti.”⁵⁶

The concordant, paradoxically, signaled the exact opposite of its stated truth: that Roman Catholicism (or at least, non-creolized Roman Catholicism) was not the religion of the great majority. To the contrary, the peasantry retained significant autonomy for quite some time and continued to practice Vodou. Moreover, it was apparent that Vodou creolized elements of Catholicism and as Achebe says, “a great many crossings”⁵⁷ took place between the two ostensibly separated bodies of belief. Métraux, for example, acknowledges the Catholic inheritances in Vodou, while still maintaining an autonomous belief system.⁵⁸ Practices labeled superstitious or Vodou continued to proliferate and inform debates about

⁵⁵ Cabon, *Notes sur l’histoire religieuse d’Haiti*, 511, quoted in Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011,) 87.

⁵⁶ Ramsey, Kate, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011,) 81. Ramsey cites, as a particularly convincing piece of evidence, a letter from the archbishop of Port-au-Prince, Joseph Le Gouaze, stating “our antisuperstition Crusade continues and cannot not continue...[because] it is the *raison d’être* of the church.” Ramsey suggests that this letter implicates the ways in which “the Catholic church in Haiti historically defined itself in opposition to the popular practices it constructed as superstition.”

⁵⁷ “True, Christianity divided the village into two—the people of the church and the people of the world—but the boundary between them had very many crossings.” Chinua Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

⁵⁸ He refers to Vodou as “a conglomeration of beliefs and rites of African origin, which, having been closely mixed with Catholic practice, has come to be the religion of the greater part of the peasants and the urban proletariat of the black Republic of Haiti.” Métraux, Alfred, *Voodoo in Haiti*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1959), 15.

Haitian identity, the construction of power, and peasant autonomy and communal production up until the U.S. marine invasion and occupation of Haiti (1915-1934).

Indeed, the U.S. occupation resolved the perpetual inability of the oligarchs to consolidate or effectively implement a strategy to suppress Haiti's rural majority. Kathy Millet suggests that the U.S. occupation consolidated "the unsteady governmental hold on the peasant world."⁵⁹ Trouillot makes the same point with some additional flair: "If Haitian leaders showed contempt for the masses, European and U.S. leaders [showed contempt] for all Haitians, leaders and masses alike, and a total disdain for the independence they had so courageously won."⁶⁰

This attitude of the U.S. occupation would set the for Vodou Jazz to emerge. The movement was a cross class phenomena that integrated Vodou ritual music under the radar of U.S. censors, who had enacted a ban on Vodou ritual music. It did so in the context of overwhelming changes in the demographics and political power in Haiti. A Black middle class emerged tied to the administration of a newly empowered Haitian state; disrupted subsistence producers had to migrate to Haitian cities, or the Dominican Republic and Cuba, to find work; and the *milat* elites who conspired with the U.S. occupation led to a backlash that valorized Haiti's cultural practices associated with Africa.

Vodou Jazz found a way to respond to all these changing realities. It appropriated one of the sonic signifiers of the U.S. occupation, imported jazz music. It do so while continuing to express the cultures of rural-to-urban migrants, and, like Vodou itself, responded to the new

⁵⁹ Millet, Kethley. Quoted in Rasmey, p. 45.

⁶⁰ Trouillot, *State Against Nation*, 50.

pressures and necessities of Haiti's (proletarianizing) peasantry. Yet one of the most striking aesthetic moves that Vodou Jazz made was response to another great migration that some rural Haitians opted for: to work as seasonal cane cutters in the rapidly expanding sugar industries of Cuba. The subject of the next section is the bi-annual migration of hundreds of thousands of Haitians, and its profound impacts on the development mid twentieth century Haitian popular music.

3.0

CHAPTER 2

“WE STRUGGLE, WE DANCE AND WE ENJOY.” HAITIAN MIGRANTS IN CUBA AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL CO-CREATION

In 1955, Issa El Saieh, a towering figure in the Vodou Jazz movement whose orchestra was rivaled only by *Jazz des Jeunes*, released “Peze Kafe,”⁶¹ The piece is based on a popular song considered by many to be one of the Haiti’s most iconic melodies, but its rhythmic structure is directly linked to Afro-Atlantic forms: Saieh’s band performs over what Mats Lundhal has labeled a “congo” rhythm. The arrangement El Saieh employs has saxophones arranged to play sensuously, with energetic punches in the brass section. An intense drum riff opens the piece and settles into a pattern, not dissimilar to the compositional strategy of “Cote Moun Yo.” This rhythm, however, is played on the *boula* drum, an explicit link to *Rara* ritual music.⁶² The song

⁶¹ Issah El Saieh, “Peze Kafe,” *La La Belle Epoque Vol. 2*, © 2010 Fred Paul. Available online at

https://youtu.be/oobnJbmZGIE?list=PLNY59ywl0ctPCrHbLTQCMkL2g8L6ce_T7

⁶² “The Rada nachon [the Rara confederation] uses an ensemble of three tanbou (drums), called manman (mother), segon (second or middle) and boula (or kata),” explains Manuel, Bilby and Largey. The use of the word “confederation” here is somewhat complex and deserves explanation. Vodou ceremonies honor different *Lwa* which are organized according to *nachon*, or nations, which take their names from geographical locations in central Africa. Over time, as linguistic groups have merged in the vast creolization that Haiti was home to, *nachon* has come to mean a confederation of nations. See Peter Manuel, Kenneth Bilby, Michael Largey

features the well known signer Guy Durosier, who tells a story about a child who is sent by his mother to sell his coffee beans, during which he is arrested by the police:

Manmam m'voye pese kafé, oh
En arivan mwen sou pòtay la
Muen jwen jandam arête'm.Me zanmi anmwen:
Sa m'a di la kay lè m'ariver?

Mom sent me to weigh coffee, oh
At the door of the city
I crossed a cop that stopped me.
My friends;
What am I going to say when I get home?⁶³

The lyrics of “Peze Kafe” bring up several historical issues simultaneously. On the one hand, it evokes the necessity of regional travel for peasants to sell their coffee products. The United States occupation disrupted localized and regional markets, which the peasantry had administered. The new system, as the song indicates, was difficult and dangerous, due to the increasingly militarized nature of the policed borders between economic and national zones.

However, the personnel of this recording is as significant as its subject matter. That the bandleader, Issa El-Saeih, was a Haitian of Palestinian descent, should give pause to any who

Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae, 150. However, as historian James Sweet points out, creolization was happening before the trans-Atlantic slave trade even commenced. Warfare caused by the Dahomean empire in 18th century central West and Central Africa spurred a massive internal exodus, generating cultural exchange between displaced migrants before West-Central Africans crossed the middle passage: “[T]he Americanization of Africans begins in Africa, rendering them uniquely equipped to address the challenges of enslavement and colonialism in the Americas.” See James H Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 5.

⁶³ Mats Lundhal, *Bebo de Cuba: Bebo Valdés y su Mundo*. (Barcelona: RBA, 2008), 57.

would claim that the movement to valorize Vodou was an uninclusive, nationalist project.⁶⁴ The arrangement was done by Bobby Hicks, an African-American jazz trumpeter living in Puerto Rico. The pianist is Bebo Valdes, one of the great Afro-Cuban composers of the 20th century and a recipient of seven Grammy awards. The collaboration of Valdes and El Saeih provide a powerful window into transnational histories at the core of Black popular music's in the mid twentieth century Caribbean. Especially in the Haiti-Cuba corridor, where both nations shared histories of cultural exchange and experiences of U.S. neocolonialism, music making was analogous to the new social relations generated by high levels of Haitian migration to Cuba in the mid 1920s. Haitian cane-cutters often travelled back and forth between the two islands to generate and return revenue for their families and personnel ambitions.

This section will thus explore the interstitial spaces, cultural and material, that linked and transformed rural Haiti, Eastern Cuba, and Port-au-Prince. The discussion will begin with human narratives of displacement and adaptation, and proceed with instances cultural exchange between Haitians and Afro-Cuban societies. Finally, this section will explore how these trends manifested themselves in the music of Vodou Jazz movement.

Occupation and Displacement

Between 1902 and 1931, statistics report the arrival of 189,362 Haitians into Eastern Cuba.⁶⁵ Migration occurred before US occupation, but the occupation had severely destabilizing affects on peasant autonomy that accelerated the flow of migrants dramatically. As Michel-

⁶⁴ See Michael J. Dash, who advances this claim. Michael J. Dash, *Culture and Customs of Haiti*. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2001), 116.

⁶⁵ Matthew Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, unpublished manuscript, 2014, 71.

Rolph Trouillot suggests, “The occupation...accelerated Haiti’s economic, military, and political centralization, leaving the rest of the country unable to restrain the hegemonic tendencies of the ‘Republic of Port-Au-Prince.’ It signaled the beginning of the end for regional economics.”⁶⁶ Casey adds that “During the U.S. occupation, efforts to build the state caused massive transformations in rural Haiti.”⁶⁷ Regulating the migratory movement (itself spurred on by occupation) became a significant part of the state-building project. Another central component of state-building was the redistribution of land from peasants to foreign corporations. The occupation authorities successfully rewrote the Haitian constitution to allow non-Haitians to own land.⁶⁸ During the early years of the occupation, the Haitian American Sugar Company (HASCO) took advantage of this opening and operated in the rural areas outside of Port-au-Prince and the Southern peninsula.

The U.S. Occupation thus, according to Trouillot, “swept away the feeble restraints” that prevented the destruction of the peasantry’s autonomy. Peasants organized into military units known as *Cacos* that fought the United States between 1918 and 1920. They were defeated through disproportionate force, including aerial bombing and the destruction of whole villages. These policies led to nearly 3,000 Haitian deaths.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*. (New York: Monthly Review, 1990), 104

⁶⁷ Matthew Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, unpublished manuscript, 2014, 64.

⁶⁸ This constitution was written by none other than Franklin Roosevelt, then a Democratic Vice Presidential Candidate. He bragged to the New York Times in August of 1920 that “I wrote Haiti’s Constitution myself, and, if I do say it, I think it is a pretty good constitution.” quoted in Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers UP, 1995), 118.

⁶⁹ Mary A. Renda. *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 151.

U.S Marines fighting the *Caco* rebels suggested that the ritual music of Vodou were responsible for their resistance. One American businessman suggested Haitians as “peaceful as a child...harmless”⁷⁰ –until activated by the “voodoo” of a pernicious Haitian elite. Brigadier General Smedley Butler similarly suggested that it was when they became activated with “liquor and voodoo stuff”⁷¹ that the population could become active in guerilla warfare. A third military ideologue, Kuser, suggested, “upon the sounding of a Vadoux drum, the priest can very often do what he wants with his followers.”⁷² The suggestion of a link between drumming and difficulties for US military planners continues to demonstrate the role music and socially organizational activities coalesced for Haiti’s peasantry.

This it not to suggest a unitary relationship between land expulsion and migration.⁷³ The latter tended to occur in the North, while the former was in the Southern provinces near the coastal city of Aux Cayes. In 1918, for instance, 78% of Haitian emigrants to Cuba left from this city.⁷⁴ There were, however, intense price fluctuations caused by increased food demand from marine personnel, as well as sudden changes in food cost caused by speculation.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Testimony of Roger Farnham, president of American-owned National Railway of Haiti, quoted in Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 143.

⁷¹ Quoted in Ramsey, 144.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ There were, however, instances when individuals and companies managed to secure control of some land in migrant-sending regions by taking advantage of policy changes. Rather than being seized, land was being commodified and subject to private sale. During the early years of the occupation, the Haitian American Sugar Company (HASCO) operated in the rural areas outside of Port-au-Prince and the Southern peninsula. Like other plantations in the Americas, the company ground cane grown on both company land and by smallholders. Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, 80.

⁷⁴ “Thus, scholars must be very cautious to assume that the Caco rebellion or land expulsion were linked in any simplistic and singular way to the migratory movement to Cuba.” Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, 78.

⁷⁵ See Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation*, 104.

Haitian migration to Cuba (and Cuban migration to Haiti) was not a new phenomenon. It is important to note as well that in 1913, before the occupation started, Cuban port officials recorded the entry of 1,422 Haitians in Cuba.⁷⁶ Additionally, Cuban revolutionaries sought refuge in Haiti during the Spanish American war, and generated a large enough community to merit a visit from Cuba's independence leader Jose Martí. Matthew Casey notes that the existence of a Cuban expatriate community can be verified by marital documents: "Between 1850 and 1871, ten marriages were conducted between Haitians and Cubans in Port-Au-Prince."⁷⁷

Occupation did hasten the rate of migration, however, and eventually subject the migration process itself to invasive and dehumanizing administrative surveillance. "What began as a region-specific, grassroots, and unregulated process of leaving Haiti was transformed through layers of legislation between 1918 and 1923. It soon became a nationwide, top-down, and highly regulated movement."⁷⁸ Bio-medical policing accompanied these regulations, such as the implementation of forced vaccinations (which were charged to migrants but rarely administered) and, in an eerie echo of the Middle Passage, medical examinations to see if workers were fit for the plantation. The United Fruit Company sent medical personnel to ships, "rejecting workers they believed were too weak to be productive and making it difficult for these

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, 41. And many others had non-sanctioned marriages, prompting a Cuban consul to ask his Haitian counterpart about the citizenship rights of "illegitimate children" born in Haiti to bi-national parents.

⁷⁸ Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, 65.

individuals to leave the country.”⁷⁹

Haitians were not passive recipients of such regimes. In Haiti, they resisted U.S. nation building projects with both armed resistance and by voting with their feet. And in Cuba, as we will see, their engagement with Cuban politics was not destined to be as cut and dry as U.S. sugar companies would have liked.

Spiritual exchange

Haitians arriving in Oriente set foot in a cultural diverse, predominantly Afro-Cuban society, with rich historical linkages to Haiti. Following the Haitian revolution, Cuba attempted to fill Haiti’s role as the sugar capital of the Caribbean. It expanded its sugar production, and thus one of the New World’s largest sites of slave importation. As Ned Sublette states: “In marked contrast to the other territories [of the Caribbean], whose slave importations had already peaked, between 75 and 90 percent of the slaves brought to Cuba came after 1790.”⁸⁰ At the period of peak migration from Haiti to Cuba in the 1920s, Cuban slavery had ended just one a generation earlier, in 1886.

One space where the intense migratory experience from Haiti to Cuba was humanized was in the sharing of ritual traditions between the workers of different nations. A site of transnational collaboration between Afro-Cubans and migrating Afro-Haitians, ritual traditions could be both adapted and communicated, undergoing a secondary creolizations that created common ground for other types of communicative activity. These moves had important political implications. According to Carr, Haitians’ renowned spiritual practice was one way they were

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*, (Chicago, Ill: Chicago Review, 2004), 111.

able to resist racism in the context of Cuban society. The Haitian “*Vodú* (a religious practice, long associated with slave and post-emancipation forms of black solidarity)...was eventually assimilated by broad layers of the peasant population of eastern Cuba.”⁸¹ Haitians’ renowned abilities in herbal medicine were a skillset coveted by both Afro-Cubans and white Cubans. As Casey retells, “in 1936, Marcelino Rugera Aguila, a white, Cuban-born individual living in rural Camagüey required the expertise of a local Haitian healer.”⁸² Another moment demonstrates that a Haitian may have served as the religious leader of a heterogeneous group. In Yaguajay, Las Villas in 1936, police interrupted a large ceremony in which “more than 100 people surrounded Alberto Diaz, a Haitian,” who was leading the ritual. Casey suggests that there were “very many crossings” between Afro-Cuban and Afro-Haitian religious practices.⁸³ Perhaps the most fluid crossing was in the shared production of music.

As in Haiti, ritual music was one space where spiritual practices could be adapted to serve the needs of new communities in transnational contact. One Cuban woman (herself born to Haitian and Cuban parents), Dalia Timitoc Borrero, remembered a Haitian spiritual leader named Santiago Fiz on a coffee farm she grew up on in the 1930s. Fiz sang songs from “the war of the Haitians against the French” and “while he sang...beat the ground with a stick like they did in

⁸¹Barry Carr, "Identity, Class, and Nation: Black Immigrant Workers, Cuban Communism, and the Sugar Insurgency, 1925-1934," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 78, no. 1 (February 1998): 105.

⁸² Aguila’s son was sick, and he was cured by Luis with herbs, concoction, and *burjerías*.

⁸³ Casey understands religious practice to be adaptable to the needs of community members within specific historic conditions: “The fluidity of religious content and the fact that it transforms to reflect the changing needs of practitioners makes these religions particularly potent vehicles of community formation.” Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, 180.

Haiti[,] calling to his ancestors.”⁸⁴ That Cubans partook in, and likely reshaped, such rituals is worth note.

Cuban literature provides another window into these exchanges: in a passage in *Una Aventura de Salgari*, a short story by Cuban author and political activist Pablo de la Torriente Brau, a Cuban worker remembers “the polyglot and international camp of Dutch people from Aruba, the English from Barbados, Jamaicans, Haitians, Columbians, Gallegos, Venezuelans and Creoles, in the thick of darkness, waiting for the deep bowl of food, of sad songs from all the countries!”⁸⁵ If such scenes occurred while waiting for nutrition at a company store, what types of musical exchange took place outside such surveyed spaces?⁸⁶

The first big wave of Cuban-Haitian musical creolization travelled through these networks of season laborers. When they returned they brought with them guitars styles unique to Cuba and began spreading these throughout the countryside as well as Port-au-Prince. This is an influence that is “not widely recognized” in Haiti because their “music elided easily with the rural styles of the *mereng*.”⁸⁷ A poem by the *indigeniste* writer Carl Brouhard from 1928 shows how early these forms were creolizing:

*Melancholy prostitutes danced the meringue,
dreaming of a distant past...far away, and their
shoes clicked on the worn floor
Melancholy, they turned...turned
as in a dream to the sounds of a strange band: guitar,*

⁸⁴ Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba*, 184.

⁸⁵ De La Torrinete Brau, “Una Aventura de Salgrai,” 55. Quoted in Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba*, 135.

⁸⁶ Casey understands religious practice to be adaptable to the needs of community members within specific historic conditions: “The fluidity of religious content and the fact that it transforms to reflect the changing needs of practitioners makes these religions particularly potent vehicles of community formation.” Casey, p. 180.

⁸⁷ Averill, *A Day for the Hunter*, 39.

güiro, triangle, drum.

Commentators have suggested that Brouchard's use of a female subject read migrant women's resistance to U.S. occupation as examples of a subaltern cosmopolitanism. Valerie Klaussen, for instance, describes the how "prostitutes and *marcahndes* of early Indigenist ethnographies ..[function] as emblems of emergent forms of pan-Caribbean subaltern resistance, the negative and positive possibilities produced out of U.S. Imperialism in the region."⁸⁸

One of these positive possibilities was the creolization of Haitian music with Afro-Cuban instruments. Such instruments functioned in Brouchard's piece as tools of historical memory. Indeed, the poem is an inversion of Valdes's experience: melancholy prostitutes dreaming of the "distant past" are mediated through the diasporic encounter through the "dream...sounds" of Cuban instrumentation. The invocation of the *güiro* is to suggest its popular identification with both Taino and African instrumental antecedents,⁸⁹ and the triangle could be an oblique reference to West African bell patterns. This was a particularly charged debate ranging in the context of Cuba. "The occasional black and mulatto orchestras attempting to perform *danzones* with non-European hand percussion such as the *güiro* (gourd scraper) or the *chéquere* were

⁸⁸ Valerie Klaussen, *Migrant Revolutions*. P. 61.

⁸⁹ The links between rural African music in the Caribbean and indigenous music is an important topic that cannot be discussed at length in this paper. Largey and Manuel suggest that "Africans [in Saint-Dominique] also adapted instruments from Taino music, including the *tcha-tcha* (maracas) which functioned much like the West African *shekere* (gourd shaker covered with a beaded net) and the *lanbi* (blown conch shell), which was an adaptation of the Akan *abeng*, or blown cow's horn." These examples further support the idea that musical production was a highly protean practice where creolization and cultural co-creation could emerge. See Manuel and Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, (Philadelphia, US: Temple University Press, 2016), 145. For a discussion of the Taino roots of the *güiro*, see Largey and Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*, 81.

condemned for bringing “savage” Africanisms into the ballroom,”⁹⁰ explains Moore. Despite this, *danzón*’s popularization in Havana surged. Its very popularity created anxieties amongst the governing classes, and their objections would result in municipal ordinances in several towns banning the style. As Moore puts it, “the perceived African influences of the *Danzón* represented a serious threat to middle-class Cubans in the 19th century.”⁹¹

Guiros were not only spreading to Cuban ballrooms. As we have seen in Brouhard’s poem, their proliferation included Haitian countrysides and Port-au-Prince. And it was not only Cuban instruments that were evidence of influence of the unique vocalized harmonies of *son*, in which two voices are harmonized in thirds, so characteristic of *son*, started to proliferate in rural zones receiving return migrants. Clave sticks (known as *bwa*), playing explicit 3-2 clave rhythms, also proliferate the songs of this style. These groups were known as *twoubadou* groups,⁹² a both musically and etymologically Haitianized version of the troubadour group. Despite a fairly clear example of Cuban and rural Haitian creolization, primitivist ideologies that associate Haitian rural populations with unchanging tradition have led this music to be also read as “traditional” and incapable of change.⁹³ Thus a secondary creolization flew under the radar of many contemporary commentators—but its significance was not lost on writers such as Brouhard (or composers such as El Saeih and Valdes) who understood the ritual music of the

⁹⁰ Miguel Fialde, bandleader who was responsible for popularizing the new inclusivity of neo-African instrumentation and rhythmic structures, was accused of deriving *danzón* from infamous *abakuá* groups. See Moore, Robin D, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*, (Pittsburgh, Pa: U of Pittsburgh, 1997), 25.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² “These same ensembles go by many names; sometimes they’re simply called *ti bann...* or *twoubadou* groups.” Gage Averill, in *Alan Lomax’s Recordings in Haiti, 1936-1937*. Estate of Alan Lomax.

⁹³ Michael Largey, “Politics on the Pavement: Haitian Rara as a Traditionalizing Process,” *Journal of American Folklore* 113, no. 449 (2000): 239-254.

Haitian peasantry to be a site of an Afro-Atlantic dialogue unique to the historical moment of U.S. occupation and its consequent migrations.

The music of Cuba may have also entered Haiti through the Dominican Republic, whose experience of Spanish colonization meant that Cuban musical styles influenced the country with passing commerce and trade. The Dominican Republic, bordering Haiti on the East and also the site of a United States military occupation, had a long history of Haitian migration, where Haitians and especially Haitian women figured prominently in the markets and economic life of the borderlands.⁹⁴ One important late 1940s bandleader in Haitian popular music, Nemours Jean-Baptiste, was actually born in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic. Charles Dessalines, who played with many of the bands in the Vodou Jazz movement, explains that Nemours Jean Baptiste “was a Dominican—father Haitian and mother Dominican—and was born in Santo Domingo, so he was interested in playing Spanish music, like Cuban, guaracha, salsa, things like that. So we [the Vodou Jazz movement] had the influence of Spanish music.”⁹⁵ Nemours’s story demonstrates that the thousands of Haitian migrants to the Dominican Republic brought with them another version of the “live dialogue” linking the Black Atlantic populations in the multi-linguistic (and multi-rhythmic) Caribbean.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ For an excellent discussion of Haitian women and the particularly porous borderlands, see Lauren Derby, “Haitians, Magic, and Money: Raza and Society in the Dominican Borderlands, 1900 to 1937,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36, no. 3 (1994): 488-526.

⁹⁵ CC Smith and Tacite Lamothe Gerard, “Legends of Haitian Music,” *The Reggae & African Beat* (Archive: 1983-1988) 6, no. 2 (Mar 01, 1987): 15.

⁹⁶ On the subject of rhythm, Dessalines also suggests that Haiti was the source of Dominican merengue: “Dessalines maintains that the Dominican merengue is based on a Haitian rhythm that was appropriated during the Haitian rule over Santo Domingo from 1822—1844.” The stakes were high for Dessalines and other Haitians, as “meringue from the Dominican Republic... was very popular throughout the 40’s and 50’s.” This paper will not be able to address the topic in full. See CC Smith and Tacite Lamothe Gerard, “Legends of Haitian Music,” *The Reggae &*

As demonstrated previously, the opposite side of the Windward Passage⁹⁷ was home to Cuban elites who feared *danzon* for its perceived relationship to Haitian cultural forms. This is a hypothesis that has some support from contemporary researchers.⁹⁸ As Matthew Casey argues, “Burgeoning Cuban musical styles such as the contradanza and dances like the Tumba Francesa had their origins in Haiti and were transformed to create meaning in the new context, especially during Cuba’s independence wars.”⁹⁹ For instance, *danzon* “was associated with Haitians, Afro-Cubans, and independence from Spain. In 1874, independence leader Carlos Manuel de Céspedes described a dance in which freed slaves sang many ‘songs, in French Creole, that refer to our revolution.’”¹⁰⁰ This suggests an enduring Afro-Haitian impact on Oriente, where many of the neo-African forms that drove Cuba’s cultural revolutions (such as *danzon*) were

African Beat (Archive: 1983-1988) 6, no. 2 (Mar 01, 1987): 15.

⁹⁷ The Windward Passage is the part of the Caribbean sea that separates Eastern Cuba and Western Haiti.

⁹⁸ Latin arranger and composer Angel Fernandez believed that the cinquillo rhythm came to Cuba by way of Haiti during the mass immigration of the late 1700s and provided Cuban music its rhythmic foundation: "The economic prosperity of nineteenth-century Cuba allowed for dissemination of these rhythms to the United States. As a result, Cuba is most often given credit for the contribution of these rhythms. I believe that Haiti's contribution deserves wider recognition." In Christopher Washburne, "The Clave of Jazz: A Caribbean Contribution to the Rhythmic Foundation of an African-American Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 1 (1997): 63.

Ned Sublette similarly suggests, more explicitly, that the cinquillo has Haitian origins. “In the first half of the twentieth century,” he writes, “there were two contradanzas in Cuba; one in Havana and one in Orinete. The Haitians in Oriente added to the contradanza a touch vodú. They brought with them to cocoyé, which was sung and danced in comparsas by the Haitian cabildos in Oriente known as tumba francesa...in Saint Dominique the rhythm was called catá, a word of Bantu origin; in Cuba it was know as the cinquillo...It would be the foundation not only of Haitian meringue and Dominican meringue, but of the Cuban danzón and the bolero. See Sublette, Ned Sublette, *Cuba and its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 138.

⁹⁹ Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba*, 38.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

headquartered.

Labor Militancy and Communist Musicians

Transnational spiritual communities interfaced with communist and militant labor organizing in Oriente. Both took on new forms, due to the multination character of the participants. In doing so, new types of communities and dialogues emerged.¹⁰¹ Communist cadres in the party's Oriente chapter "campaigned to overturn the prohibition of "African" popular dancing decreed by municipal authorities in Santiago de Cuba, the site of the island's renowned carnival."¹⁰² Communists saw popular dance and music, apparently, as crucial sites for building international cross-class unity.

Labor organizing itself created the conditions for new dialogues between Haitians and Cubans to emerge. Life for cane cutters was not easy or simple. Strenuous demands were placed on cane cutters, and abusive employers withheld wages. These were just some of the difficulties that Haitians experienced in Cuba.¹⁰³ Militarized and racist border regulations, especially after 1923, were others.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Indeed, Matory has suggested that movements of international socialism should be considered as sites of Atlantic historic creation : "momentous transborder communities structured by forces other than "capitalism"—such as Islam and international socialism— are cast outside of this new monocausal grand narrative [of globalization]." See Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 36.

¹⁰² Barry Carr, "Identity, Class, and Nation: Black Immigrant Workers, Cuban Communism, and the Sugar Insurgency, 1925–1934," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 78, no.1 (1998): 115.

¹⁰³ "Cutting cane is a strenuous and onerous activity even in optimal conditions. As groups of men repeatedly swung their machetes for long hours, accidents were common...." Also: "The inherent difficulties of cutting cane on a massive scale were compounded for Haitians and workers of other nationalities by company abuse. One of the most notorious examples of sugar company abuse was the payment of workers with vales (vouchers) instead of cash." See Matthew Casey, "Haitians' labor and leisure on Cuban sugar plantations: the limits of company control", *New West Indian Guide*. 85 (Summer 2011): 5.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Casey's notes that forced vaccinations (which were charged to migrants but rarely administered) and, in an eerie echo of the Middle Passage, "the United Fruit Company sent

Yet even in these moments, workers challenged their dehumanizing experiences. Sugar cutters across nationalities, voicing shared grievances, led to the growth of militant agitation through strikes, unionizing, or affiliations with the communist party. For instance, in mid-January 1932, Haitians and Jamaicans protested pay cuts by orchestrating a work stoppage at the United States-controlled Cunangua mill. At other times, both the Cuban state and Afro-Cuban agricultural workers supported repatriation of Haitians, motivated by economic self-interest and new constructions of nationalism that claimed to be inclusive of Afro-Cubans with citizenship in their borders.¹⁰⁵ Exemplifying both dynamics was the story of a Haitian-born coffee farmer, José Caridad, who left a coffee contract and sold his belongings to support the Communist party, which he claimed was the only organization to defend immigrants' rights to stay in Cuba. Caridad declared that since the Cuban state was attempted to deport Haitians, he returned his land to his landlord to become a full time communist organizer. Caridad was described by Cuban authorities as possessing a current issue of *Bandera Roja* (Red Flag), a Communist newspaper whose front page carried an article under the heading: "In Oriente They are Hunting Haitians."¹⁰⁶

Moments of worker solidarity between Haitian migrants and Afro-Cubans are numerous. 1933, Cuban and immigrant workers, including Haitians, defied a divisive Cuban nationalist discourse and occupied a mill in Camagiüey and self-governing the space for two months before

medical personnel to ships, rejecting workers they believed were too weak to be productive and making it difficult for these individuals to leave the country." Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba*, 100.

¹⁰⁵ See Carr's discussion on how "U.S. Imperialism both opened spaces for collaboration and antagonism between Afro Cuban and Afro Caribbean cane cutters," in Carr, "Identity, Class, and Nation: Black Immigrant Workers, Cuban Communism, and the Sugar Insurgency, 1925-1934," 115.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of U.S. Imperialism: A Transnational History*, 169.

being met with violent repression. As Casey suggests, “The ideas of race and nation projected by lettered Haitians were less salient in the rural areas where individuals of diverse nationalities actually interacted. In fact, these tidy ideologies may have been created in response to the complex social relationships that cut across national lines in rural areas.”¹⁰⁷ In these instances, ritual communities, embodied in song and music, were one incentive for Afro-Cubans workers to resist the appeal of ethnocentric nationalism.

Bebo Valdes: between proletarian internationalism and Black Atlantic dialogues

Cuban musicians related to these transnational exchanges. Some built links with both popular spirituality and ritual music, while others entertained membership, or at least an affiliation, with the Cuban Communist party. Some did both. The mobility required of professional musicians meant that they were uniquely exposed to transnational dialogues. The story of Julio Cueva is instructive in this regard. He was known as the lead trumpet player for one of Cuba’s most popular bands, the *Modesto Don Azplazu*.¹⁰⁸ During one tour to the Middle East, he abruptly quit the band and moved to Madrid, where he joined the Communist party in 1936. It happened to be months before Spain’s civil war, and became a bandleader in the Republican army. He returned to Cuba and founded a new group, which performed regularly at

¹⁰⁷ Casey, 20. See also Whitney and Chailloux Laffita, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 37-8: “It could be argued, then, that the emergence of Cuban exceptionalism within the Caribbean between 1920 and 1940 was a political response by nationalist to the fact that Cuba--and especially eastern Cuba--looked too much like the rest of the Caribbean....Eastern Cuba in particular matched this wider Caribbean pattern, at least before 1940.” Robert Whitney & Graciela Chailloux Laffita, *Subjects or Citizens: British Caribbean Workers in Cuba, 1900-1960*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Mats Lundhal, *Bebo de Cuba*, 58.

the Radio station *Mil Diez*, administered by the *Partido Socialista Popular* (The Popular Socialist Party).¹⁰⁹

Bebo Valdes remembered Cueva as one of the nation's best jazz trumpet players, and was a fan of his work the legendary group *Hermanos Palau*. Valdes's admiration was reciprocated and he was invited to joined Cueva's own band. As a result of this relationship, Valdes began working for Radio *Mil Diez*. In 1947, artists associated with the station came under government surveillance and intimidation, and Valdes's friend was assassinated in a wave of political violence. He left the country and joined the band of Haitian musician Issa El Saeih's, whom he had met in Havana. Valdes thus joined a tradition of Cubans fleeing political persecution on Haitian soil.¹¹⁰

Valdes had also entered into a multi-decade long path of Afro-Haitian and Cuban musicians collaborating under framework of jazz. An early-recorded example in 1933, "Jazz and Hot Dance in Martinique," which included musicians from Haiti (such as saxophonist Emile Chancy) drummer and bandleader from Martinique named Flavius Notte, and a Cuban trumpet player (whose name is unknown). Music and jazz were early sites of multinational collaboration, and the example "Jazz and Hot Dance in Martinique" points to a larger section of musicians who forged employment networks and transnational communities under the framework of "jazz."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, the story of Manuel Fernández, a Cuban revolutionary fighter in the Spanish-Cuban war of independence who migrates to Haiti in 1870. In Casey (2010), 58.

¹¹¹ Averill, *A Day for the Hunter*, 321 Valdes was one of many musicians who travelled regularly to Cuba for performnces. Averill notes that "In the 1940s and 1950s, Haiti became a regular destination for visits by Latin orchestras such as Sonora Matancera, Siboney and the Xavier Cugat Orchestra. The Cuban *bolero* became a staple of Haitian bands for romantic songs, and the neighboring Dominican *merengue* exerted a strong influence as well." Of course, the influence went two ways: "Many of the major Haitian bandleaders of the 1950s and early 1960s got their

Valdes's experiences in Haiti seem to have led him to the knowledge he was seeking. According to Mats Lundhal's biography of Valdes, "Bebo [Valdes] insists on the Haitian inheritance that exists in Cuban music. He made his first observations in the 1940s in Port-au-Prince and concluded that 'the things I heard in Port-au-Prince [the African ones] I've never heard them so beautifully. It was one of the purest things I've heard in my life.'"¹¹² The suggestion of Valdes that elements Cuban music had "inherited" from Haitian music is striking, as well as the clearly profound impact such elements had on Valdes's trajectory and work.¹¹³

The collaboration between Valdes and the musicians of the Vodou Jazz movement were dynamic examples of J. Leonard Matory's metaphor of the "live dialogue" he uses to characterize cultural interaction and transformation between Black Atlantic communities. Live dialogue explains a dynamic process; it also offers a coherent theory of Atlantic "Africanity":

The ongoing 19th to 21st-century dialogue among the massive urban black populations of the Atlantic perimeter has, to my mind, done as much to constitute the Africanity and the creativity of these populations as has any ancestral African or plantation culture. The social contexts of not only Candomblé but also Dahomean/Beninese Vodun, Cuban Ocha, West African and Cuban Ifá divination, Rastafarianism, North American jazz, and black Protestantisms all over the Anglophone Americas (to name just a few famous instances of Afro-Atlantic "folk" culture) have always had important supralocal, interethnic and cross-class dimensions. In all these traditions, African-American practitioners borrowed from, studied, and communicated with Africa (and strategically manipulated Africa's image) as they institutionalized their own African-American forms of solidarity and social hierarchy. An African-Americanist cultural history need not assume, even in the context of plantation slavery, that African Americans lacked a means of access to Africa. And they

start in these Cuban-influenced djaz of the 1930s and 1940s." See Averill, 89.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ One is reminded of Stuart Hall's comment that "the active work on existing traditions and activities, their active reworking so that they come to a different way: they appear to "persist" – yet from one period to another, they come to stand in a different relation to the ways working people live and the ways they define their relations to each other, to "other others" and to the condition of life." Quoted in Lipstiz 1990, 11.

never lacked their own strategic priorities.¹¹⁴

Was music a uniquely receptive vessel for this antiphony? Transnational Black political formations emerged that were, according to Lara Putnam, “not limited to political leaders, nor to eloquent authors, nor to the print public sphere. The border crossing spread of black-identified music and dance in this era (under names like jazz, calypso, mento, rumba, and *son*) reflected a different kind of Black internationalism, one that was generated and spread by people of varied ages and stations, young working-class men and women most of all.”¹¹⁵

Bebo Valdes’s life trajectory provides a striking example of an almost liberatory synchronicity or “coevalness”¹¹⁶ embedded in Black musical internationalism. Valdes was born in Quivacán, Cuba, the oldest of six children. His grandfather, Gabriel, had escaped enslavement, defeating dog packs with a machete. However, Gabriel died when Valdes’s father was one year old, exemplifying the liberatory and fatal potentialities of maroonage. As a result, Valdes claims that he “didn’t know anything about my African origins...I suppose it is Yoruba based on a conversation with my grandmother. My dad’s family gets lost with my grandfather Gabriel because my father never met him, he died very young.”¹¹⁷

Valdes had completed a program at the Conservatorio Municipal de la Habana, in 1937—or almost completed, rather. He deliberately sabotaged his final exit exam and did not appear at his graduation,¹¹⁸ explaining he did not require the validation and that the knowledge he needed

¹¹⁴ J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), 36.

¹¹⁵ Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 4.

¹¹⁶ See Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 15.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Mats Lundhal, *Bebo de Cuba: Bebo Valdés y su Mundo*. (Barcelona: RBA, 2008), 78.

¹¹⁸ See Mats Lundahl, *Bebo de Cuba*, 46: “His last course consisted in reviewing everything that

came elsewhere: “It was very important to me to get experience in the streets, because conservatory is one thing, and the real world is very different¹¹⁹ ...I was missing a bit of school from the streets.”¹²⁰ Valdes rejected the stability of being a middle-school music teacher and concert pianist, seeking something different, a connection with the popular and Afro-Atlantic musical traditions.

Bebo Valdes’s formative connections with the routes and street smart of the African diaspora, based on the above quotations, seem to come from his experience in Haiti and with Orchestra Saieh. Valdes’s experiences point to how such “live dialogues” across rural and urban and between nations profoundly shaped the identities of actors, formations of popular cultures, and historical processes that characterized Haiti, Cuba and the Caribbean at this time.

Valdes had deep impacts on this decade’s popular Vodou Jazz songs. He returned to Haiti in 1956 to perform and record with the popular Haitian vocalist Guy Durosier. The new band was called (in English) “Guy Durosier and His Rhythm.” Their hit song was a kreyol adaptation of a Venezuelan song known as “Mathilda,” but its lyrics were changed to depict the metaphor of Haitians expropriation in Cuba.

*Li ba'm youn kouo ba,
Li pati, l'al Kiba.
Sènkant dola, mesye, Mwen pèdi,
Lajan pou'm achte youn uye bogota.
Lajan m'te seere anba matla'm,
Li pretann tankou li t'ap fe'm lamou,
Li passé men e li vole lajan mwen,
E li pati, l'al Kiba.
One day a big hit,*

the students had already and in Bebo’s case, it did not make sense. That was the reason why he did not show up to the last exams of music theory and solfage.”

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 47.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 50.

*Left, took off to Cuba.
Fifty dollars, sir, I lost
The money with which I was going to buy an old tartan (boat)
I had hidden the money under the mattress.
She faked making love with me,
Put her hand under the mattress, and took the money.
She left, took off to Cuba.¹²¹*

The song could be read in multiple ways: as a simple account of love lost, of a male gaze shaming female autonomy, or of gendered struggles within the context of the Haitian migrant community. Looking at Haitian literature of this time opens up some other possible meanings. Within the *indigineste* movement, for instance, writers understood migratory women as agents of revolutionary change. “[M]igrant female subjects mapped alternative modern spaces that resisted occupation authority and predict today’s diasporic circuits of exchange,”¹²² explains Klaussen, and perhaps the protagonist’s mobility represents both agency and displacement in the context of rural Haiti’s impossible conditions under occupation.

“Mathilda” as with “Peze Kafe” captures the multiple levels of anxiety and displacements facing Haitians during the occupation years. Valdes’s recording of the song is significant to this discussion: he willfully comments on Cuba as a site of expropriation of Haitian labor and desire. Cuba and the Haiti were linked by shared experiences of Imperialism that both brought the both histories of rural workers and musicians into intimate contact. Imperial interventions also exposed the limits of state hegemony, revealing and deepening cleavages between lighter skinned elites and African masses, divisions deliberately exploited by occupying powers. Often such debates, as will be discussed below, took place in the context of what was acceptable, and

¹²¹ Lundhal, *Bebo de Cuba*, 82.

¹²² Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions*, 61.

unacceptable, music for the “classes” versus the “masses.”¹²³

Bebo Valdes was sensitive to the struggles of Haitian migrant laborers as demonstrated by the consistent messaging of the songs he collaborated on. The musical legacy he left in Haiti expresses this transnational solidarity. Vodou Jazz’s invocation of the peasantry’s cultural traditions would influence Valdes his future compositional work and aesthetic practices.

The story of Bebo Valdes was not the only example of concrete heritages between Haitian migration to Cuban and the development of Vodou Jazz. One popular song sung by *Jazz des Jeunes* in the 1940s reflected the influence of music, spiritual communities, and technologies of survival among Haitian migrants in Cuba. The song, titled “The Modern Herbalist” (El Yebero Moderno), is sung in the Spanish language and reflects the importance of herbal medicines and healers for both medical and ontological aid:

The rumour of preaching is heard
which says something like this:
The little herbalist, arrived
I bring sacred herbs for the throat
I bring “Caisimon” for the hinchazon [illness]
I bring a path opener for your destiny
I bring the gruda for him that is sneezing
I also bring albohaca (basil) for people who are skinny
The apaoste for the frotas
I bring the vetive for they throat
And with this herb, you will marry.
Se oyo un rumor de un pregonar
Que dice asi...
El yerberito llego, llego,
Traigo hierba santa pa la garganta
Traigo caisimon pa la hinchazon
Traigo abre camino pa tu destino

¹²³ Putnam describes the politics of these designations and their culture separation between these in the context of the British Caribbean in her work *Radical Moves*, 50. I have borrowed it to apply a similar distinction of identify and worldview vis-à-vis the politics of racial formation in Haiti.

Traigo la pruda pa el que ‘elstornuda
Tambien en traigo a’bohaca
Pa la gente flaca
Al apasote para les frotos
El vitive, para el que no ve
Y con esa hierba se casa usted.¹²⁴

The invocation of a healer as “path opener” is particularly interesting in context of migratory patterns. Did a path to Haiti need to be reopened, or a path to communal traditions that were no longer accessible in the context of migratory isolation? Perhaps the swollen throat that is mentioned in the prior line is a site of alienation or homesickness. Linking the biological aspects of healing to emotional and political diagnoses was a long-standing practice: healers in Vodou traditions were often successful because of their ability to discern the social basis for illnesses. As James Sweet writes of an enslaved 18th-century Gbe-speaking Vodou healer in Brazil, Domingos Alvarez, “Domingos successfully diagnosed deep social tensions and tied them to physical ailments.”¹²⁵

A Cuban song with clear connotations of healing and divinity entered in the repertoire of Haitian popular music by at least the mid-1940’s via *Jazz des Juenes*. The band may have been responding to adoption, by migrating Haitians, of Afro-Cuban divinities. Within the Vodou pantheon, *Lwa* refer to regionally and culturally specific deities that are honored through

¹²⁴ “Initiation a la musique avec le Super Jazz des Jeunes,” René Ch. Beaubrun. *Haiti: Editions du Tambour*, (25 Novembre 1962), 201.

¹²⁵ James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 208. Alvarez was a Gbe-speaking healer who was sold into slavery to Brazil by the Dahomean Empire. A fascinating case, that lies on the assumption that tales of Alvarez’s spiritual work may have been circulated through the Black Atlantic, is of the story of a Haitian migrant in Cuba named Napoleon François. When he was convicted of unspecified political crimes by the Cuban state, he changed his name to “Domingo Alvarez” to resist identification—and perhaps, to invoke this spiritual worker’s legacy. See Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba*, 129.

elaborate and creative rituals involving dance, performance, and music. “*Lwa* also have their own music in the form of ritual songs. Ceremonies usually feature a series of songs intended to invite the *lwa* to participate....other songs follow in a prescribed order, each devoted to a particular *lwa*.”¹²⁶ Given that some Haitians were often identified in Cuba as *Santeros*, or disciples of Afro-Cuban *Santería* religious practices, it would make sense that the appropriation of a song could be a way to continue to honoring a *lwa* from outside an indigenous pantheon. James Sweet makes the argument that such “adoptions” of new religious deities within Black Atlantic vodou was commonplace, and even Jesus Christ was one such adoptee. The main criteria was reciprocity between the *lwa* and the devotee: “Devotion required reciprocity, and if the Christian God could not deliver an improved quality of life, some other god might.”¹²⁷

Perhaps that god could be from the *Santería* religious systems, which would have ensured a community of worship and solidarity abroad. Tellingly, the musical systems involved were not so different structurally: *rara* drum ensembles were “similar in function to the *tumba francesa* and *batá* ensembles of Cuba in the sense that in each it is the largest, lowest-pitch drum that leads the group.” Both ensembles honored specific deities in pantheons that had both undergone significant creolization.

Another possible explanation is that the song encoded, like music from the Vodou pantheon, specific herbal remedies the song invokes. The song may have been one example of a dialogue that communicated localized agro-botanical knowledge to Haitian migrants. Perhaps these were some of the incentives for deeper cultures of musical exchange. Their link to the

¹²⁶ Largey, Maneul, and Bilby, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, 150.

¹²⁷ James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World*, 4.

necessities for survival is, nonetheless, reminiscent of Vodou song, which in the discussion above demonstrated similar themes. Indeed, the Haitian peasantry's tradition of gardening continued in Cuba: "many *braceros*, especially Haitians, did cultivate small plots as a way of surviving the increasingly lengthy *tiempo muerto* between harvest seasons."¹²⁸ All of this speaks to Lara Putnam's observation that "supernatural manipulation served as a kind of lingua franca across the Greater Caribbean."¹²⁹

Another song *Jazz des Juenes* integrated into their repertoire was sung by the communist composer and trumpet virtuoso, Julio Cuevas. His song "A Luchar" was performed by *Jazz des Jeunes*:

El cha cha cha hay que bailar
Sus pasos yo aprovecharé
Para luego echar un pié
Porque la vida, hay que gozar.

El chachacha, chachacha quiero bailar
El chachacha, chachacha que me hace gozar.
Esta es la vida en mi Cuba Tropical

Se lucha, se baila y se goza
Se goza, se baila y se lucha
Esta es la vida en mi Cuba tropical¹³⁰

One must dance the cha cha cha
I will benefit from it's steps
for later I will put my foot out

¹²⁸ Barry Carr, "Identity, Class, and Nation: Black Immigrant Workers, Cuban Communism, and the Sugar Insurgency, 1925-1934", 117.

¹²⁹ Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 51. Putnam has thought through the new questions such cross-cutting spiritual languages pose to theories of origins: these examples "offer contrasting explanations for the commonalities found among diasporic peoples. Do they reflect African roots? New World oppressive systems? Or perhaps not old world roots but New World routes -- ongoing exchange rather than unidirectional diffusion?" in Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 59. We will see evidence of exchange and negotiation in the subsequent paragraphs.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 239.

Because life, must be enjoyed

I want to dance the chachacha, chachacha
The chachacha, chachacha makes me enjoy.
This is the life in my Tropical Cuba

We struggle, we dance and we enjoy
We enjoy, we dance and we struggle
This is the life in my tropical Cuba

That the two of the major Spanish-language songs of *Jazz des Jeunes* deal explicitly with herbal healing, and communist-inflected class struggle, suggests a more-than-ancillary relationship to the political and cultural education that Haitians migrants experienced and generated while in Cuba.¹³¹ Indeed, I argue here that the Cuban influences of the Vodou Jazz movement “worked” specifically because they *did* cultural work by synthesizing and storing the experiences of the hundreds of thousands of Haitians who travelled to Cuba during the first three decades of the 20th century.

The prior section aimed to situate the cultural work of Bebo Valdes, Issa el Saieh, and *Jazz des Jeunes* in a web of interactions between migratory Haitians and Cuban sugar workers in

¹³¹ I use “education” here loosely. Clearly the relationship was closer to an exchange, or the collaborative construction of new bodies of knowledge, than a one way flow between Cuban educators and Haitian students. However, the subject of education, it is interesting to note that Cuban prisons doubled as informal educational institutions where Haitians learned how to read and write—often from left wing political activists. See Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba*, 127: “The Cuban prison system served as a site of both literacy and radicalism in early twentieth century Cuba, though incarceration cannot explain all Haitians’ participation in union activities. While in prison, Haitians like Augusto Manuel Pool took advantage of the penal system’s education programs. “Lacking all instruction,” he wrote to the jailer, “I wish to take advantage of my time in this [place] to acquire the knowledge that is so necessary in life.”⁸⁹ Newspapers were available to inmates in at least some Cuban jails as well. In addition to the violent and inhuman conditions of prisons, Cuban writers from the 1920s and 1930s describe them as places where individuals interacted constantly and became radicalized. Carlos Montenegro’s 1937 novel *Hombres sin mujer* poetically explains that prisoners were cut off from the outside world, but not from each other. “In the presidio, solitude did not exist. It was the great tragedy of a common solitude.””

Oriente. The prior discussion offered vignettes into the types of interactions between religious and musical systems in order to adequately account for the practice of Afro-Atlantic diaspora, which, as Charles Carnegie reminds us, “requires the ethnography of nonmetropolitan sites that were and are a part of the metropolitan circuit.”¹³² Such exchanges profoundly changed the rural cultural process of Haiti and the plantation societies of eastern Cuba. Participants in these exchanges created new techniques for administering health, practicing self-governance, and honoring the spirits. As in rural Haitian communities, music and song played structurally important roles in facilitating these interactions, as they produced a communal commentary on the experiences of migration. These songs stored new knowledge garnered by the web of these interactions.

Valdes’s work and life story point to this metropolitan circuit as well as rural sites of exchange and power. His life and music were shaped by the politics of a Cuban national project that was in the thrust of contradictory ideas about race, nation, and music. Into a vacuum where Black political organizations were banned, communists made inroads into plantation economies dominated by Afro-Cuban and Afro-Caribbean workers. While declaring himself a liberal, the politics of anticommunism targeted Valdes, spurring a preemptive self-anointed exile to Port-au-Prince. Bebo Valdes’s life demonstrated the power that international coalitions in both performative practices and labor solidarities had in effecting the material and cultural networks of the interwar Black Atlantic. “Maybe it wasn’t strange” writes Mats Lundhal, “that Bebo adapted so well[,] and that the Haitian musicians continued talking, after sixty years, with near-euphoria about the influence that Bebo had, not only for pianists, but among a generation of

¹³² Charles V. Carnegie, “Reaching for the Border,” *Small Axe* 19 (2006): v.

Haitian musicians more generally.”¹³³ Valdes’s work late into his life would pay tribute to both his work with El Saieh and the Afro-Haitian musical legacies he learned from. It was a mutual influence, not dissimilar to the Haitians’ adoption of the title of *Santero*. Despite, or because, of Bebo Valdes’s Afro-Cubanness, an acclaimed innovator Cuban Jazz was fundamental to the creation of Vodou Jazz, as Vodou Jazz was fundamental to his own artistic oeuvre.

¹³³ Lundhal, *Bebo de Cuba*, 83.

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CHAPTER 3

NEW DESIRES AND FORCIBLE SOOTHING: HAITIANS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS TOGETHER AGAINST THE GRAIN

In Maurice Casseus's novel *Viejo*,¹³⁴ a Haitian migrant sugar cane cutter named Mario (known as a *Viejo*, after whom the novel is named) is the focal point around which international resistance to U.S. occupation is formed. While on a sugar plantation in Cuba, Mario is introduced to Marxist internationalism, participates in labor strikes, and returns to Haiti to participate in the historic 1928 student revolts at the American administered Damien agricultural school. The year 1928 saw falling coffee prices, increased taxes, and delayed elections, making the revolts particularly contagious and disastrous to the legitimacy of the U.S. occupation. They ultimately led to a general strike.

Despite the celebration of Mario's ties to Marxist internationalism in Cuba and militant direction action at Damien, the novel somewhat schizophrenically adopts a very different analysis and programs of change and political programs in post-occupation Haiti. Mario's creolized nature is both inspiring and anxiety inducing for Casseus. "By the novel's end," explains Valerie Klaussen, "he relies more and more on the ideological solutions that *noirisme*

¹³⁴ Maurice Casseus, *Viejo*, (Port-au-Prince: Editions "La Presse," 1935).

proposes”¹³⁵ rather than locating political organizing, so central to the books’ development, as the central site of transformation. *Noirisme* posited an ensemble of biological determinism, Afrocentrism and vanguardist ideas about Black leadership as solutions for Haiti’s post-occupation crisis. These ideologies centered the Haitian masses discursively, but also spoke for them and down to them. For instance, *Noirisme* rejected democracy because it did not derive from black racial psychology.¹³⁶

In fact, Casseus suggests Mario’s working-class transnationalism is also a potential site of contamination. These anxieties were fueled almost entirely by the political and psychological economies of the U.S. occupation. Casseus suggests that those who “worship the God called the dollar”¹³⁷ become infected with a disease and turn into a “new race.” In a passage that preempts Franz Fanon, the discourse on money idolatry is linked with white supremacy: “The reign of the dollar in the black island spread like leprosy the supremacy of (white) skin,” and suggests that those who hail its logic are “*fadré de blanc* [made-up in white, or wear white make up].”¹³⁸ In one dream sequence, those who become *fadré de blanc* are African-American jazz musicians:

A hand lifted him up, projected him into an atmosphere saturated with the strains of jazz, *congo-paillette*, slow blues, and *pignette*, music that Mario himself conducted in black tie and white gloves. The orchestra was white and Mario was white, but the women dancing were as black as swallows. Olive was there, dancing with another Mario, the one that he really was. Playing a sweet Negro melody, the orchestra accompanied the graceful rising and falling of Olive’s hips as if she were fornicating with some beautiful, invisible, and fantastic Guinean god. But the black Mario who had accompanied her to the first of the *petro* had

¹³⁵ Valerie Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions*, 98.

¹³⁶ David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Color and National Independence in Haiti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 172.

¹³⁷ “Ensensait l’idole ‘Dollar.’” Casseus, *Viejo*, 56.

¹³⁸ Casseus, *Viejo*, 56.

disappeared. And the white conductor's gold baton now amplified the rhythm as it slowed.¹³⁹

In this scene, Mario becomes aware of his blackness transforming into a commodity, not only through the political rule of the occupation, but through the white gaze which becomes the main vehicle of social discipline. Mario finds himself transmuted into a white conductor, an eerie parable for the white commercial success in Black cultural domains known as jazz.¹⁴⁰ His hypersexualized being is built into the commodity gaze, and somehow the music is a link to the alienation to his own body and community. Klaussen's analysis is apt: "The scene evokes the dance sequences of 1930s American cinema, and Mario is lifted up and "projected" into an atmosphere drenched with the stains of diasporic music...Black musical forms—American, Haitian, and African alike—are co-opted...racial contact, here, becomes a mass cultural aesthetic."¹⁴¹

Viejo was part of a movement in which the meanings and representations of Vodou suddenly became strategically essential for groups vying for leadership in Haiti. A constellation of forces, and not only Haitians, fought over the definition and meanings of Vodou. Some, including Haitian art music composers, sought to enter Vodou into circuits of commodity exchange. Others, such as U.S. occupation planners, were determined to link Haitian Vodou (and Haitian people) to discourses of primitivism and savagery. New classes of nationalists, following the trend of neighboring national elites who embraced their subalterns, strove to marry ritual music of Vodou to "legitimate" Euro-derived cultural forms. Vodou Jazz enters this highly

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ The (ironically named) Euro-American Paul Whiteman was, for instance, thought of as "the King of Jazz" during the 1920s, and publically criticized the music of his Afro-Trinidadian contemporaries for its perceived roughness. See Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 159.

¹⁴¹ Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions*, 79.

contested debate about the meanings and usages of “Vodou” with a different fusion in mind. As it engaged the culture of Haiti’s peasantry, musicians of the Vodou Jazz movement self-merged it with another internationally known musical genre, one also locked in a battle of recognition with Western music: Jazz. What was unique about the Vodou Jazz movement was their obstinate refusal to strip Vodou-associated performative practice of their socio-historic significance. Rather, Vodou Jazz ensembles foreground the peasantry’s mode of production as a solution to Haiti’s loss of sovereignty and identity during the U.S. occupation.

This chapter will begin by analyzing the vectors of capitalism and Vodou commodification. Vodou, as will be shown below, was central to the construction of new cultures of U.S. foreign policy and the white race. It will then examine how the Haitian bourgeoisie and *milat* classes debated the meaning of the peasantry’s music, specifically in their struggle over the proper representation of the five beat *mereng* pattern, considered distinct to Haiti’s peasantry. The chapter will close by demonstrating how the solidarities and exchanges between African Americans and Haitian artists provided a solution to a crisis of national identity that was able to re-appropriate, briefly at least, the cultural and historical legacy of a displaced Vodou tradition, which created a space for the subaltern speak—or sing.

New Desires and Forcible Soothing: Commodities and de/re-Vodouization

While Maurice Casseus wrote fiction, his concerns of coordinated market penetration and peasant displacement was anything but. U.S. economic planners entered the country with the explicitly-stated intent of replacing Haitian desires with American ones: “If they are to be citizens of an independent self-governing nation,” explained the occupation’s financial adviser, Arthur C. Millspaugh, “[they] must acquire, or at least a larger number of them must acquire, a

new set of wants.”¹⁴² Scottie Tissue and Gold Medal Flour, among many other American brands, appeared in bulk in Haitian stores.¹⁴³ Early American visits to Haiti during the occupation complained of Haitians’ illiteracy in the civilization of commodities. One representative of American business reflected in the city of Cap Hatien in 1919:

A search in the shops failed to reveal anything of interest to a foreigner...the liveliest thing in town while I was there was a merry go round, which after a run of five months in Port-au-Prince had just been set up by an American. The whole town was in excitement...It was a perfect illustration of just how naïve are the Haitians. Any kind of work undertaken for their betterment will have to take into consideration their long isolation from the very commonplaces of modern civilized life.¹⁴⁴

American overseers linked commodity penetration to civilization, and the planners of the occupation were quick to label Vodou ritual as the cause of Haiti’s “lack of progress.”

Millspaugh, for instance, attacked Haitian Vodou as evidence of a lack of culture:

Negroes in Africa were probably not lacking in rudimentary culture, in simple organization and capacity for progress, but the slave trade could hardly have been without effect on the psychology of the people who were to found and populate the republic of Haiti...[Haitians] had been drawn from different tribes and separated regions. In their new home[,] plantations were isolated, and until independence there seems to have been little except color, common misfortune and hatred of whites to create in the slave population feelings of solidarity and national unity...they long preserved their primitive fetishism and voodooism.¹⁴⁵

As demonstrated above, Vodou was precisely such a syncretic cultural form that did create generated communal identity and coordinated activity beyond the “hatred of whites.”¹⁴⁶ But

¹⁴² Quoted in Schmidt, *The Occupation of Haiti*, 155.

¹⁴³ Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 50.

¹⁴⁴ Inman, Samuel Guy. *Through Santo Domingo and Haiti: A Cruise with the Marines*. 1919.

¹⁴⁵ Arthur C. Millspaugh, *Haiti Under American Control: 1915-1930*. (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1931), 7.

¹⁴⁶ For Sidney Mintz, “*vadou*, like any other complex of belief and practices, is a vital, living body of ideas and behaviors, carried in time by its practitioners, and responsive to the changing character of social life.” In Sidney Mintz, “Introduction,” in Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, (New York: Schocken, 1972), 13.

unbeknownst to Millspaugh, Vodou was set to be one of Haiti's most lucrative commodity exports—although not for Haitians themselves.

As outlined in chapter 1, it is clear that musical production intersected with and embodied several of the Haitian's peasantry's social and ritual activities. These included practices associated with the Vodou pantheon, including *rara* festivals, in which conceptions of Haitian history and politics were narrated from the perspective of Haiti's rural and hybrid working-class/rural populations. Music also organized activity related to agricultural labor, such as in *combite* agricultural work collectives, and in the encoding of specific herbal knowledge in songs. In general, the practice of generating rhythmic grooves and sharing songs was closely linked to the social continuity of the Haitian peasantry, within and over generations.

Musical production thus played crucial roles in the production of communal identities, labor organization, and specific technical knowledge during periods of migration and displacement. During the most advanced moments of Haitian migration to Cuba, accelerated by seismic shifts in global economic changes linked to the U.S. Marine occupation, musical exchange facilitated transnational dialogues between Afro-Cubans and other migrant laborers. These exchanges seem to have had lasting resonances in the culture of Haitian migrants, so much so that they changed the music cultures of the Haitian peasantry in migrant-sending zones.

The music also dealt with another major shift: the U.S. occupation's epic transformation of Haiti into a coffee exporting state with a centralized economic and military bureaucracy. Through customs receipts, import/export controls, increased taxes, the occupation generated both new mechanisms of control. Civil servants were needed administer these mechanisms. For instance, while merchants facilitating rural to urban exchange had existed in generations prior, these roles were strengthened and made essential to supporting a centralized bureaucracy. The

taxing of these goods became an issue of national security: “They represented the state’s primary source of revenues before, during and after the occupation.”¹⁴⁷ Eventually the Haitian state developed the ability to collect taxes on goods bought and sold among peasants in rural markets, which had been previously unenforceable. “The poorest and most heavily taxed sector of Haitian society was now being squeezed harder.”¹⁴⁸ Economic centralization was both a cause and effect of these new technologies of expropriation, and as Trouillot suggests, “economic centralization also contributed to the growth of urban parasitic groups, as many provincials rushed to Port-au-Prince, hoping to grab choice places in the state apparatus.”¹⁴⁹

These designs were also attempts to disrupt Haitian subsistence methods of production. Millsbuagh was quite aware of the obstacles that the self-sufficiency of Haiti’s peasantry presented:

It was evident that an increase of agricultural production necessary to the attainment of an adequate standard of living could not be accomplished, at least within a measurable period, if reliance were placed solely on peasant cultivation of their holdings. Small farms and gardens under individual management were not generally believed to be adapted to the production of tropical exports in competition with other tropical countries...Individualistic small farming appeared to present serious obstacles to the employment of capital.¹⁵⁰

By 1930, agricultural land had been purchased or leased in Haiti by seven American corporations, which occupied a total of nearly 50,000 acres.¹⁵¹

All of these dynamics led to a scenario in which the balance of power, one that had set the parameters of Haitian politics for generations, was fundamentally altered. “It signaled the beginning of the end of regional economics,” writes Trouillot. “In 1906, the city had 101,133

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba*, 65. See also Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 48-9.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. For more on this subject, see Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 118-120.

¹⁴⁹ Trouillot, *State Against Nation*, 104.

¹⁵⁰ Arthur C. Millspaugh, *Haiti Under American Control*, 153.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

people. Despite an increase in international out migration, by 1950 Port-au-Prince had 143,534 inhabitants; just under half were born in the Haitian countryside.” For a country of 2.4 million, the migration of 70,000 to a single city was significant. As Casey observes within the world-historical context, the “global transition from informal networks to state bureaucracy was playing out in Haiti.”¹⁵² What was distinct about this process was that a foreign army orchestrated it.

Urbanization and peasant displacement were not accidental effects of the U.S. occupation. The disruption of this economy was a deliberate tactic that fit occupiers’ ideological and economic objectives. Their objective was to create proletarian laborers. Millspaugh praises an American company, the Haitian-American Sugar Company, for providing 1,000 jobs to Haitians, which “supplemented in this way the meager returns from their garden plots”¹⁵³, and who also become consumers of American products.

Vodou was an adaptable set of beliefs and institutions, which could respond to changing demographic conditions to optimize land use, while maintaining cultures of solidarity and decentralized collectively central to the Haitian peasantry.¹⁵⁴ It was exactly this aspect of Vodou that led U.S. Marine planners to criminalize it—to facilitate a strategy that would, as Millspaugh said, “create a new set of wants.”¹⁵⁵ This discussion will demonstrate how, paradoxically, the

¹⁵² Casey, *Haitian Migrants in Cuba*, 97.

¹⁵³ Millspaugh, *Haiti Under American Control*, 153.

¹⁵⁴ Gerald F. Murray, “Population Pressure, Land Tenure, and Voodoo: The Economics of Haitian Peasant Ritual.” in *Beyond the Myths of Culture: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Eric B. Ross (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 316.

¹⁵⁵ Ironically, part of this was the dismantling of education systems that were not geared exclusively to agricultural production. “Before the intervention,” wrote Millspaugh, “‘classical’ education had guided young Haitians ‘from, rather than towards, productive industry. This is the primary cause of the low productivity of Haiti. . . . it is therefore essential that the education system should, at the present time, be designed to furnish agricultural education to the rural classes.” Arthur C. Millspaugh, *Haiti Under American Control: 1915-1930*. (Boston: World

ban on Vodou created a “new set of wants” for U.S. Marine occupiers, and contributed the importance Vodou would play as central site of meaning, for both Americans and Haitians, in subsequent generations.

U.S. Imperialism and changing global relations initiated by World War I hastened the process of racial reconsolidation in terms of black and white.”¹⁵⁶ In Marine accounts during this heightened age of U.S. military expansion, such as *Black Bagdad: The Arabian Nights Adventures of a Marine Captain in Haiti*, Haiti’s blackness becomes a backdrop upon which the whiteness of Irish-American, German-American, and Polish-American troops could be constructed.¹⁵⁷

Marines were actively shaken when their encounters with the sonic worlds of peasant Haiti during their occupation rounds. During their campaign against rural guerilla insurgents named *Cacos* from 1918-1920, one Marine remembered:

We passed the [*Caco*] outpost with no resistance but after passing them about 150 *Cacos* fell in behind us armed with rifles, machetes, and sharp pointed sticks, keeping up an incessant blowing of conch horns and beating of drums....at the second outpost...a much larger force...fell in rear of us also keeping up the conch horn music which will never be forgotten by the men as it was the weirdest of sounds under the circumstances any of us had ever heard.¹⁵⁸

The way in which “the incessant blowing of conch horns and beating of drums” unsettled Marines on patrol and was perceived as a threat, informed Captain Campbell’s promise, in the fall of 1915, to burn the houses and destroy the crops of the *Cacos* “if they blow anymore

Peace Foundation, 1931), 162.

¹⁵⁶ Shannon Rose Riley, *Performing Race and Erasure: Cuba, Haiti, and US Culture, 1898–1940*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

conches.”¹⁵⁹ Perhaps the engagement with this neo-African music was disturbing because it demonstrated the cultural identity of those who colonial planners sought to turn into consumers and laborers for U.S. capital. The intensity of the particular cultural engagements spawned by imperial encounter, and its interaction with a stable system of subsistence agriculture, was perhaps not the self-understanding that Marines had signed up for. Many threatened to quit: “We tried to keep *esprit de corps* high to cover for service which was often disillusioning,” [so much so] “that we sometimes wondering just what was right or wrong” and “what it was all about.”¹⁶⁰

The Marines, a majority of them younger, southern white men,¹⁶¹ had not been ready to understand the power and interpretive agency of a culture that had resisted similar attempts to repress it for over a century. “Coming face to face with Haitians on Haitian soil would force U.S. American men to confront countless unexpected cultural realities,” explains Mary Renda. “Haitian historical discourses, for example, embedded in architecture and in social practices as well as in printed volumes, held out alternative interpretations of Haiti’s rich relation to the United States.”¹⁶² One such social practice, clearly, was in the production of ritual music to confront the invasion of self-governing territories.

Vodou: From Threat to Commodity

“No commodity is quite so strange/as this commodity called cultural exchange.”

--Dave and Iola Brubeck, *The Real Ambassadors*.

¹⁵⁹ Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 42.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 43.

¹⁶¹ Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 101.

¹⁶² Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 17.

“Relations of power at work in the occupation gave Marines access to Haitians—their bodies and their services—as well as to Haitian cultural objects and lore. Ironically, this turned out to be more profitable...than the development of Haitian agricultural or manufacturing pursuits.”

--Mary A. Renda,
Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940.

A crisis of confidence and purpose in the Marines was resolved only when they were permitted access to what had been prohibited. As the occupation continued, officers’ memoirs begin recording their interest in learning about “Voodoo” and other aspects of Haitian culture.¹⁶³ Crucially, this research seems to have helped consolidate the racial identity of the predominantly pan-ethnic Caucasian army,¹⁶⁴ and given renewed purpose to the occupation beyond repression.

Such love and theft¹⁶⁵ compelled Marines to raid places of worship, called *hounforts*, and confiscate drums and other ritual objects ostensibly to interrupt this now illegal practice. Although some ritual objects were burned, many were sent back to the States, or kept as souvenirs. Captain John Houston Craige, for example, had collected four drums, “a mass of beads,” and what he called “ghost-rattles” by the time he left Haiti.¹⁶⁶

Making Vodou illegal also gave American authorities a good deal of leverage at the local level. When they needed cooperation on development projects such as roads and railroads, they could make “exceptions” and permit Vodou ceremonies. This was a widespread practice; in fact, French Anthropologist Alfred Métraux suggested that the ban on Vodou was largely “observed in the breach,” that the ban was most visible when Vodou was being “permitted.” Even when it

¹⁶³ Ibid, 212.

¹⁶⁴ Shannon Rose Riley, *Performing Race and Erasure: Cuba, Haiti, and US Culture, 1898–1940*, 5.

¹⁶⁵ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2013).

¹⁶⁶ Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 212.

was enforced, it seemed still to be a contradictory gesture. The main enforcement activity was the confiscation of drums. In this way, military power facilitated the repositioning of Haitian cultural objects as exotic commodities for circulation and exchange in the United States. Thus, while disciplining Haitians for their supposed backwardness, “marines could include their own desire for the exotic.”¹⁶⁷

Marines also entertained American visitors with captive Haitians whom they ordered to perform the very music and ritual their commanders had waged war on. For instance, Blair Niles, author of *Black Haiti: A Biography of Africa's Eldest Daughter*, recounted her visit to a police garrison in the Artibonite Valley in Haiti. There she expressed interest in seeing a Vodou temple. Instead, the Marines summoned a drummer who, arrested for stealing corn, was sitting in the local jail. The drummer was forced to play, and the performance was photographed by Niles. The striking image—in chains, performing by a tree—is a powerful metaphor for how representations of Vodou were violently reproduced for a white gaze. Kate Ramsey suggests that far from being prohibited, the exchange shows that the “ban” on Vodou was rather an attempt to control its worldwide circulation: “It is an image that documents how the prohibition and persecution of popular ritual practices during the occupation became the occasion for their displaced, and in this case forced, reenactment.”¹⁶⁸

Thus, we have seen the ways in which Vodou was commodified as a sign of difference. The Haitian press, even at the height of the occupation, still refused to develop a defense of rural peasants to practice their culture in dignity. *Le Presse*, a Haitian newspaper, accused Crumbie and other “employees of the tax office” of

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 219.

[M]alicious manouevering in order to dazzle and impress members of the commission...Mr. Crumbie is buying drums with drumheads on which the fur is preserved. They will be given as gifts to members of the commission and will be illustrations of the mentality of a people who they say are profoundly attached to voodoo.¹⁶⁹

Clearly the right to self-rule, in the mind of the Haitian elite, continued to be tied to the renunciation of Vodou—an unresolved conflict that would make revalorization movements so critical to cultural strategies of middle and lower class urban Blacks who wanted meaningful change in post-occupation Haiti. Amiri Baraka, speaking in 1961 about jazz, could have just as easily been providing an explanation of Haitian Vodou. It “was collected among the numerous skeletons the middle-class black man kept locked in the closet of his psyche, along with watermelons and gin, and whose rattling caused him no end of misery and self-hatred.”¹⁷⁰ The cultural explosion following the occupation would ensure that it would not be locked away again.

Haitian Music

Let us no longer scorn our ancestral heritage. Let us love it, let us consider it as an intangible whole.

--Jean Price-Mars

Jean Price-Mars's indigeniste manifesto of 1920, *Ainsi parle l'oncle (Thus Spoke the Uncle)*, was a clarion cry for Haiti's appreciation of African tradition. It challenged musicians and intellectuals to build a national culture that foregrounded its Afro-Haitian cultural practice,

¹⁶⁹ Raphael Dalleo, *New World Studies: American Imperialism's Undead : The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism*, (Charlottesville, US: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 47.

¹⁷⁰Amiri Baraka [Leroi Jones], “Jazz and the White Critic,” in *Black Music*, (New York: Morrow), 1968.

particularly Vodou, and demanded vigorous ethnographic research of inspired disciples. The failure of Haiti's literati to have already done so, for Price-Mars, is what made the U.S. occupation intelligible to the Haitian elite: by playing on the hatred that the "classes" had of the "masses," *milat* politicians and ruling classes decided that American intervention would be a productively modernizing force for the nation. He thus "placed responsibility for the American Occupation squarely at the feet of those who shunned Haiti's distinctive character and engaged in a national 'Boavaryisme.'" ¹⁷¹ Michael Smith argues that Price-Mars's work influenced a whole generation of young Haitian intellectuals, primarily because it was a "cultural nationalism that was truly inclusive." This factor, "above all, would prove most inspiring" to the succeeding generation of artists. ¹⁷²

While Haitians in the countryside formed resistance militias to repel the American Marines, elite Haitians, located mostly in urban areas, chose to show their displeasure with the American occupation through forms of "cultural resistance," including music, dance, literature, and visual arts. Rejecting the culture of the invading Americans as vulgar and uncouth, some Haitian intellectuals recommended turning to the rural roots of Haitian culture—specifically, the Vodou religious ritual. As Matthew Smith notes,

There were several musical responses to Price-Mars's call for a national Haitian music. Classical composers like Justin Elie, Ludovic Lamothe, and Werner Jaegerhuber wrote orchestral and chamber music using either Vodou melodies from the Vodou ceremony into a big-band format. ¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Gage Averill, "Ballad Hunting in the Black Republic: Alan Lomax in Haiti, 1936-37" *Caribbean Studies* 36, No. 2 (Jul. - Dec., 2008): 3-22.

¹⁷² Matthew Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 8-9.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

Werner Anton Jaegerhuber was one composer who sought to integrate the popular music of Haiti's peasantry into western art music idioms. Jaegerhuber worked tirelessly to transcribe the exact western translation of the "quintolet" the five beat pattern known in contemporary parlance *cinquillo*. This syncopated rhythm became the basis of several Afro-Atlantic musical forms, including *danzon* and, perhaps, North American jazz.¹⁷⁴

According to Michael Largey, Werner Jaegerhuber helped to "realize Jean Price-Mars's dream of making the products of the Vodou ceremony a cultural commodity"¹⁷⁵ that could be shared with an international audience. Jaegerhuber challenged the tendency of foreign observers to cast Haitian Vodou practices as dangerous. At the same time, Jaegerhuber's attempted downplayed Vodou music's connections to Africa and insisted on ancient Greek origins. For instance, Louis Maximilien, one of Jaegerhuber's patrons, claimed that

[Jaegerhuber] has endowed the Voodoo melody with all the requirements for visibility and universality by having it rendered accessible to occidental ears, and by having it opened to the inspiration of the artists of the planet. he has succeeded in his attempt because of his solid musical training, because of his capacity [for] applying the laws of harmonization and of counterpoint, also because of his ethnological knowledge. It is due to him that a classical production has taken birth from the Haitian folksong.¹⁷⁶

Such attempts at generating "universality" for Vodou, conflated with occidental ears, can be also be found in Sténio Vincent's book entitled *The Republic of Haiti*. Vincent, a *milat* president of Haiti during the occupation, wrote in one chapter on composer and ethnologist Theramenes Menes (1862-1911). Menes deliberated the debate around the nature of the *cinquillo*. Menes and a whole generation of elite intellectuals were debating its specific character

¹⁷⁴ See Christopher Washburne, "The Clave of Jazz: A Caribbean Contribution to the Rhythmic Foundation of an African-American Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 17.1 (1997): 59-80.

¹⁷⁵ Largey, *Vodou Nation*, 168.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 15-16.

in the 20th century, and the vexed question of how, exactly, to notate it. Apparently, the debate was important enough to earn the attention of a Haitian head of state, who praised Menes for demonstrating:

That it is possible, on the basis of historical data, [to demonstrate] that the Greeks first, and the Romans afterwards imitated, adopted, or modifying many dances which were either in Egypt or in the East, and by this continuous migration, some Greek or Roman dances have reached us. Thus, [our national dance] would not be by dancing a model for the waltz... but the meringue, which has become national dance.¹⁷⁷

Vincent was part of a cohort of elite Haitian intellectuals and artists who were both attempting to both codify and theorize the national importance of the Vodou music and dance by suggesting a link to ancient Greece and Rome. His appreciation for the *mereng* did not lead to a political position supportive of the peasantry or their religious practices. Following the end of the occupation, President Vincent passed a 1935 law that toughened existing sanctions against the practice of Vodou. Simultaneously, Vincent encouraged the study of Vodou ethnologists, extolled it as a national heritage, and staged its performance internationally as "folklore." Kate Ramsey argues that, "Through their conversion to 'national folklore,' popular cultures long figured in the West as evidence of Haiti's primitivism could be constructed as official indices of national identity, but only, it seemed, on the condition that they were figured as 'revivals' of a transcended cultural past."¹⁷⁸ Jaegerhuber fits into this movement of elite-sponsored "revivals." Some, such as Michael Largey, have argued that Jaegerhuber "sought connections with the peasantry that would transform not only the peasants' social and economic relationships with

¹⁷⁷ Sténio Vincent, *La République D'Haiti Telle Qu'elle Est; Aperçus: Historique, Géographique, Ethnographique, Politique, Administratif, Agricole, Pastoral, Économique, Intellectuel, Législatif, Financier, Minier, Médicinal, patriotique*, (Bruxelles: Société Anonyme Belge d'Imprimerie, 1910), 272-273.

¹⁷⁸ Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 2002.

Haitian elite classes, but also Haiti's political relationships with foreign powers, especially the United States.”¹⁷⁹ While the interest in the music associated with Haiti’s rural masses was a new development, it is clear that this movement’s desire to delink its connotations with Africa suggest that this transformation of values was incomplete. It may be apt to compare Jaegerhuber to Paul Whiteman, a classically trained violist and composer whose life mission was to “make a lady” out of jazz.¹⁸⁰

Interestingly, African-American artists had long been interacting and influencing similar elite art circles. In 1904, North Alexis, President of Haiti, hired for a period of over three years one of the more famous African American bandleaders, Ford Dabney. “Jim Europe and Ford Danbey wrote so many songs...that their names were spelled backward on some sheet music,” so as to lend “an appearance of variety.”¹⁸¹ A prolific composer of marches, Danbey’s coaching of the state’s musicians demonstrated early influences of American syncopated music in early 20th century Haiti. According to Claude Dauphin, his hire demonstrated the esteem in which African-American music was held in certain Haitian circles.¹⁸²

After the American invasion of Haiti in 1915, some Haitians viewed the popularity of music from the United States as a threat to the vitality of Haitian music. Maurice Casseus, as discussed earlier, found it to be too linked to American forms of cultural hegemony and empire to be a foundation for music of Haitian liberation. But another group saw it as an example of

¹⁷⁹ Michael Largey, *Vodou Nation: Haitian Art Music and Cultural Nationalism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 207.

¹⁸⁰ Joshua Berrett, *Louis Armstrong and Paul Whiteman: Two Kings of Jazz*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

¹⁸¹ Eileen Southern, *Readings in Black American Music*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983) 347.

¹⁸² Claude Dauphin, "La Meringue Entre L'Oralite et L'ecriture: Histoire D'un Genre Musical Haitien," *Canadian University Music Review* 1 (1980): 49-158.

liberating music that was both mobile and rooted simultaneously.

The following section will situate African American jazz forms to official Haitian nationalisms. Elite ideologies that defined folkloric and modern paradigms had also debated over the meaning and national character of jazz. African American and Haitian collaborations reached back centuries, and a brief overview will frame some of the meanings jazz adopted in the context of occupied Haiti.

African-Americans and Haiti: Jazz and Class Across the Atlantic

Despite Haitians' interest in African American musical culture, leading Black American intellectuals were not sympathetic of Haiti's political sovereignty. W. E. B. Du Bois wrote a letter to the President in August of 1915 insisting that the United States offer reassurance that while "it is our privilege as a nation to rescue [Haiti] from her worst self . . . we have no designs on the political independence of the island and no desire to exploit it ruthlessly for the sake of business interests here."¹⁸³ Similarly, *The Crisis* argued in November 1915 that the United States should "help Haiti rid herself of thieves and not try to fasten American thieves on her".¹⁸⁴

Haiti's (overdetermined) location as a site of African savagery probably played to the elitist trends in Afro-American thought. This dismissal of Haitian culture in early 20th century Black letters was captured by Claude McKay's 1929 novel *Banjo*. The novel's protagonist, Ray, is a self-exiled Haitian intellectual, and he debates with a member of the "talented tenth" about the class basis of cultural production. "It's the common people," extorts Ray, "who furnish the

¹⁸³ W.E.B. Du Bois, Correspondence 1:212. Quoted in Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism*. (Charlottesville, US: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 89.

¹⁸⁴Raphael Dalleo, *New World Studies: American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism*, (Charlottesville, US: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 48.

bone and sinew and salt of any race or nation.” He continues, “If this renaissance is we’re talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scrabby thing, we’ll have to get down to our racial roots to create it.”

“I believe in racial renaissance,” responds the intellectual, “but not in going back to savagery.” “Getting down to our native roots and building up from our own people,” retorts Ray, “that’s culture.”¹⁸⁵

Putnam comments on this exchange:

Celebrating cultural continuities across the African diaspora would become a centerpiece of black internationalism by the middle of the twentieth century. But in the interwar era, few of McKay’s peers—from W.E.B. duBois on down—wanted to hear it...Racial renaissance, absolutely. But no savagery.¹⁸⁶

The Harlem Renaissance elite echoed its disdain towards jazz in ways analogous to Haitian elites’ repulsion towards Vodou. Nathaniel Huggins summarizes this attitude in *Harlem Renaissance*:

[T]he promoters of the Harlem Renaissance were so fixed on a vision of *high* culture that they did not look very hard or well at jazz...Were it not for Langston Hughes, we would have almost no writings on it. It is very ironic that a generation was searching for a new Negro and his distinctive cultural expressions would have passed up the only creative thing that was going on.¹⁸⁷

Not coincidentally, Hughes was an intellectual who both advocated for the transformative power of jazz and the necessity of Haitian solidarity. He even visited Haiti in 1930, doing ethnographic research himself, and also helped organize an international solidarity movement on behalf of jailed *indigenste* writer and fellow communist Jacques Roumain.¹⁸⁸

While Haiti and Haitian rural cultures spoke to Harlem writers such as McKay and

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 77.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 77.

¹⁸⁷ Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1976), 9.

¹⁸⁸ Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 21.

Hughes, jazz was understood by some Haitians as a cultural resource that connected Afro-diasporic history to Haitian ears. In this reading, its combination of transnational and indigenous cultural forms could take place in a way that Black and African influences were not erased. For instance, *indigensite* Haitian writer Jacques Roumain dedicates several scenes in his work to moments of jazz's interpenetration in Haitian musical culture. His book *Les Fantoches* ostracizes the *milat* elite's inability to acknowledge the blackness or Afro-Americaness of the music they listen to. One such scene had a group of *milat* elites dancing to a waltz fused with jazz instrumentation and styles, including a saxophonist. As he describes it, "the Danube [a type of French waltz] flowed between Louisiana river banks: a saxophone screeched like the wind above the somber bayous, and in the cotton plantations there swirled, melancholically, instead of Viennese petticoats, the loose blouses of Black women."¹⁸⁹ The expressive cultures of African-Americans, of Louisiana origin, serve as the repository of both historical memory and cultural resonance. They stand in contrast to the French waltz. The juxtaposition is, according to Roumain, "moving and ridiculous."¹⁹⁰

Roumain and Hughes's affinities demonstrate that the politics of jazz were not synonymous with the dominant classes of the jazz age. And in this cross-Atlantic collaboration, they built on long-standing Black-Atlantic networks that connected African-Americans: During the nineteenth century, Haiti became a model in the struggle for liberation in the United States as well as an asylum for blacks fleeing oppression. From the time of its founding, Haiti established a "law of return" for all people of African descent seeking to take up residence as free people in

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in Martin Munro, *Different Drummers: Rhythm and Race in the Americas*. (Berkeley: U of California, 2010), 70.

¹⁹⁰ Quoted in Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions*, 35.

a country under black rule. As a result, Haiti drew interest from black separatist movements in the United States both before and after emancipation.¹⁹¹ In 1961 the first African-American Episcopal bishop, known as the Reverend Holly, traveled to Haiti in 1861 with 101 emigrants from Connecticut to found a parish there. While Holly stayed, many of his companions returned to the United States. Around the same time, writer J. Dennis Harris traveled to Haiti to find a suitable location for a community of African- American emigrants.¹⁹²

Despite the evidence of migration, literary and cultural movements were perhaps more significant spaces of transnational organizing for African Americans and Haitians. But oddly enough, much musical information in the mid twentieth century was carried on the backs of invading Marines. Michael Dash notes that “The occupation had a disruptive effect on Haitian culture at all levels...lead[ing] to the musical penetration of Haiti by foreign music—in particular African-American jazz...and Cuban dance bands.” American soldiers certainly brought “new wants” to Haitian musical communities, which began listening to and performing such tunes such as “Saint Louis Blues” and “Baby Face.” One Marine observed, “it was during my stay that American jazz began to sweep through Haiti as it has swept through so many countries.” The Marine comments that they “took to them with vim to the detriment of their Native music.”¹⁹³ *Noiriste* writer Maurice Casseus may have agreed with the Marine on this point, if that point alone.

These debates beg the question: what was jazz, and what did it mean? As Lara Putnam has argued, jazz had contradictory meanings and pushed at fissures within Black Atlantic as “the

¹⁹¹ “Haitians and African Americans,” in *Encyclopedia of African American Society*, edited by Gerald David Jaynes (Sage Publications 2005).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Averill, *A Day for the Hunter*, 56.

classes” debated how to relate to this popular music “of the masses.”¹⁹⁴ As Jamaica-born J.A. Rogers wrote, “Jazz is a marvel of paradox: too fundamentally human...to be typically racial, too international to be characteristically national, too much abroad in the world to have a special home. And yet jazz in spite of it all is one part American and three parts American Negro, and was originally the nobody’s child of the levee and the city slum.”¹⁹⁵

While a whole generation of Haitian writers explored the relationship between jazz, Haitian identity and Black Atlantic musical circuits, the musicians of Vodou jazz themselves collapsed the distinction between local and global in performance and practice. Perhaps they saw and heard in this “nobody’s child” from North America a confrontation with the West suspiciously close to their own. Sentiments like those from Duke Ellington would be echoed by the generation of Vodou jazz musicians who resisted moves such as Jagerhuber’s to make a lady out of Vodou. “To attempt to elevate the status of the jazz musicians by forcing the level of his best work into comparisons with classical music,” Ellington opined, “is to deny him his rightful share of originality.”¹⁹⁶

As the subsequent discussion below elucidates, *Jazz des Jeunes* and the Vodou Jazz movement writ large were *not* playing jazz to the detriment of their native music. To the contrary, African-American improvised music provided a creative model to answer a complex problem in this age of modernization: where does all that music go when it leaves the countryside?

Ancient Jazz, Future Music: Improvising Creolization

¹⁹⁴ For Putnam’s discussion of the respectability politics of jazz, see *Radical Moves*, 160.

¹⁹⁵ J.A. Rogers, “Jazz at Home,” *Survey Graphic: Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro* (March 1925): 665.

¹⁹⁶ Alex Ross, “Rock 101: Academia Tunes In,” *New Yorker*, (July 14, 2003).

Jazz Des Jeunes proclaims in their song “Anciens jeunes” that:

Jazz des Jeunes is the Haitian people’s treasured child/
Their pride, their dignity, is to eat their own food.
Living from their garden, they love being ancient/
By extolling the foreign, you betray only yourself.¹⁹⁷

In one lyric, *Jazz Des Jeunes* equates two seemingly opposed forces into a coherent whole. On the one hand, a form of music, brought to Haiti under U.S. Marine designs of “forcible soothing” Vodou (and peasant gardening) out of existence. Another instance, the invective to live from one’s own garden—that is, to practice subsistence agriculture, resisting commodity export, and to be attuned to the indigenous aspects of one’s culture. How could jazz fulfill these needs? This apparent contradiction is addressed by Musicologist Martin Munro, who has given a powerful interpretation of this “foreign” music: “Although jazz had arrived as a cultural aftereffect of the U.S. occupation, it was of course the music of black Americans, and, even if few Haitian jazz enthusiasts seemed to realize it, jazz had evolved from strong Saint Dominiquean-influenced roots in the dances at Congo Square.” Thus, “the arrival was also a return, a homecoming of a much travelled, much changed distant relative.”¹⁹⁸ Following the 1804 Haitian Revolution, Louisiana’s Black population doubled as planters fled Haiti with their enslaved Afro-Haitians in tow.¹⁹⁹

The mentioning of gardening is particularly striking. Is this reference purely metaphoric? What if it carried the weight of an advocacy for peasant autonomy and self-subsistent production? As we have seen, Vodou encoded generations upon generations of social knowledge

¹⁹⁷ Quoted from Averill, *A Day for the Hunter*, 60.

¹⁹⁸ Martin Munro, *Different Drummers: Rhythm and Race in the Americas* (Berkeley: U of California, 2010), 73.

¹⁹⁹ Laurent Dubois, *The Banjo: America's African Instrument* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2016), 181.

that helped regulate collective labor, contained specific agro-botanical information, and was generally related to administering a peasant mode of production. Given the centrality that gardening and community agriculture have had in Haiti for generations as sites of class conflict, the argument of “Ancien Jeunes” seems to read as a veiled, but powerful, advocacy for Haiti’s peasantry.

Perhaps because of a lack of terminological specificity, or a misunderstanding of *Jazz des Jeunes*, many scholars collapse the distinction between Vodou Jazz musicians and their *noiriste* counterparts. For instance, Mathew Smith suggests that “the formation of the popular dance band, Jazz des Jeunes, in 1942 was an important development in the diffusion of *noiriste* ideas to the urban populace. With members coming from the Black middle class, the ten-piece group fast became sympathetic to the black political movement.”²⁰⁰ Similarly, Michael Largey writes that “Jazz de Juenes cultivated a sound and look that appealed to the Haitian public; band members dressed in ‘folkloric’ garb of colorful cloth, while dancers moved to the Vodou-influenced rhythms. Jazz des Juenes was active in the promotion of a ‘noirist,’ pro-black, political platform in support of Dumarsais Estimé, the first dark-skinned Haitian president who was not a puppet of the light skinned Haitian elite.”²⁰¹ Dash also sees *Jazz de Jeunes* as “[U]rban neotraditionalist music... [that was] deeply influenced by the cult of authenticity and the Afrocentric orientation of the *noiriste* movement. However, in order to achieve commercial success, this meant a shrewd mix of popular cosmopolitan musical styles with indigenous rhythms.”²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 21

²⁰¹ Peter Manuel, Michael D. Largey, and Kenneth Bilby, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple UP, 2016), 159.

²⁰² Michael J. Dash, *Culture & Customs of Haiti* (Westport, US: Greenwood Press, 2000), 127.

But if *noiristes* were evangelical vanguardists, convincing the masses to give up their freedom to become race men, then *Jazz des Junes* (or Issah El Saieh) simply does not fit the bill. *Jazz des Jeunes* did not simply put on folkloric garb and learn to resonate. Musicians in the group, such as bandleader René St Aude or singer Altheé Rivera, took Price-Mars's call for ethnographic and musical research seriously. They went to Haitian countryside and learned melodies, rhythms, and the thematic concerns of the peasantry. As the Haitian ethnomusicologist Jean Franck wrote, "those [in *Jazz des Jeunes*] who carried the music would be taking on the conscience of the problems posed by the social order."²⁰³ It was in these ethnographic practices that songs such as "El Yebero Moderno" entered into the repertoire of the band.

But they also interacted with a Haitian peasantry that itself had been mobile and were migrating between rural and urban spaces. Their understanding of Vodou was not static, and surely accounted for its changing meanings and messages in the transition from rural to urban spaces. Indeed, rural migrants to cities in this time had adapted Vodou to address new socioeconomic concerns of space and race. Lara Putnam describes one sort of "creolization" between rural belief and urban social and political critique in the emergences of a "death car:"

Press reports offer only glimpse of quotidian concerns and periodic terror, such as rumors of a nocturnal "death car" seizing Haitians for their blood in 1932: "overridden by suspicion, the humble classes of [Port-au-Prince] are panic-stricken over the 'death car' which is said to be running around the city kidnapping persons between the hours of 1 o'clock and 4 o'clock in the morning." The possibility was hardly unthinkable, seventeen years into a U.S. occupation in which technology and mechanized transport had been used against Haitians in new and malevolent ways.²⁰⁴

That vodou had adapted to the complexities of urbanization and U.S. occupation is not

²⁰³ Jean Frank, *La Musique Populaire Haitienne: Son Evolution Au Cours Des Annes*, (MA Thesis, Universite D'Etat d'Haiti, 1978), 94.

²⁰⁴ Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 69.

surprising. Joan Dayan, for instance, argues “that vodou practices must be viewed as ritual reenactments of Haiti’s colonial past, even more than as retentions from Africa.”²⁰⁵ While Vodou clearly has had activities that are not simply reenactments of colonized/colonizers struggles, certainly the integration of a (police) car that ate human beings was an apt metaphor for the struggles to turn Haiti into an exporter of cultural capital and consumer of American products.

The invective to “Eat from your own garden” can thus be read in many ways. One may be a call to resist tokenistic interpretations Vodou culture that had permeated international markets and print-media spheres, fueled by the occupation’s successful commodification and distortion of such practices. Their songs consistently attempted to capture ruptures in the peasantry, the complex disruptions in collective family structures that had been broken up due to land privatization and displacement, and the indifference of the wealthy. For instance, in “Poor women” all these women are powerfully foregrounded:

Pauvre femme
Tu mendis tout le long de la journée
Pour nourrir tes quatres enfants
Abandonnée, hélas! c’est ton sort
En pleurant tu as tendu la main
Aux passants, souvent indifférents.

Pauvre femme Ta jeunesse est fanée comme une fleur
Qui s’exposait au soleil
Maintenant ta vie est malheureuse
On oublie si vite l’heureux moment
Qui te fais souffrir, ô belle femme,

Pauvre femme
Tu soupirez á chaques fois le pasée
Est revenu dans ta pensée

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 267.

Tu revois le rayon du beau soleil
Qui brillerait dans ta "lune de miel"
Et les baisers de l'être bien aimé.

Pauvre femme
Tu trembles sous le poids de la vie
Reoulant les souvenirs
Consolée, embrassant tes enfants
Honorée parce que tu es maman
Tu vivras sans pleurer tes souffrances.

O Grand Mystère
Tes victimes parfois sont piteuses
Et font peur de vivre
Allège la souffrance
De ces âmes inconscientes
O grand Mystère

Poor woman
You beg all the time throughout the day
to feed your four abandoned kids, Alas!
It's your destiny
You cried as you extended your hand
to pedestrians, who were often indifferent

Poor woman Your youth faded like a flower
that is exposed to sun
Now your life is unfortunate
One forgets rapidly the joyful moment
That makes you suffer, Oh beautiful lady,

Poor woman
You sigh every time the past
comes to your thoughts
You look at the beautiful sunrays
that would shine in your "honey moon"
And the kisses of the loved one.

Poor woman
You tremble under the weight of life
rejecting the memories
Comforting, kissing your children
Honored because you are a mother
You will live your suffering without tears.

Oh great mystery
Your victims sometimes are pitiful
and form the fear of living
Alleviates the suffering
of their unconscious souls
Oh great mystery²⁰⁶

While the gendered metaphor for the nation is striking and unmistakable, the piece fits into the group's consistent deliberate advocacy for the peasantry. Highlighting the struggle of an abandoned mother was not a ploy to sell records.

Another way to read the metaphor to "eat from one's own garden," is of course, in the centuries long struggle over the meaning of liberty between the Haitian peasantry and the state. What if the invective to "eat from one's own garden" simply meant that the practices of communal self-sufficiency should be restored and celebrated? Certainly, the group represented the peasant breach in the "guerrilla war" between the two groups:

while the economic and political divisions [between elites and peasants] may be reminiscent of trench warfare, the cultural relations between the classes are more reminiscent of a guerrilla war. The peasantry is not master of this space-or never for long-but it penetrates it deeply and harasses the enemy, while remaining ready to retreat at any point. It does not dictate the dominant cultural codes, but those who impose them must take its values into account. For example, there is no aspect of Haitian economic and political life that explains why the Jaegerhubers, a commercial family of German origin firmly ensconced within the bourgeoisie, should have invested a considerable amount of time at the beginning of this century in transcribing peasant songs.²⁰⁷

Critically, *Jazz des Jeunes's* membership was *not* firmly ensconced in the bourgeoisie.

Bandleader St. Aude's family had to work unspecified working class temporary jobs, and in one interview the Aude family regretted that he was not able to fully live off of his music.²⁰⁸ This is a

²⁰⁶ René Ch. Beaubrun, "Initiation a la musique avec le Super Jazz des Jeunes," *Haiti: Editions du Tambour*, (25 November 1962): 231.

²⁰⁷ Trouillot, *State Against Nation*, 114.

²⁰⁸ Wiener Sèjour, "Jazz des Jeunes: une disparition premature," *Haiti Progress* 19, no. 9 (May

striking observation, as the band was incredibly popular at St. Aude's name was the stuff of legend. "Of all the orchestras Haiti ever produced," write music journalists CC Smith and Gerard Tacite Lamothe,

Jazz des Jeunes is the most highly revered. Any Haitian, when asked about the history of the music, will without fail mention Saint-Aude, a legend in his own time...Jazz des Jeunes played open-air concerts at the Theatre de Verdure in Port-au-Prince every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday...and performed live on Radio Haiti for 11 years. Listening to the radio broadcasts became a Sunday ritual for many families.²⁰⁹

Rene St. Aude and his family, despite a period of stardom, continued to belong a working class. Given that half of Port-au-Prince's population in 1950 had been born in the countryside, it is certainly possible that some band members were born from the peasantry. The president elected in 1946, Dumarsais Estimé, for instance, had peasant origins.²¹⁰

Finally, *Jazz des Jeunes* actively worked with drummers who worked in ritual ceremonies, such as the legendary drummer Ti Roro, who Max Roach reportedly sought out and performed with.²¹¹

Jazz des Jeunes and the Vodou Jazz movement included the syncretic and creolized elements of the Haitian peasantry into their understanding of Haitian music. African American Jazz thus provided a model that defied simple categorization in terms of its class location: it was a foreign music, but it was created by peoples of African descent and expressed an urbanized peasant music in its own context.

16, 2001): 4.

²⁰⁹ CC Smith and Tacite Lamothe Gerard, "Legends of Haitian Music," *The Reggae & African Beat* (Archive: 1983-1988) 6, no. 2 (Mar 01, 1987): 14.

²¹⁰ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 87.

²¹¹ Morton Marks, "Jazz Des Jeunes 50th Anniversary," *New Routes: Traditional Music and Dance in America*. Summer 1993: 2.

While *Jazz des Jeunes* certainly supported the project of Black political rule in Haiti, they did not succumb to a reified understanding of the Haitian peasantry, and instead, along with El Saeih, Bebo Valdes, and many others, generated a process of an interregional and interclass musical formation that became Haiti's popular music. At the level of both its style and content, intense and conflicting struggles over the meanings of Vodou, Haiti, and the culture of the peasantry were performed and resolved in such a way to allow a long-maligned tradition center stage, on terms negotiated by both urban and rural Haitians.

5.0

CONCLUSION

This thesis has deliberately operated from several methodological assumptions that many writers do not take for granted. It assumes, for instance, that musicians are not only entertainers but also theorists, commentators, constructors of communal knowledge, and that the themes they choose to perform on are chosen deliberately and carefully. In the African-American context in North America, Charles Mingus's selection of the title "Haitian Fight Song" is not, for instance, a random song title, but a specific reference to the Haitian Revolution of 1804. Its performance on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1971 was a deliberate attempt to connect the struggle for Black Liberation of that moment to world historical transformation of the Haitian Revolution in 1804.

Similarly, we assume that the arrangers and bandleaders such as El-Saieh, Valdes, and René Saint Aude were deliberate in the political and socio-historical contexts of the repertoire they choose. To assume otherwise is, I believe, the height of condescension. Of course, the ontological centrality of pleasure, escape, and communal recreation in music is of prime importance, especially for working class audiences whose free time is guarded zealously. But historical consciousness was not been a sign of dreariness, but rather a heightened engagement with the arts of transcendence. Looking at the historical and cultural foundations of Vodou music provides one theoretical window into why, particularly in the nexus of Cuban/Haitian migratory

peasant music, engagements in the realm of ideas was a precondition to a band having any type of sensuous authority.

This is not to suggest such composers were infallible or incapable of contraction. As the promise of social justice and renewed relations between the peasantry and the elite broke down into the *noiriste* totalitarian regime of president François Duvalier (1957-1971), *Jazz des Jeunes* continued to be supported by the state, and seemed to have supported it in turn. There is no simple way to explain away the disassociation with the band from its roots in a cultural revolution rooted in the ritual music of the Haitian peasantry to its close alliance with repressive forces. What is certainly true is that music continued to be fought over by the state and the popular classes. Gage Averill sums up the complexities of this period of the band's life in his obituary to Rene St. Aude:

Some will never forgive the close association of Jazz des Jeunes with the *noirist[e]* politics that produced the Duvalier dictatorship. Yet few in the 1940s and 1950s could fully imagine the lengths to which Duvalier would go, not just to protect a *noirist[e]* revolution but to establish his own tight grip and paranoid structure of power on the country. In 1995, with a new generation of roots artists like Boukman Eksperyans opening up international markets to Haitian music, and with a rising effort in Haiti to reclaim vodou from the Duvalierist mentality, it is appropriate that we salute Rene St. Aude, a visionary, a gentleman and able leader who guided a legendary musical ensemble through nearly a half-century of Haitian political changes.²¹²

Boukman Eksperyans was a descendent of the methodology that *Jazz des Jeunes* pioneered. The band combined Vodou rhythms and musical cultures into a fusion of Afro-Atlantic popular music. In the 1990s, this included Reggae, funk, and heavy synthesizers. The band, named after the enslaved Jamaican-Haitian revolutionary Dutty Boukman who helped

²¹² Gage Averill, "Passings: Rene St. Aude Haitian Roots Pioneer," *The Beat* 14 no. 3 (1995): 90-91.

catalyze the Haitian revolution. The band was particularly fierce critics of the military government that disposed the democratically elected Jean-Baptiste Astride:

During Aristide's exile, Boukman was the target of government reprisals for fusing Vodou rhythms with politically critical lyrics. The song "Jou nou revolte" (The Day We Revolt), from the 1992 album *Kalfou danjere* (Dangerous Crossroads), both recalls the day Haitians revolted against oppression in the revolution against the French and foretells the revolution that is to come when the military is overthrown and Haiti's elected government is restored... Songs like "Se Kreyòl nou ye" (We're Creole) ridiculed the Haitian elite's disdain for the country's national language, saying that "some Haitians would rather speak French, English, or Spanish rather than Kreyòl."²¹³

The examples of Vodou-inspired popular music infusions continued to inform grassroots activism up until the present day.

While Vodou influences were the heart, they were not the entirety of this process. Jazz provided a compositional form and aesthetic terrain in which multiple class identities and cultures could be expressed simultaneously while maintaining a commitment to the project of a Vodou nation. Haiti's political history of occupation and its restructuring under US marine forces increased rather than decreased the influence of Vodou culture. Within the United States, Jazz had served a similar process of re-articulating African-derived cultural forms (spirituals and the blues, as well as Caribbean influences from Cuba and Haiti) with new rhythms and instruments that connoted modernity and the rapidity of modern life. The very exchange of these musics – African American jazz and Vodou Jazz – spoke to Atlantic circuits of cultural and economic exchange, accelerated by United States empire. As Ned Sublette has argued, migration and the corollary movements of rhythmic cells and motifs created in this circum-Caribbean world a kind

²¹³ Peter Manuel, Kenneth Blilby and, Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), 183.

of “musical fertile crescent”²¹⁴ that stretched from Saint-Dominique to Cuba and West to New Orleans.²¹⁵

During this era, the embrace of local African-derived traditions was a pan-Caribbean phenomenon. Simultaneously during the US occupation of Haiti, young Cuban writers and scholars were challenging both American hegemony and a corrupt Cuban elite through a politicized celebration of Cuba’s African descended populations and their cultural heritage. In contrast to previous generations of composers, such as Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes for whom “Afro-Cubans did not exist,”²¹⁶ a new generation of writers and musicians heeded the call of anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who invited Cubans “capable of collaborating in this easy task of national culture, which is that of collecting the tales with which old black ladies as mothers entertained their black children.” This group, known as the Minorists, were a generation of Cuban musical intellectual who “were lit afire by the realization that the music of Africans in their midst had an aesthetic and a technique as sophisticated as the Europeans.”²¹⁶ In 1927, the group penned a declaration in their periodical, *Social*, that was “in favor of vernacular art...[and] in favor of the economic independence of Cuba and against Yankee Imperialism.”²¹⁷ And as in Haiti, the flow of jazz styles into Cuban culture helped influence the valorization of African-derived cultural forms in Cuba, a movement dubbed *afrocubanismo*.

The interrelationship of Haitian jazz musicians with the cultural materials of the peasantry persists to this day. An important figure of jazz guitar in Haiti, Alix "Tit" Pascal, also worked with *rara* in the early 1970s traditions. His reflections are instructive:

²¹⁴ Sublette, *Cuba and its Music*, 107.

²¹⁵ Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 40.

²¹⁶ Sublette, *Cuba and its Music*, 281.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

I have been looking at *rara* the way we say an *kan*[on edge]; you look at it sideways and just let it go by...I have never thought that I'm going to modernize *rara*. It is far more modern than anything modern we have. It is avant-garde. They used to think that the peasant doesn't know anything, but they carry with them thousands of years of African culture. So I said to myself 'This is no ignorance, this is complex stuff. This is heavy stuff going down. Like when I heard Coltrane...' ²¹⁸

In Pascal's account, jazz affects a type of "modernism" that beats back the disregard for indigenous materials. His true embrace of *rara* music is a type of "heavy stuff" that is analogous only to his experience of Coltrane, signifying a post-bebop harmonic world. This example speaks to the idea that cultural activity in one part of the African diaspora can influence the forces of history in another. In that sense, music speaks to the essence of self-activity: across diasporas, across subalterns, across humanity, the courageous acts of self-creation and social memory in Black Atlantic music traditions inspires, haunts, and at times can heal a world torn asunder by capital and apartheid. In a world bound ever closer by environmental crises and new technologies of radicalized border control, eerily resonant with prior regimes, we would do well to acknowledge and celebrate this resource.

²¹⁸ Quoted in Averill, *A Day for the Hunter*, 132.

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