

ENTANGLED BORDERS: PERFORMANCE ON THE EDGE OF NATIONS IN
HAITI AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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Within the last 20 years over 70 border walls have been built around the world in the name of sovereignty and global security. Not only are border walls being built but the sovereign power these walls assume are expanding beyond their coordinates. As technological innovations rapidly develop, borders are hindering the movement of people across borders. Despite these technological innovations people continue to create strategies and tactics that reimagine and negotiate the borders of nations.

This particular work is an ethnography of the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This dissertation is based on 16 months of ethnographic research in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti and Pedernales, Dominican Republic. My overall argument is that performance acts as a vehicle by which people subvert, solidify, and reimagine the borders of their nations. I explore how performances such as national celebrations of identity and the religious Lenten festivals of Rara on the border provide an avenue by which people perform the nations ideological and political borders. In Haiti and the Dominican Republic, these performances demonstrate the deep historical ties between the two countries that illuminate sites of collaboration within structures of anti-Haitianism and xenophobia. These entangled performances highlight the space between mobility and immobility in which people are able and unable to move across the border yet still have the ability to shape and mold those borders.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Elena Herminia Guzman was born in Colorado and raised in New York City. She is a first-generation college student with deep roots in the lower east side (LES) of Manhattan and the Bronx. She attended CUNY Hunter College and majored in Anthropology with a minor in Africana Puerto Rican and Latino Studies (AFPRL). Her working-class background drew her to Anthropology and Ethnic studies as a way to understand the experiences she encountered as a Boricua from multiple diasporas living in New York. Immediately after obtaining her bachelor's degree from Hunter College, Elena entered into the Ph.D. program at Cornell University in the Department of Anthropology to study Pan-Caribbean connections that occur through art and dance. These interests led her to study cross-border connections in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Her research interests include Caribbean dance and music, feminist and activist practice, blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean, and ethnographic film. Her dissertation research focuses on Haitian and Dominican history, relations, and identity on the border of Hispaniola through performative spaces such as carnival and the spiritual practices of Rara and Gaga in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Inspired by the traditions of Black feminist anthropologists such as Katherine Dunham, Zora Neale Hurston, and Pearl Primus, Elena is an advocate for public and creative anthropology. She uses film to reach broader audiences. Her visual work broadly looks at issues of representation in the African/Black Diaspora with a focus on narrative, portrait, and documentary film. This includes projects that explore identity in the African Diaspora such as hair salons in the Bronx, stigmas of mental health for

Black communities, and racism and citizenship in Latin America. She was co-director of a documentary film entitled *Bronx Lives* which takes a narrative and auto-ethnographic approach to homelessness in New York City. She is a co-founder of *Ethnocine* Collective, a feminist filmmaking collective that is committed to a feminist and decolonial lens that push the boundaries of non-fiction film.

To Asunción Elena Ruiz, Edwin Anthony Delgado and Kim Kayleigh Edwards
Ashe

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Writing is often a solitary practice spent mulling around in coffee shops and library conference rooms, but this dissertation would not have been possible without the community of friends, family, mentors, and colleagues that propelled me forward.

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INTRODUCTION

Setting the stage: The Borderlands

Imagine yourself as a Dominican border patrol agent. Newly arrived from your military training, you sit at the gate that divides two nations. You have official orders to maintain the border. You are the one that assures that the border is not just a gate but a barrier; one that upholds the sovereignty of the nation and enforcer of the distinction between *here* and *there*. The imposing black gate with an emblem of the Dominican flag and the large statue of Dominican Independence leader Juan Pablo Duarte, always remind you that you are Dominican, and the border you police maintains a clear demarcation between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

On a typical day, the large black gate and wired fences stand tall, and its boundary maintains the flow of a sea of brown and black bodies moving in and out on either side. As you've been trained to believe, the constant movement through the barriers threatens the existence of this division while the bodies you prevent from crossing maintains the integrity of the nation. However, whom you allow to cross and not cross does not always align with the nation-state's desires. It is this precise mobility and immobility that makes the border less of an irrefutable point of separation and more of a partition that is continuously in flux.

As you attempt to control that mobility to different ends, whether it be for the nation or simply your own interests, you sit down in the shade hiding away from the scorching sun and chat with fellow officers, moto-taxi drivers,

and friends. As people cross, you check their documents and make sure they have an official visa to come into the Dominican Republic. If they do not, you are armed to assure the security and the maintenance of the nation at the border.

As you venture past the gated area carefully navigating a stream of zooming motorcycles kicking up dust you enter into the bi-national market, one of 4 major markets set along the border region to encourage binational trade and commerce. Encased by a chain-link fence, this market is located outside and filled with vendors and buyers alike.

Now imagine yourself a Haitian market woman. Every Monday and Friday, you make your way early in the morning to the bi-national market. As you walk past the sea of bodies pouring in and out of the official border crossing you pass a Haitian border patrol officer holding a large rifle in his hand and sitting in the shade in a uniform that has the name *PoliFront* embroidered on the right pocket. This new feature of the border isn't a shock to you because the United Nations employs officers who patrol the area in masks with such guns. As you pass the officer, you descend onto the bridge that is the only crossing over the river bed to the Dominican border crossing. Before you can cross the bridge, you pass a partially built gate that has a Haitian flag emblem with the words *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity); words to you that are just as symbolic as the partially built gate on the Haitian side of the border.

With the little provisions you could gather, you set up your stall in the binational market to sell your products, often bought from the Dominican

Republic. Most times you don't have a stall. If you had enough money for a rental booth, you would showcase your products while also having necessary shade from the beaming sun. But these booths are mostly for the Dominican sellers. Today, you came to the market to sell some fruits and vegetables you collected from your garden. You had hoped to sell a couple of chickens you raised, but the patrol officers decided today they would not let you in with poultry products because some Dominican vendors are selling poultry and the market wasn't designed to undermine the Dominican economy in any way.

During the week, to make extra money, you venture into the Dominican Republic to sell your products. You pay the guard to let you cross with your products and without the correct documents. If the guard doesn't let you through you, go *anba fil* or under the wire by going to the unguarded part of the fence and slipping carefully through the barbed wire. You spend an exhausting day selling your products in town while also ducking the immigration trucks that frequently target street vendors. When you are done selling your products you make the arduous walk back to the other side of the border. If you have any money to spare, you pay a moto-taxi 50 pesos to take you to "*la puerta*" or the door.

When you slip under the wire after 6PM when the border officially closes, a group of young boys standing next to the guard post waits patiently as you explain to the guard why you were unable to get back to the other side

¹ In Kreyòl the border crossing is similarly referred to as *pòt la* or the door. In Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Place* (1996), Basso explain the significance of place names and how they are revealing of the landscape. In this case, the door, or the barrier that divides two nations becomes an interesting metaphor for how border residents understand their connection and division. While the door can serve as a barrier to another side, it can also serve as an entrance.

of the border before it closed. You haggle with the guard for a few minutes as they maintain the official policy that you are not able to cross after 6 pm, but after a while, the performance of pretense is dropped for 75 pesos--a bargain from the initial 100 pesos you expertly navigated. One of the young boys standing near the patrol posts advances and offers to hold your bags. These young kids are called *pase*, a word in both Spanish and Haitian *Kreyòl* that means someone who passes. These are mostly young boys looking to make a few *pesos* (currency in the Dominican Republic) or *goude* (currency in Haiti) by helping you cross the border under the wire when the door or main border entrance/exit is officially closed. From there the *pase* leads you behind the guard post to a wire that has been cut to facilitate crossing through the wire barrier.

The stage is set. Each actor has a role in enforcing and undoing the borders through their performance. The border is a theater of real life; one with stages and roles that are put in place to maintain the barriers to the nation. Nancy A. Wonders (2006) argues that "although states attempt to choreograph national borders...these state policies have little meaning until they are 'performed' by state agents or by border crossers" (66). In other words, the border as theater is a stage of embodied performances that happen both at the physical border crossing and other locations beyond it (Coutin 2003; Luibhéid 2002; Shoaff 2017).

The framework of the border as theater leads me to conceptually analyze various aspects of what I call the *borderland stage* of Pedernales and Anse-a-Pitres. Performance in the border region demonstrates the ongoing

dialogue and tension between the nation and state for both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In what follows, I investigate the contradictory space of the borderland stage in both Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales. People in the border region oscillate between allegiance to the nation-state and the cross-border entanglements that un-do the borders of that very nation-state. Cross-border entanglements point towards the deep history of exchange between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. By focusing on entanglements through the lens of performance, I show the multiple crossings that people undertake whether or not they have the ability to cross a geopolitical border.

A border by definition is often described as an edge, a boundary, or a line of separation. Borders often serve to demarcate and separate while borderlands account for the human factor of living and existing near a geopolitical border. Michael Baud and Willem Van Schendel (1997) argue that the byproducts of borders "create political, social, and cultural distinctions, but simultaneously imply the existence of (new) networks and systems of interaction across them." This twoness to border creates cross-border connections and spaces of in-betweenness.

This intersection between the border and borderland forge what I term *cross-border entanglements*. I draw from the extensive literature within the field of History in order to understand the uneven and asymmetrical "knot-like" connections that define a particular region beyond national borders (Ballantyne 2015). Entangled history moves beyond a comparative framework and recognizes the analytical importance of interconnectedness beyond

categories of nation and empire (Bassi 2016; Manjapra 2014). In the case of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, entangled histories are not separate histories of the two nations but instead the history the interconnections forged through the shifting borders of the two countries.

The border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has shifted over time and continues to be shifted in legal and everyday ways. According the Eliga H. Gould (2007), Entangled histories can be thought of, “as a more capacious form of borderland history” (767). The shifting borders of Haiti and the Dominican Republic created various kinds of historical entanglements: maroon and indigenous communities escaping colonial rule and oppression; a massacre in the northern part of the island that sought to sever the interconnectedness of the border region. Entangled history of Haiti and the Dominican Republic posits a different retelling of the past, one shaped by what García-Peña (2016) calls *contradictions*—histories that recount the interconnectedness of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Cross border entanglements are the by-products of these past and ongoing interconnected histories: the solidarity, the conflict, the economic networks, personal relationships and connections, amongst others. In focusing on cross-border entanglements, I illuminate the messy field of relations that materialize through co-constituted histories. I move against the grain to compare the history of Haiti and the Dominican Republic and instead focus on entanglements forged across national boundaries historically and contemporary times.

Entanglements are the product of cross-border networks and gesture towards the ties forged and shifted historically (For example, the binational market that happens every week on the border crossing between Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales is an example of a cross-border economic network. The entanglement that emerges from this network is the inequity that emerges where the market ultimately benefits the Dominican economy and sellers. As Luisa, a market seller of Haitian descent told me, "It's not a binational market it's a national market" referring to the reality that Dominican authority ultimately controls the market. Entanglements point toward the uneven exchange that arises within varying political and social systems of power and the deep and interconnected history in which these relations have formed and shifted over many years.

Although cross-border entanglements are often framed as resisting dominant strands of the nation-state, I argue that they exist within and not outside of discourses of the nation. The Dominican nation is historically and presently dependent upon these border entanglements with Haiti even though the core ideology of the Dominican nation-state locates itself in opposition to Haiti. An analytical focus on the anti-Haitianism present in bicultural encounters resists the erasure many Haitians, Black Dominicans, and Haitian descendants face daily. Even cross-border entanglements and bicultural spaces are often rife with anti-Haitian sentiments and actions.

Once one moves beyond the physical marker of a border, and towards the cross-border entanglements, the borderlands come into purview. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue that borderlands are not "a fixed topographical site

between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures) but an interstitial zone of deterritorialization and hybridization" (48). *Borderlands* allows for an analysis that does not favor fixed notions of the nation-state but instead the networks, entanglements, relations, and interactions that occur across borders. This perspective decenters the state in favor of landscapes created by people, the entanglements they create within and despite borders.

The border is a liminal space; both in its geographic liminality (existing between two sovereign states) but also in its performative nature. Victor Turner (1977) defines performance as liminal entities which are "neither here nor there: they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). As Turner notes liminality points towards something that is betwixt and between. Essential to the liminality is ritual which can be transformative. The rituals of the border (checking documents, passing guards, passing gates) all create a border that seems fixed. Yet, due to its liminal status betwixt and between there is always the potential for transformation: an epic theater that disturbs the ritual performance of the border. The ritual maintenance of a border is predicated on performances that solidify the boundaries of the nation while simultaneously creating a porous border.

Performances can also facilitate the undoing of a border because the actors exist within a liminal space that necessitates existing between two realities— the sovereign nation-state and the connections that move beyond sovereign border demarcations. The border is a space that necessitates both rigidity and fluidity of ideas, people, currency, and activities. The border is

made less solid through the economic, political, and social networks that sustain each border city.

Taking all of this into context the border is performative in two senses: the various actors who play their roles (the market woman, the patrol officer, the "Haitian", the *rayaño*³). Props such as clothes, guns, language, etc. support these performances. Then there is the border as performed through space. The space of the border creates a sense of separation, due to an arbitrary division of an otherwise organically continuous space. The geographic separation, in turn, is replicated ideologically, linguistically, historically, and culturally. Thus flags, statues, gates, and empty riverbeds all become a part of the performance of the border.

What emerges in the space between the border and the multitude of performances that do and un-do the border is what I call a *borderland stage*. The borderland creates a landscape of contradictions that lie at the heart of its location within the nation-state *and* its location on the fringes of that very nation-state. In defining the borderland stage, I draw from Arjun Appadurai's (1996) conceptualization of locality in which he privileges "relational and contextual rather than...scalar or spatial" (178). Within this framework, a physical border creates a landscape that is dependent upon ideas of the

² A Haitian friend of mine once shared that he never crossed the border without looking nice and smelling good because he didn't want the guards to think of him as a "typical Haitian" that is, the negative stereotype that paints Haitians as poor and black invaders. By looking and smelling nice, my friend sought to evade this stereotype by distancing himself from that image he understood was imposed upon him. Similarly, another friend of mine said she also dresses up, but the image she is escaping is that of the poor black woman who crosses the border to sell or give birth in the Dominican Republic. The performance of class and its intersection with race and gender are paramount in how permeable a crossing becomes for some people.

³ This is a word used to describe the children of Dominican and Haitian parents

nation-state yet, the fluidity and movement across borders reconfigure these spaces and in doing so can shift borders. The space requires both rigidity and fluidity in order to allow both realities to exist incongruously with each other. So, depending on the day sometimes the guard may let someone through without proper documents with a small amount of money and other times he won't. Sometimes products slip by, and sometimes they do not. Sometimes someone can pass through the gate and joke with the guards and other times you cross under the wire and hope for the best.

My conceptual framework of borderland stages hinges upon the tension that exists between mobility and immobility or what I call *im/mobility*⁴, or the ways the mobility is navigated within strict limitations. Despite limitations, people are never in stasis; they are always in movement. Yet restrictions may limit that movement. The concept of *im/mobility* explores the techniques that people develop to circumvent, bypass, or solidify borders. Tracing mobility and immobility in liminal spaces allows for a unique analysis; One that shows the way borders are reframed, reimagined, --not only by those who can move across geopolitical borders but also by those who are unable to cross and therefore, must seek different kinds of borders to cross.

The water has long been a significant place that scholars of the African Diaspora have theorized about historical moments, movement, and displacement. Gilroy (1993) reimagines the water as the Black Atlantic, a noun that uses a particular moment of mobility across the ocean to explain a current

⁴ I take inspiration from Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera* in which the slash in the title comes to represent a border itself. It at once binds and separates the two clauses. I use the slash to gesture to the space that happens in between mobility and immobility.

community of people across the globe. Derek Walcott's famous poem asks us to consider the sea as history. For many, the sea becomes a site of mobility and movement that entails a history and process of identity.

While the sea suggests mobility, Vanessa Agard-Jones (2012) asks us to consider the sand as history; "as a repository both of feeling and of experience, of affect and of history, in the Caribbean region..." (325). Although scholars have idealized the sea for its ability to think through movement and motion, Agard-Jones considers, "the fate of those who do not or cannot move in this vaunted age of mobility -- people attached to local geographies -- often drop out of analytic purview.... those Caribbean people who build lives for themselves right where they are, under conditions of both intense contradiction and sometimes, too, intense joy" (326-327). Agard-Jones work questions the focus on mobility and ask us to consider stasis and non-movement as a site of history.

Both the sand and the water prompt a framework that considers both that which is always in transition and that which stays and doesn't move. I consider the space in between mobility and immobility in which performances on the ocean edge of Hispaniola make mobile and immobile border crossing possible. Not everyone has the ability to cross the geopolitical border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and even those who are able to cross contend with other kinds of borders beyond the geopolitical border: consider the market women in the Dominican Republic who must duck immigration trucks, the sugar cane worker who is limited to the *batey* (sugar cane field) he works, the Haitian who takes a bus from the border to the capital and is

constantly asked to show documents. While they can be mobile, there are degrees of immobility that are significant to consider. Tracing *im/mobility* in liminal spaces allows for a unique analysis; One that shows the way borders are reframed, reimagined, --not only by those who have the ability to move across geopolitical borders but also those who are unable to; those who cross different kinds of borders.

Mapping the trans-imperial Greater Caribbean, Ernesto Bassi (2016) argues that regions are not only fixed places but instead are created through mobility. For Bassi, a region is conceptualized as "fluidly bounded and amorphously demarcated spatial units shaped and reshaped through everyday social interactions...This approach calls for understanding regions as meaningful geographic spaces that make sense to those who experience them daily" (7). Bassi contends, "taking mobility as a defining criterion has the potential to illuminate regional configurations and communities that escape the eyes trained or coerced to look for "imagined communities" that cohere around linguistic, religious, or ethnic units, the weight of imperial bureaucracies, and the printed trail left behind by patriotic narratives, cartographic representations, and other cultural artifacts of nation-making" (7-8). In this understanding, space is mapped less as a static region or even a static idea of bounded space, but instead, it is mapped via moving bodies and the experiences that bind them.

Focusing on the borderlands as a region that is defined less by linguistic and cultural sameness and more by cross-border connections and networks allows one to focus on how *im/mobile* subjects define regions and

nations: How a young Haitian woman with no documents to cross the geopolitical border is still able to go to doctors and hospitals on the other side of the border, or in other words, negotiate mobility within her imposed immobility; how an undocumented Dominican of Haitian descent can be mobile within the borderlands but becomes immobile once he leaves the community that accepts him as Dominican and goes towards the capital where his color prompts questions of his citizenship and belonging; the Haitian student who attends school on the other side of the border but can only cross during school times and must be back before the border closes at 6 PM. Each of these is examples of how varying degrees of *im/mobility* map, contest and maintain borders and regions. It shows how people who may not have the full ability to cross the border are still able to push the limits of the nations, define borders, and shape discursive realities. Even though people may be unable to cross geopolitical borders or are limited in their mobility across borders and within the borderlands, they still can utilize a particular kind of mobility to push ideas of the nation which includes spiritual border crossing, discursive border crossing, physical border cross amongst many others.

Following *im/mobile* performance allows the region of the borderlands to emerge. It is defined less by the framework in which the border is a point of separation between two nations and more by the framework in which the border is a seam of connection between two nations. Through *im/mobility*, people create and forge networks through everyday cross-border interactions. While government policy and barriers make borders real it is always the

movement or non-movement of bodies that animate borders by making them tangible, solid, and/or porous. By privileging these bodies, we can see how people shape borders and in turn how borders become embodied in the borderlands.

Performance is my analytical framework for engaging with these questions. It is an appropriate analytic for the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, because of its ability to reveal alternative narratives and what James C. Scott (1990) calls hidden scripts. These hidden scripts are especially critical by way of two countries who have a large percentage of African descendant population in the Caribbean. The conditions of slavery and colonialism for these two countries meant that disguise and subterfuge were essential to survival and communication. Édouard Glissant (1997) explains these level of communication as:

An act of survival. In the silent universe of the Plantation, oral expression, the only form possible for the slaves, were discontinuously organized. A stales proverbs, sayings, songs appeared... they bore the stamp of this discontinuity...; what one does find, on the other hand, is a symbolic evocation of situations, as if these texts were striving for disguise beneath the symbol, working to say without saying. This is what I have referred to elsewhere as detour and this is where discontinuity struggles... (68)

The slave trade, the plantation, and colonialism all created the conditions in which these ways of being became viable sources of disguised communication. Caribbean historicity, then, heightened the significance of gesture, performance, and meta-communication as essential aspects of the way people exist and act in the world. Privileging the meta registers of performance take into account the multitude of ways African descendant

people navigate their realities; and in this particular case, how they navigate the borders of their nation.

In the Dominican Republic and Haiti, their entangled history informs metacommunication. For Silvio Torres-Saillant (1998) the Dominican Republic is the original site of blackness: "Dominican society is the cradle of blackness in the Americas...Marking the start of the black experience in the western hemisphere" (126). Yet, despite being the cradle of black civilization, racial identity in the Dominican Republic has been defined in opposition to blackness, which is associated with Haiti. In the discursive imagination of the Dominican nation-state, Haiti is all that the Dominican Republic is not. The Dominican racial imaginary cast Haiti as a black, unmodern, Vodou nation in contrast to the identification of the Dominican Republic as a mixed-race (Indio/White), modern, Catholic nation. Historian Anne Eller (2016) demonstrates during the 19th century how a small elite was able to control discourses that depended on a nascent Dominicanidad that defined itself in opposition to Haiti: progress versus backwardness, civilization versus barbarism, order versus atavism, Christianity versus fetishism, and Providence versus disorder" (10). The term Dominicanidad refers to the dominant ideologies that inform contemporary articulations of the Dominican nation.

Lauren Derby's exploration of the borderlands from the period of 1900 to 1937, complicates Torres-Saillant's identification of blackness with the Dominican Republic. Lauren Derby (1994) argues that Dominican and Haitian identity and differences were not necessarily driven by race/class based anti-

Haitian national rhetoric but instead were based on criteria having to do with perceptions and practices of embodiment. As such, Dominicans perceived Haitian difference through the lens of value, fertility, and Vodou. Narratives of identity and nation, from Derby's perspective, were then scripted on to those differences of embodiment that defined the Haitian body from the Dominican body.

Dominicans and Haitians define their difference from one another through a wide range of bodily practices, including eating, procreating, washing, walking, sitting, and speaking (accent). Haitian women did not cover their breasts when they washed, as Dominican women did; also, Haitian women squatted at the market, exposing their knees, a posture loath to a Dominican woman. Haitians cannot speak the rolled Spanish "r," pronouncing "l" instead. Race was not primarily marked by skin color; indeed, this marker would have been a most ambiguous signifier in a zone which had seen four hundred years of extensive intermarriage and cultural mixing. Yet there was a difference, universally acknowledged in the border, between Dominicans and Haitians. The question of whether or not they had been born on Dominican soil was not an issue; this was neither a territorially nor biologically based concept. 'A Dominican could become Haitianized if he lived in Haiti long enough that his speech, bodily movements, and way of life were affected (521).

According to Derby, "An important aspect of the impact of the U.S. occupation [in the Dominican Republic] was that it made border inhabitants see themselves in a new way. Modernity meant in large part 'looking modern'; it was a theatre in which representatives of authority, such as police, should be identified visually, by their appearance, no longer merely by their reputation in the community" (505). Here, Derby demonstrates the importance of performance in maintaining the border. To visually look modern meant to embody discourses of the nation-state that did not align with the local reality. Thus, local realities (established via community reputation) were not as

significant as visual discourses of who performed the image of a modern Dominican and who did not.

In my work, I center the bodies of Haitians and Dominicans who live in the borderlands who create and sustain cross border entanglements in order to show how borders are created, navigated, challenged, and maintained through performances. I show how Dominicans and Haitians solidify and make porous the border of their nations. Such an approach forces us to think of the border less as a tangible object and more as an embodied experience that is not bound to one particular space (a gate or fence) but one that is animated through people's bodies and performances.

Fieldwork, Methodology and the legacy of Anthropology in Haiti

This dissertation is an ethnography of the cross-border connections between Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti and Pedernales, Dominican Republic. This research is based on ethnographic fieldwork in the summers of 2013 and 2014 and yearlong fieldwork from 2015-2016 on the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. My research was primarily located in the border commune⁵ of Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti and its' sister city Pedernales, Dominican Republic.

Anse-à-Pitres⁶ is a border commune in the Southeast department of Haiti. Located within the district of Belle-Anse, the commune has a total of 3

⁵ Haiti geographically defines the country in order of the department, district (*arrondissement*), commune, and communal sections. Anse-à-Pitres is a commune located in the Southeastern department in the district of Belle-Anse.

⁶ The history of Anse-à-Pitres has yet to be explored in a book or historical study. In fact, during my research, I was told there was one book that existed detailing the history of Anse-à-

zones including the main town of Anse-à-Pitres, Banane, and other rural sections. As of 2015, The total population of Anse-à-Pitres was 30,146. The majority of people residing in the commune live in rural sections (16,875) with the second largest population living in the main town of Anse-à-Pitres (a total of 9791) (IHSI 2015).

Sharing a border with Anse-à-Pitres, Pedernales is located in the southwest portion of the Dominican Republic. The city Pedernales is located within the larger province of Pedernales which also includes Cabo Rojo and El Mogote. In 2010, there was a total population of 31, 587.

The two locales have historically depended heavily upon each other, and that relationship continues today. According to a national statistical report, approximately 5.57 million USD of exports are transported annually from Pedernales to Haiti by road. Other border locales transport a bulk of the cross-border imports such as Jimaní (USD 285.04 million), Dajabón (USD 126.69 million), and Elías Piña (USD 50.56 million) (CFI 2016). Although Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres represent the smallest amount of exports transported along the border, the trade is vital to locals providing significant economic opportunities to sell used clothes and food⁷.

Even though Pedernales fares better than Anse-à-Pitres, concerning infrastructure and the percentage of the population living in poverty, Pedernales still suffers from high poverty rates with 74.6% of the population

Pitres. The rumor was that it was in the hands of a senator. After reaching out to a variety of contacts, the book itself never turned up.

⁷ According to a report, food/beverages/juices comprise 60% of all Dominican vendors while 87% of Haitian vendors sell both used clothing (*pepe*) and food/beverages/juices (CFI 2016)

living in poverty and 44.6% living in extreme poverty (ONE 2012). Because of the lack of a formal economy, informal and cross border economic networks^s are essential to the border regions. Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales also have important cross border relations that include religion, family, entertainment, amongst others.

Throughout this work, I explore the various stages and performances of the border that solidify and make porous the borders of the nation between Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti and Pedernales, Dominican Republic. From mundane border crossings to state-sponsored festivals, performance provides a critical lens to gauge vernacular forms of sovereignty enacted through the body. A framework on embodiment allows me to centralize bodies that cross borders and those that do not in order to reveal the slippages that occur between nation, the state, and its borderlands.

In the same way, my work pulls from borderlands literature, the work I do exists within the borderlands of disciplines. It does not singularly fall within Haitian studies nor Dominican Studies or anthropology for that matter. I am partially invested in questions of Dominicanidad but from the perspective of Haiti. What does Dominicaness mean to those persons invested in the nation-state project but lives across borders they regularly traverse? What does Dominicaness mean to the Haitian who has lived and worked in the Dominican Republic for five months, five years, 20 years? Along those same lines, what does Haitianness mean to someone who is often

^s According to a CFI (2016) report the informal economy along the border is estimated to be around \$375 million worth of unregistered trade in 2014.

unable to participate within their own nation-state and must cross borders and engage in another nation-state? How does Haitianness shift in the face of Dominicanidad in the border regions?

For an ethnographer to do research in two countries is to attempt to be in two places at one time; to be bi-cultural and bilingual. This can be quite difficult for various logistical, personal, and sometimes legal reasons. Thus, it's important to stress that this is not an ethnography of Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres. Instead, it is an ethnography of the cross-border entanglements forged through performance between these two places. This ethnography draws from George E. Marcus' (1995) explication of multisited research that focuses on , "chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography" (105).

The reader will see that many of these entanglements begin or entirely remain in Haiti. This is partly on purpose^o. In my own work focusing on Haiti, I found that significant connections to the Dominican Republic remained even when I did not cross the geopolitical border. Cross-border connections persisted in each of the performances I analyze. And, as I argue, it is these largely unrecognized connections, which are crucial to understanding not only Haitian identity but also Dominican identity.

^o. Much work remains to be done on the construction of the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic from the perspective of Haiti. Contemporary scholarship focuses on the border and the relations between the two countries from the location and perspective of the Dominican Republic. There is a trove of archival and ethnographic that remains to be done.

This overall framework of performance, mobility, and immobility brings me to connect two performative spaces in my own work: How borders are mapped during national holidays and celebrations of identity and how spiritual borders are traversed during the Rara Lenten festivals in Haiti. What connects these two sites of performances is that each demonstrates a kind of *im/mobile* performance contends, crosses, and rearticulates borders.

Methodology

I undertook fieldwork in the border region of Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti, and Pedernales, the Dominican Republic from 2015-2016 preceded by short-term trips in 2013 and 2014. I conducted over 50 structured and semi-structured interviews with a variety of people: performers, state officials, motorcycle drivers, displaced migrants, fans and audience members, teachers, students, border guards, immigration officials, market sellers, and vendors, amongst many others. Many more informal conversations appended these interviews. The goal of my interviews was to establish a multivalent understanding of the border as lived and experienced by a variety of people. Additionally, the aim was to understand people's use and comprehension of their various performances. My fieldwork also consisted of participant observation primarily with a Rara group in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti called Feeling Rara.

Finally, my methods were also supplemented through my work as a visual anthropologist. This work values the visual as another layer of knowledge that highlights the, “practices, and interventions that are variously in the margins, on the borders, and beyond the center of writing” (Madison

2005, 167). My camera was a frequent companion for me during my fieldwork. However, during the first five months of fieldwork, I chose not to take my camera. People in Haiti often have a strong reaction to foreigners who use cameras which is a product of the myriad images by foreigners that perpetuate the stereotypes of Haiti as a poor and backward nation. Aware of this reaction and understanding the impact a camera could have when settling into fieldwork, I choose not to use a camera during the first half of my fieldwork. It was not until after I settled in and was invited to use my camera in certain spaces that I did.

My chapters on Rara use photography and film as a part and as a separate product of this ethnography. As a part of my collaboration with the Rara group Feeling Rara, I was asked to make a film for them. I am currently in the post-production stage of a film called Feeling Rara that will document the group's activities during Holy Week.

The camera is present in most chapters, but the degree to which I analyze the camera as a tool of data collection varies. Nonetheless, just as any tool of data collection, the camera affected the space it was in and how that transpired is analyzed further in each chapter.

*Positionality and the legacy of Anthropology in Haiti*¹⁰

¹⁰ I focus primarily on the legacy of anthropology in Haiti since it is the place where many of the performances I analyze occurred. It should be noted that anthropology and U.S intervention also has a contentious and similar shape in the Dominican Republic.

I remember the strong smell of *botanicas*¹¹ with waves of competing smells from candles, herbs, and varied fragrances; being told at a young age who my "headmaster" was; praying at altars with flickering candles adorned with Catholic saints and statues that represented Yoruba deities; being given teas when the doctor's medicine just wasn't working; and divination considered as real a knowledge as any other. Growing up a *Boricua* in New York meant growing up in communities of people in overlapping diasporas. It meant seeing various African, Asian, and Indigenous spiritual traditions converge in their shared commonality.

I share these memories to foreground how my own background influences this broader inquiry. At its essence, this work is a part of a lifelong recognition of Benítez-Rojos (1996) notion that there is "a certain kind of way" that exists throughout the Caribbean. These repetitions can be seen, "in music, dance, song, and the plastic arts, but also in cuisine...in architecture, in poetry in the novel, in the theater, in bodily expression, in religious beliefs, in idiosyncrasies... "(80). In particular, seeing the certain kind of way that repeats in Afro-Diasporic religious traditions this work emphasizes the lines that connect African descendant peoples throughout the Caribbean and their diaspora communities, with a particular emphasis on overlapping diasporas (Lewis 1995; Rivera 2012).

The work that I undertake on the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic draws from Gina Athena Ulysse's, *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives A*

¹¹ Botanicas are stores that sell spiritual items and traditional herbs. The store primarily sells spiritual items based on the religions of Santeria and *Espiritismo* but also includes items and services associated with Vodou, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

Post Quake Chronicle (2015). Ulysse takes up the call to represent Haiti in new ways that move beyond stereotypes and one-dimensionality often portrayed in the public sphere. She goes on to explain how her place as a "native-anthropologist" places her within a unique insider-outsider status to represent and retell narratives of Haiti. At the core of this call is a desire to tell nuanced stories and reframe Haiti.

Part of being able to tell new narratives is to recognize the ones that pervade the discipline and allow space for other narratives that emerge from a different place. The narratives that I share of Haiti and the Dominican Republic move beyond intellectual curiosity and instead harness shared connections. As a Puerto Rican Afro-descendant and Indigenous woman, I feel connections to a pan-Caribbean identity; connections I see in the food, humor, and ways of being. I feel connections as a displaced person of the African Diaspora attempting to understand my own in-betweenness and a way back to a place I cannot return. I feel my in-betweenness in ways that repeat in the borderlands. When I see altars in Vodou ceremonies of Ezili with photos of Our Lady of Sorrows, I see my grandmother lighting a candle in a church praying to saints with a secret doubleness; praying to white Catholic saints while evoking African spiritual deities. However, in these ways that I am connected, there are ways in which I am immensely disconnected that are created both through my positionality as a foreigner and as an anthropologist.

Anthropology as a discipline has long been invested in the colonial project of representing "the other." Despite the crucial efforts of anthropologists such as Michel-Rolph Trouillot to move beyond the "savage

slot" (Trouillot 2003) and the call by Gina Athena Ulysse to create new narratives of Haiti (Ulysse 2015), Haiti remains tethered to anthropological discourses that over time have shifted from Haiti as exceptional to Haiti as a laboratory testing ground (Schuller 2016b). Anthropological representations of Vodou, a religious practice framed as exceptional, exotic, and unknown, is especially subject to these particular narratives. Despite being framed as a traditional practice, Vodou exists within, adjusts, and contends in increasingly globalized landscapes.

The legacy of anthropology in Haiti and of Haitian Vodou became very apparent during my fieldwork. One day I was walking to the local beach resort to conduct an interview. The resort was a favorite place amongst people in the area, and I would often go there at the request of people to talk and have a drink. After waiting for over an hour, I finally realized that the person I was set to meet was not coming so I began to walk back home. As I was leaving the beach resort, I passed by a group of men who were sitting on the beach under a canopy and drinking wine. As I walked by, one of the men waved his hand to call me over. Noticing his hand motions, I looked over and quickly realized that I did not recognize anyone at the table. Since foreigners often frequented the beach, I assumed that he had mistaken me for someone else and told him in Kreyòl, "oh no not me, wrong foreigner" The man paused then looked at me and said, "*aren't you the anthropologist?*" I looked back at him stunned, somewhat bewildered that this man identified me as the anthropologist. I stumbled a bit and said, "yes I am," and then he invited me to

join the political meeting that was taking place for major annual performance between Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales called "The Meeting of Two Cultures."

This moment of interpellating me as an anthropologist was shocking¹². Although I was doing a Ph.D. in anthropology and conducting my research in the area, I never thought of myself as an anthropologist because it is a discipline, I find myself on the fringes of in a variety of ways¹³. Most importantly, I had never been identified as one outside of an academic setting. It was in this quick exchange that I realized that my presence was not just about who I was as a person but also a legacy of anthropology in Haiti.

My Americanness gave me access to privileges that I have never been able to have in the United States. My racial ambiguity allowed me to rest easily in Haiti and the Dominican Republic; it allowed me to cross borders without questions. My otherwise precarious job as a graduate student gave me a level of financial security that most people were unable to attain. My access to American citizenship opened an array of doors abroad. While I was connected in certain ways, I was also disconnected in important ways that marked me as an outsider. I realized that no matter my identity I was contending with a legacy of foreign intervention, colonial anthropological projects, and American surveillance.

¹² Louis Althusser's (1984) understanding of interpellation rest upon the moment in which a subject is identified and then cast within a particular set of ideologies. In this case, I was made a subject vis a vie the ideology of anthropology in the context of Haiti.

¹³ I am thinking in particular of anthropologist Faye V. Harrison's essay, "Auto-Ethnographic reflections on Hierarchies in Anthropology," (1995) in which she reflects on anthropology's erasure of Black anthropologists, "When "academic Others" do successfully live up to those productivity standards—and in some cases even surpass them—they rarely receive full recognition and reward for their hard-earned accomplishments," (50). As a woman of color who comes from a poor and working-class background, my relationship to anthropology has been uneasy.

It is in these ways and the many others that I was marked that shaped this inquiry, the people whom I collaborated with and spoke to, the social capital I attained, the chapters that proceed, and the chapter's that do not.

Setting the Stage for Borderland Nationalism in Pedernales

During the 1930s, embattled within post-occupation discourses of progress and nation, the Dominican Republic began to solidify its nation, not only ideologically but physically as well, under the leadership of Dominican President Rafael Trujillo. Given the significant collaboration and continued cross-border networks that occurred between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the Trujillo administration believed the fluid nature of the border was a significant threat to the nation. This ever-present threat of a fluid, multi-lingual, multi-racial borderland began a campaign that historians often refer to as the Dominicanization of the borderlands. This process entailed changes that were legal, linguistic, and ideological.

In 1929, Dominican president Horacio Vasquez and Haitian President Louis Borno signed a border treaty that delineated the geopolitical border between the two nations. The treaty stated that the border began at the Massacre River in the North and ended at the Pedernales River in the South. These treaties included extensive mapping of border zones detailing the geographic layout, topography, the definitive borderlines, and coordinates. Separate Haitian and Dominican commissions led the mapping teams. In 1933, four years after the original treaty, President Trujillo finalized the negotiations

and established the current border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

This Dominicanization was also occurring in other parts of the country and took on a racial dimension—The San Juan Valley located in the central southwest of the Dominican Republic was a battleground of the Dominican nation in solidifying its borders and national identity. According to Robert L. Adams (2006), Trujillo's dictatorship initially began the process of modernization by dismantling the communal activity of cattle ranching and asserting the hegemony of the sugar plantation industry. This move from communal, free-flowing, unregulated trade and border ambiguity shifted the economy in significant ways that disproportionately affected Afro-Dominicans and Haitians.

Along with economic and spatial transformations, the regime also sought to outlaw "uncivilized" practices which included the outlawing of participation in Vodun practices and ceremonies by Law 391 which fined individuals up to 500 pesos if convicted (Deive 1992). Not only was blackness being marginalized economically, and reorganized spatially, it was now being made illegal by criminalizing religious and cultural forms associated with Haiti.

According to historian Edward Paulino (2005), this Dominicanization was taking place within the political landscapes of language. In the case of the Dominican borderlands, this occurred with the erasure of Kreyòl from the borderlands. The campaigns renamed major landmarks and roads after national heroes of independence, and changed Kreyòl sounding names to

their Dominican counterparts: "Jean Sapit [was changed] to Agapito; in Barahona, Cailón was changed to Caonabo; El Yimbí to La Altagracia; in the region of La Descubierta, Calingá to Joaquín Puello; Toussaint to Granada . . . [and] in Pedernales: Bucá Creol to El Cercado; and Madam Jean to Doña Juana" (Paulino 2016, 86)

Border locales became crucial sites for the Dominican nation-state because they existed at the periphery of the nation and their existence was now predicated on the idea that these towns now served as barriers to another nation; not just any nation but the nation that the Dominican Republic declared its' independence from. What emerged was a distinct nationalism that I term, borderland nationalism. I use the term borderland nationalism to point towards the process by which the state employed the symbol of the nation in a way that was explicitly aimed at borderland residents and their location on the peripheries. This nationalism was supposed to be imbued with dominant discourses of the nation while being tied intimately to their symbolic role as the frontier against Haiti and its possible invasion into the Dominican nation.

The existence of these fluid border communities became threats to the nation and the borders of an emerging Dominicanidad that cast Haiti as its' antithesis. This moment can also be located within the historical moment of the erasure and denial of blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean or what Andrews (2004) terms the war on blackness. According to Torres and Whitten (1998) whitening or *blanqueamiento*, "refers to the processes of becoming increasingly acceptable to those classified and self-identified as

'white'..." (8). In the Dominican Republic, this erasure of blackness took place economically, spatially, geographically, culturally, and racially. During the Trujillo era, various laws and actions took place to ensure the blanqueamiento of the country.

In October of 1937, the ultimate stage of blanqueamiento occurred when upwards of 15,000 Haitians were massacred to ethnically cleanse the state.

President Trujillo reportedly said:

For some months, I have traveled and traversed the frontier in every sense of the word... To the Dominicans who were complaining of the depredations by Haitians living among them, thefts of cattle, provisions, fruits, etc., ... I have responded, 'I will fix this.' And we have already begun to remedy the situation. Three hundred Haitians are now dead in Bánica. This remedy will continue (Cited in Turits 2002).

These changes that were occurring throughout the Dominican Republic were a part of the nation's modernization plans, and the state placed the border region at the frontier of that plan. For the Dominican state, this process of solidifying the border was not just about delineating the physical boundaries of the border; it also meant solidifying what it meant to be Dominican and subsequently who was not Dominican. Thus, the official borders of Dominicanidad cast Haiti and blackness outside the boundaries of the nation. These official state discourses sought to mark the racial, linguistic, and historical boundaries of Dominicanidad that erased, revised and minimized the profoundly entrenched connections between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Predictably, state initiatives disproportionately affected Afro-Dominicans and Dominicans of Haitian descent.

After the 1937 Massacre, in an effort to quell the concerns and outrage of the international community, the Trujillo administration began to not only solidify the border physically but also historically. In order to justify the massacre as a small internal affair between farmers, the state began to craft and revise the image of Haiti in the Dominican Republic imaginary, capitalizing, "on a familiar but diffuse anti-Haitian collective memory..." (Paulino 2016, 82). Although historical records demonstrated that Haiti and the Dominican Republic have always had a history of collaboration and border crossing, the administration would revise this history to show that Haiti has always threatened the sovereignty of the Dominican nation -- from Toussaint Louverture's temporary rule over the entire island to Boyer's 22-year reign of the island. Trujillo ideologues reconstructed the public memory to cast Haiti as the anti-thesis of Dominicanidad or the "terrified image" of the Dominican nation state⁴. The effects of this history of anti-Haitianism from the Trujillo dictatorship continue to this day.

For Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the revision of history is revealing in that the nation-state predicated its existence upon its separation from Haiti. In 1822, Haitian President Jean Pierre Boyer led an army in Santo Domingo, now the country of the Dominican Republic, and abolished slavery claiming independence for the other part of the island. For 22 years, from 1822

⁴ Essential to these moments is the notion of a terrified consciousness in which the other perpetuates anti-blackness via the way they construct the space one exists in. The individual does not inspire terror, but the space that an individual exists in created by racial and historical schemas inspires that terror. In other words, it is the constructed image of that individual, within particular spatiotemporal constructs, that inspires terror. "You justify the terror against the black on the ground that what you perceive to be his natural or intrinsic barbarity terrorizes you" (Maingot 1996: 53)

to 1844, Boyer reigned over the entire island of Hispaniola. When I interviewed a local resident of Pedernales, a young man of Haitian descent stated, "Haiti ruled over the island of Hispaniola and freed them [Dominicans] from slavery." The young man's declaration sought to counter the dominant narrative of Haiti as an occupier, with Haiti as a liberator. Sara E. Johnson demonstrates that a popular image during Boyer's rule, *General hatiano en marcha*, was not a critique of the Haitian presence in the Dominican Republic as previously thought but instead an acknowledgment of the centrality of Haiti in the genesis of Dominican nation. She further elaborates this notion by utilizing a poem from a newly freed Dominican woman who thanks "Papa Boye" for "La Liberte," (Johnson 2012, 71). Yet displays at the Museum of Juan Pablo Duarte in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic show an imposing and threatening black Haitian army marching towards a white peasant woman and her white, blue-eyed blond hair child.

The verb used to define the rule of Boyer demonstrates a significant contestation--some use the word *rule*, and others use the word *occupy*. The difference is notable because in one version of history Haiti is the ruling party that liberated the Dominican Republic from slavery and in the other Haiti is the oppressive occupying force. Both versions of history are essential to consider in that they reveal an important site in which the borders of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are performed, demarcated or challenged via history. Trouillot (1995) demonstrates the processual nature of history arguing, "For what history is changes with time and place or, better said, history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives" (25). The narrative of

the occupation of Haiti versus the rule of Haiti showcases two important sites of historical production. The narratives are essential in demarcating different stories about the role Haiti plays in the genesis of the Dominican nation and determining the borders of the Dominican Republic.

The history between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has not only been contested by historians but also by people in the border regions. During the Dominicanization of the borderlands, border citizens were not merely passive subjects of the state and its vision of the nation, but instead active participants complicit in state projects. Krohn-Hansen (2005) argues that during the Trujillo era, "power was far more distributed, more transactional and more negotiable than has usually been assumed...The Trujillo state system was built not only from the top but also at the grassroots level" (117). In that sense, border residents had an essential role in the dominicanization of the borderlands not only in participating in the state's campaigns to solidify the borders of the nation but also in actively rejecting and reimagining the nation and their place within it. The role of the borderland residents continues to be important today in not only upholding Dominicanidad but also in redefining and reimagining the borders of the nation.

The tension between the state's vision of the nation versus the border residents' vision of the nation set up the contradictory borderland stage that defines the contemporary politics between Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres. According to Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) borderlands are "place of contradictions" that are "created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (19, 25). Borderlands are inherently contradictory because they are both here and there;

therefore, borderland stages highlight the contradiction and the performative dialogue that takes place between nation and state.

Instead of understanding residents as vacillating between contradictory realities, I'd like to suggest that cross-border connections remain tethered to realities of anti-Haitianism, each existing within the same fabric of Dominicanidad. This is in part due to the entangled and asymmetric histories between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. These cross-border entanglements that are a by-product of these entangled histories at times solidify and other times shift the borders of the nation. When these cross-border entanglements begin to push beyond the borders of Dominicanidad, the center reacts and reifies the borders through the expulsion and erasure of Haiti. The center here is not only represented by state actors but also non-state actors who enact visions of the nation. This approach moves away from romanticization of bicultural/cross border spaces and instead demonstrates the landscapes of power that permeate these various relationships.

The contemporary borderland stage in Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres

Although the border campaigns began in the 1930s, the borderland stage continues to define the region and take a central place within contemporary political discourses in the Dominican Republic. In 2006, President Leonel Fernández created CESFRONT (*Cuerpo Especializado De Seguridad Fronteriza*) through decree 325-2006. The goal of the organization was to fulfill the ministry of defense's four-year mission to achieve control and institute a system of surveillance along 90% of the border by 2016 (RESDAL

2014, 254). While CESFRONT maintains its jurisdiction along the geopolitical border, the army takes over their duties 15 km after the borderline. The *Fuerza de Tarea Institucional* (FTI-Frontera Segura) is a special branch of the army created in 2012 whose purpose is to detain Dominicans and foreigners who violate laws on customs, migration, drugs, and trafficking. The national army staffs this unit and all enlisted members of the army are required to serve 15 days in this unit. These military units have effectively extended the geopolitical border beyond the agreed upon demarcation of the two nations. Militarized border surveillance techniques are a new reality for border residents as they contend with a border and security force whose sole purpose is to cease the flow of bodies and other materials.

The contemporary push for the stronger borders has been under the rule of President Danilo Medina who has taken a firm stance on the border since 2012, continuing the legacy of his precedent and fellow party member President Leonel Fernandez. The administrations' firm stance on immigration has primarily revolved around discussions of sovereignty. Medina and his administration have steered discussions away from claims of anti-Haitianism and instead have focused on conversations on the countries sovereign right to determine its policy around nationals. In a speech that occurred on February 27th, 2015, the celebration of the 171st year of independence, Danilo Medina took a clear stance against the criticism of the government's immigration policies. He stated, "I want to make it clear that no country in the world, nor international organization, can require/ demand of the Dominican Republic, in terms of migration rules, nor any other sovereign right, to assume sacrifices

outside of what is legal and ordered by the constitution” (2015). Medina directed this statement to international organizations and countries that condemned the administration's recent decision to denationalize hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent as far back as 1929, under the ruling TC 168-13, also referenced in Spanish as *la sentencia*. Medina’s emphasis on sovereignty demonstrates the continued occlusion of anti-Haitianism and xenophobia from public definitions of Dominicanidad.

Two years later, on this same day, President Medina was responding to critics of the ruling. On February 27th, 2017, Dominican President Danilo Medina released a new border plan that emphasized technology and surveillance as a new border control mechanism. President Medina’s use of Independence Day to reveal plans related to immigration and border control is telling in that it demonstrates an underlying thread of anti-Haitianism that continues to permeate the nation-state.

Medina's border plan included 900 new military troops, 30 off-road vehicles, one new helicopter, UAV and infrared night detection, and air and sea in coastal areas (Medina 2018). The governments turn towards border technologies falls within the scope of the recent turn towards the governmentality of borders and immigration, but also is specific to the region itself.

Jason De Leon (2015) has argued that the US border patrol and enforcement have depended heavily upon a policy known as "prevention through deterrence" in which officials encourage migrants to embark upon a dangerous physical terrain and depend upon this strategy as a part of their

immigration control. Thus, death becomes a central component of US immigration and border policies. In the Dominican Republic, a policy as such is not possible because there are not many significant physical terrains. Therefore, increasing technological surveillance on the border is a policy that allows the Dominican state to control mobility between nations. The military checkpoints spread throughout the country's main national routes showcase the extended arm of the state.

While the physical terrain does not allow a policy of prevention through deterrence, necropolitics remains a central component of the Haiti and Dominican Republic border. In Dajabon, the death of thousands of Haitians remains a deeply seeded memory in the oral histories and memories for residents (Paulino 2016). While such a campaign has not occurred since the early 20th century, the increasing control of state authorities, as well as the potential for violence that threatens day-day life, and the lived realities of anti-Haitianism makes death and violence a vital part of maintaining and solidifying the border of the nation. As Agamben (1998) has argued, the link between violence and law is a crucial part of sovereignty. By creating zones of indistinction, law and violence become indistinguishable in enactments of state sovereignty.

In the militarization of the border, the geopolitical divide is no longer confined to the geopolitical border itself but is now placed onto the bodies of people (Shoaff 2015). Through bodily performance, people have the ability to undo and reinforce borders, but it is crucial to recognize that the state itself can perform embodied borders as well. Through checkpoints and patrols that

span the country, certain bodies become imbued with borders of the nation-state despite their distance from the geopolitical border demarcation. Thus, while the US-Mexico border depends on a policy of prevention through deterrence, the Dominican Republic-Haiti border depends upon mobile borders that are mapped on particular bodies. These embodied borders are crucial in controlling the mobility of Haitian and Haitian descendant people.

In Pedernales, this militarization has taken root via emerging border control technologies and immigration policies that target Haitian and Haitian descendant people. Just as the national government has taken a firm stance on border security and enforcement, the local government in Pedernales has also taken a firm stance on controlling the mobility of the borders. Pedernales Senator Dionis Sanchez, also a member of the PLD party, was reported as saying:

In order for the border issue to be solved, it is necessary to build 'a wall of industries and companies' all along the border because of the problems in Haiti, Haitians will not stop trying to enter the Dominican Republic, like Mexicans in the United States [...] That's why we have to work with businessmen and international organizations, to create a corridor of job-creating industries on both sides along the border, for both Dominicans and Haitians, so that everyone could stay at home without having to cross the border to look for work (HaitiLibre 2018b).

In this quote, Senator Sanchez points towards US-Mexico border technologies and surveillance policies as sources of inspiration. For Sanchez, the wall is not the only technology necessary for border control but job creation as well.

Pointing towards the economic conditions of both Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres, Sanchez recognizes economic reasons as the primary reasons for border

crossing. Other forms of cross-border activities, however, remain unrecognized.

On March 16th the Attorney General, Jean Alain Rodríguez and the Minister of Defense, Rubén Darío Paulino Sem met with authorities of various border regions including Dajabon, Pedernales, and Elias Peña. In a statement, Attorney General Rodríguez stated the purpose of the meeting aimed at addressing, "the efficient and effective combat of this serious social scourge that especially affects these communities because they are the most vulnerable because of their proximity to the border" (Acento 2018). The rhetoric and policy on the ground paint a picture of a stable and steady border between Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales. However, the reality on the ground is quite different.

The militarization of the border is also taking root in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. In 2018, a new feature at the Anse-à-Pitres border crossing emerged, a Haitian border policing force called PoliFront (*Police Frontalière*) that is a part of the PNH or Haitian national police. In announcing the establishment of PoliFront, the Director of PNH explained the purpose of the border policing force:

Today, with transnational organized crime, drugs, arms trafficking, child trafficking, and terrorism are coming together to form the other side of globalization. These phenomena threaten peace, undermine multidimensional development and, above all, jeopardize the security of States. Thus, the issue of border security has become a major concern for states all over the world (Corneille 2017).

The director's connection between the border and the threats of globalization is a part of the U.S. post 9/11 global war on terror. According to the 9/11

commission report: "9/11 has taught us that terrorism against American interests 'over there' should be regarded just as we regard terrorism against Americans 'over here' " (2004, 362). The U.S Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) helped establish PoliFront. Additionally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) created a seminar to train PoliFront officers at the U.S.-Mexico border (HaitiLibre 2018c). In a similar fashion to the Dominican Republic, the U.S. and other international interests are militarizing the border of Haiti.

The role that PoliFront plays in local and national discourses of the nation remains to be seen yet the increasing militarization of the border is a new feature of the Anse-à-Pitres borderland stage. Contrary to the Dominican Republic the militarization of the border is not undergirded by xenophobia or discourses of keeping the other out. Instead, the officials have focused on the opportunity to prevent illegal smuggling. Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was reported saying that the money recuperated at the border could build, "15,000 classrooms, in order to educate the 10% of the children not yet schooled on the territory" (Haïti Progrès 2018).

Despite the increasing militarization and modes of surveillance that are being developed in Haiti and the Dominican Republic border region, everyday people find ways to negotiate the border divide. Roles are created, and people can enact the borders of their nation. What is evident in these everyday enactments of sovereign borders is the seemingly contradictory ways in which people do and undo their nation's borders. In the case of the

Dominican Republic, the nation's borders are fluid and permeable via *im/mobile* bodies.

Take for example a staple at the border crossing in Pedernales known as the *pase*, which I mentioned earlier. As security forces sit along the official border-crossing, young bilingual, mostly Haitian boys sit along with these army officers. They work with the officers and often run errands for them and help. Their ultimate role is implied in their name, *pase* which means pass in both Spanish and Haitian Kreyòl. When the official border crossing is closed (after 6 PM), and people want to cross into or out of Haiti, the guards are not allowed to let anyone through the gate to cross over. Despite these official rules Dominicans and Haitians still cross with the help of a *pase*. These young boys help people cross through when the border closes for an exchange of 25 pesos or so. They sit there at night when the border crossing closes and wait for people who want to cross and successfully navigate the various soldiers. Their job is not to get you across but instead help you find the route to cross. It is an official/unofficial position with CESFRONT soldiers in Pedernales. This *pase* makes it, so the guard does not break the rules, but at the same time, cross-border networks can occur. This allows for various cross-border exchanges: Dominicans looking to grab a Prestige (the national beer of Haiti) at the beach reserve and dance with their friends, men who frequent the *gagè* or cock-fights in Anse-à-Pitres, or a student who goes to school in Pedernales and is returning late night to go back to their home on the other side of the border.

There is another well-known character of the border: *Buskon/buscone*. This term refers to a person who is hired to successfully get people to the capital Santo Domingo or further inland. The equivalent in the US-Mexico border is known as a coyote. When I spoke to Ilosia, a woman who was living in the border camps a product of the 2013 denationalization of hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent, she explained she was able to arrive in Barahona, a city in the southern region of the Dominican Republic with the help of a *buskon*. Ilosia explained, a *buskon* is "that someone who knows the route, he goes with you on foot, and then we go under the line." For the people who are unable to pass these mobile borders a *buskon/buscone* allows them to evade these checkpoints and mobile borders. Prices vary, but the reported costs from Pedernales to Santo Domingo for someone who has no passport or visa is 7000 pesos (approximately \$140). For someone who has a passport but no visa the price decreases.

Chapter Outline:

In recent years, scholars and activists have taken the lead on revealing other narratives of Haitian and Dominican history. This move to work against the dominant rendering of Haitian and Dominican relations is significant not only because it uses the archives to reimagine a past but also it uses history to reimagine a future and alternative possibilities that go beyond pitting Haiti and the Dominican Republic as inevitable foes, like two cocks fighting in the ring of Hispaniola (Wucker 1999). Scholars and activist are working to revise the history set out in order to move beyond what Samuel Martinez (2003) calls

the fatal conflict model, in which the two countries are thought to be nemesis and in total conflict.

This research is done in the spirit of the revisionist work in an effort to move away from the conflict model and instead focus on connection through the concept of performance and cross-border entanglements. Previous work has focused primarily on artistic and historical interventions; I use ethnography to detail the everyday lived experiences of those on the border in contemporary times. This approach highlights Gordon and Anderson's (1999) call for an ethnography of diaspora by not only highlighting the way people of the African diaspora understand their racial identities but how these understandings create and shift borders. In doing so, I show how borders and borderlands are created, navigated, challenged, and maintained through performances. Performance offers a glimpse into embodied ways of knowing and being.

The conceptual arc of *Entangled Borders: Transnational Performances on the Edge of Nations in Haiti and the Dominican Republic* is as follows: Chapter one investigates how celebrations of Dominican Independence Day in Pedernales, Dominican Republic allow people to performatively shift the borders of Dominicanidad. I explore how borderland nationalism in Pedernales created a contradictory stage, or *borderland stage* that demonstrated a multivocal landscape of Dominicanidad that included cross-border entanglements of alternative borderland histories and anti-Haitianism. The various performances demonstrated the slippage that occurs between the Dominican nation and state and the role that Haiti plays in those imaginations.

Chapter two shifts to national celebrations on the other side of the border in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. In this, I show how the borderland stage in Anse-à-Pitres Haiti showcases the ongoing disjuncture between the Haitian nation and state. I frame performance as *call and response politics* in which the people use performance to make a call to the state and the state in turn answers. Performance provides a crucial space for the state to dialogue with the nation while the absence of performances reveals and furthers the schism between nation and state.

Chapter three shifts to performances of spirituality. I focus on the Lenten day festivals of *Rara* in Anse-à-Pitres. I argue that while many in Haiti are unable to cross the geopolitical border, *Rara* offers a way for people to cross borders spiritually. In continuing traditions and embodied memories of Africa through the concept of *Ginen*, *Rara* provides a prism in which a Vodou can build a community beyond the border of Haiti. I argue that *Rara*, provides an avenue by which practitioners map futures yet to come between Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the African diaspora. What emerges are transnational connections forged through performance.

Chapter four continues this arc and focuses on the way women use *Rara* to cross borders imposed within their communities. Women cross borders not only spiritually but also economically often using commerce across the border as their sole means of income. During *Rara* season women also traverse borders of secular/religion and vulgarity/decorum through Vodou ceremonies and celebrations. In traversing these boundaries women in

the border chart complex renderings of black womanhood in the African Diaspora through Vodou.

By broadly examining these spaces of performance, I look to different levels of nation-making at the individual, community, and national stages and ask what these experiences reveal about borders, nations, and identity. Each space is connected not only via their categorization as performance but also by the fact they were occurring in the borderlands, specifically Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti and Pedernales, Dominican Republic.

The borderlands take a central role in this definition because it is their precise liminality--as a space that can work as a site of separation or a site of connection that allows elements to be "played" with and explores the discursive terrains at tension--or how people who live in the borderlands and don't directly identify as a part of the national discourse navigate the ever-present tensions of anti-Haitianism. Each site of performance also allows narratives of *im/mobile* performances to be foregrounded, in addition to narratives of those able to cross the geopolitical border. Ultimately each offers a glimpse into other possibilities in which people in the borderlands are charting futures for the nation and reimagining borders through performance.

CHAPTER 1

“THE FRUITS OF DUARTE:” PERFORMATIVE ENTANGLEMENTS, BORDERLAND NATIONALISM AND DOMINICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

"Not many years ago nationalism was considered one of Europe's most magnificent gifts to the rest of the world" (Chatterjee 238, 2005)

"These walkways [across borders] silently attest to the popular denial of the official border, marking in space the arteries of a common Haitian-Dominican culture that transgresses the national divide imagined by elites in the respective capitals." (Derby 1994, 493)

On March 12th, 2018, several trucks roamed through the streets of Pedernales, Dominican Republic, a city located on the southernmost edge of the Haiti and Dominican Republic border. The truck was equipped with loudspeakers and followed by a group of men on motorcycles as passerby attempted to circumvent the large envoy blocking the main roads. Motor taxis zoomed by and through carrying Haitian and Dominican passengers alike.

The motorcade was in response to the killing of a married Dominican man and woman Julio Reyes Pérez and Neiba Félix Urbáez in El Quemao, located in the province of Barahona. Reports claim authorities identified three brothers of Haitian descent as potential suspects. This murder happened soon after another in which a young man named Turbí Díaz was found dead in a dumpster in Oviedo, a municipality in Pedernales. Local newspapers report that many believe Haitian descendants were also involved in this murder.

According to reports, the couple was murdered in their homes with machetes on February 20th, 2018. While Reyes died immediately, it was not until March 10th that Félix passed away. In response to the wife's death, a

group of Dominicans descended to the border region in trucks and motorcycles. Through the loudspeakers, the vigilante group warned that Haitians had 24 hours to leave the area or else be forcefully removed. Within 24 hours by March 13th, many Haitian and Dominican-Haitians fled the area and crossed the border into Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti, the commune on the other side of the border.

Local responses in the Dominican government ranged. Various sects from the Dominican and Haitian government, army, and church met to discuss the event while also creating a plan to extradite the accused and quell the tense situation. Pedernales Senator Dionis Sanchez reportedly warned that there would be no peace until the accused men were brought to justice. The Mayor of Pedernales, Luis Manuel Feliz, also known as Miguito, asked Dominican President Danilo Medina to send reinforcements in order to keep the peace. The president quickly obliged sending both a specialized army and anti-riot units.

Reportedly, during demonstrations, two Haitians were attacked and sent to a hospital the day after the incident first occurred. According to locals in Anse-à-Pitres, the toll was much higher than was being reported. To prevent further tension and violence, Mayor Luis Manuel Feliz suspended the binational market indefinitely until there was security for both Dominicans and Haitians.

The Associated Press (2018) reported: "Interior Minister Carlos Amarante urged people not to take justice into their own hands as he announced that Haitian authorities had detained one suspect and were

preparing to turn him over to Dominican authorities." After both governments reached an extradition agreement, Dominican authorities were reported as saying, "We regret that innocent and hardworking (Haitian) people have had to leave Pedernales and we are sad that they had to flee because of the persecution of some Dominicans" (HaitiLibre 2018a).

While politicians attempted to paint the event as an "isolated incident," the tension in the border region between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has always been palpable. The tension has been marked by various competing visions and realities of the nation via the state and non-state actors. Some 73 years before this event in Pedernales, during Rafael Trujillo presidency in the Dominican Republic, the nation-state began a process known as the Dominicanization of the borderlands. This process implicated non-state actors within the process of "Dominicanizing" the border. This process occurred through religion, language, and education (Paulino 2005).

The March 12th event in Pedernales showcases two core concepts that inform the backbone of this chapter: 1) the performance of national identity and borders and 2) the way that borders become imbued and enforced by particular bodies. The relationship between these two tenets is that one has the ability to shift and/or reinforce the borders of the nation through bodily performance. In the case of the March 12th event in Pedernales, the brigade demarcated the ethnic borders of the nation by demanding the expulsion of Haitian descendants. This performative event that reinforced the borders of the Dominican nation are representative of what J.L. Austin (1962) calls a speech act, an utterance that intends an action. This particular performative

event sought to solidify the nation's borders. By announcing in Spanish, even though many in Pedernales have a working knowledge of Haitian Kreyòl and the message was aimed at Haitian descendants, the brigade linguistically reinforced the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic area into a monolingual and ethnic town existing firmly within the dominant borders of the Dominican nation.

I begin the chapter with this moment to introduce the concept of embodied borders and the essential role that performance plays in shifting these borders. These embodied borders stem from geopolitical borders that divide nation-states. Geopolitical borders are made to mark the distinction between here and there, them and us; they function to demarcate a territory that is said to have a unitary group people who share common origins and history vis a vis their culture, language, and identity (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994)

Embodied borders are based upon these borders and the ideological and discursive realities that they create. In this formulation, the body is central to understandings of borders because it is through the body that borders can be imbued, enforced, and shifted. Baud and Van Schendel (1997) argue, "there is an extensive literature on how states have dealt with their borderlands, but historians have paid much less attention to how borderlands have dealt with their states" (235). Following this line, I focus on how people performatively negotiate and live with their national borders. I show how border residents in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti, and Pedernales, Dominican Republic simultaneously take part in and push the limits of what Garcia-Peña calls the borders of

Dominicanidad (2016). While border residents have existed on the fringes of their nation-states, their precise location on the edges of the nation makes it, so they are central to Dominicanidad.

By encompassing the variously embodied contradictions that prevail from those on the peripheries of the nation, my goal is to demonstrate the cross-border entanglements that occur through performance. Focusing on performative narratives of the nation or what celebrations of national identity reveal about Haitians and Dominicans relation to their respective state, allows for peripheral narratives to emerge; ones that focus less on the constant conflict between the two nations (Martinez 2003) but still pay attention to the real and important divisions between the two nations and their people.

These cross-border realities and existences can be conceptualized as resisting dominant strands of Dominicanidad I argue that cross-border entanglements exist within and not outside of Dominicanidad. The Dominican nation has historically depended and continues to depend upon these border entanglements with Haiti. The March 12th event in Pedernales is exemplary of what scholars of the Dominican Republic have argued is a long history of border crossing between Haiti and the Dominican Republic; whether it be maroon communities who refused to accept colonial borders (Ricourt 2016) or throughout the Dominican Republic's fight for independence and against imperialism (Eller 2016), the border between the two neighboring countries has never been able to enclose and separate two countries entirely. Yet, because of the significant role that anti-Haitianism has played in imaginings of the Dominican nation, when the cross-border entanglements threaten the

borders of the nation, whether they be ideological, cultural, linguistic, or geopolitical, the center responds to solidify the border. This reality means that even cross border entanglements, and bicultural spaces are often rife with anti-Haitian sentiments and actions. Focusing on the anti-Haitianism that is present in bicultural spaces in the Dominican Republic and Haiti prevents the possible erasure of the experience many Haitians, Black Dominicans, and Haitian descendants face daily.

I ethnographically focus on how people in the border city of Pedernales, Dominican Republic, located in the southernmost part of the border, performatively shift the borders of Dominicanidad during Dominican Independence, on February 21st, 2016. A focus on bodies allows multiple embodied narratives to emerge revealing the polyphonic landscape of dominicanidad. These narratives demonstrate the contested battlegrounds of the borders of the Dominican nation-state. In this case, these performed borders that are mapped onto bodies extend beyond the geopolitical border and into ideas about who is apart and separate from the nation. I move away from the center to focus on the way borderland residents understand and contend the borders of the nation. I include those who exist inside and outside the borders of Dominicanidad. I focus on national celebrations of identity and their particular emphasis on performing and demarcating the borders of who and what history belongs to the nation. In that same vein, I also focus on the performative ways in which the borders of these identities and histories are enacted or defied. In other words, how individuals performatively enact their nations via their participation or non-participation in celebrations such as

Dominican Independence Day. These peripheral voices offer narratives that place borderland experiences at the forefront of the Dominican nation.

In what follows, I trace the historical emergence of borderland nationalism in Pedernales and the general border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, I investigate the subsequent creation of what I call, *borderland stage*. Despite the state's efforts to incorporate the border communities into the heart of the nation, opposing lived realities created a landscape of contradiction that encompassed competing visions of the Dominican nation and created a borderland stage. I use the term stage to not only point towards the landscape but also how these contradictory landscapes are materialized in and through performance.

In Pedernales, these visions were less dependent upon its location within the nation and more dependent upon its' lived realities of the border. Afterward, I ethnographically investigate how nationalism in the borderlands is performed in Pedernales, the Dominican Republic during Dominican Independence Day. I argue that the variety of performance present within this celebration show the ongoing tension of the nation-state project to incorporate border residents within the nation as they partake in these discourses within a contending battlefield of counter-discourses to dominant renderings of Dominicanidad. This tension influences both the lived and discursive realities of anti-Haitianism in the borderland. I follow varying aspects of the performances and the narratives that emerge from people and the official performances. I also move outside the official performances and focus on three borderland individuals of Haitian descent who were present during the

celebrations, each with varying relationships to dominicanidad. Their stories demonstrate the extensive entanglements Haiti and Haitians have to the Dominican Republic despite being rendered outside the boundaries and imaginaries of the nation. Their presence in the borderland allows them to exist on the peripheries of dominicanidad while also shifting those boundaries to encompass them.

In this chapter, I focus on the *performative entanglements* that take place on the borderland stage. There has been a wealth of literature that explores how performance acts as a means to understand and engage in social, economic, and political realms. Take for example Alleyne-Dettmers (2002) study of Trinidadian *mas* celebration in the London diaspora communities in which he explores how the aesthetic aspects of mas (dancing, music, mud, etc.) are all embodiments of misbehavior; embodiments that flip Eurocentric ideas of respectability and conjure a hidden transcript that critiques and resists these ideas via the figure of the Black Kings. Despite the boundaries imposed upon them by societal expectations, celebrations of mas fall within the realm of performative entanglements in that performance reveals the various global flows at play and performed.

I follow Guilbault (2005) in privileging the audible entanglements, or the cultural politics made audible and visible via music, except here I focus more broadly on performance or performative entanglements. Entanglements refer to "dynamic web-like formation, a complex and shifting assemblage of connections that ran directly between colonies" (Ballantyne 2015, 17). In the context of the border region, I follow the web like connections that connect

Haiti and the Dominican Republic while revealing the various threads that create these entanglements.

Performance on the borderland stage is both reflective and constitutive of the entanglements that occur between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In privileging per and contradictions of the border that assert the role the individual has in shifting borders and defining the nation.

Borderland nationalism and the Creation of Borderland Stages

In 1804, *Ayiti* gained its independence after a 13-year anti-colonial and anti-slavery insurrection. On the opposite side of the island, the colonial Saint Domingue was still under the rule of Spain. It was not until 1822 when Haitian president Jean Pierre Boyer united the entire island of Hispaniola under one rule. After a series of natural disasters, the Boyer regime collapsed both in Haiti and Santo Domingo. In Santo Domingo, led by a secret society known as the *Trinitarios*, Juan Ramón Matías, Mella, Francisco del Rosario Sánchez, declared independence from Haiti on February 27, 1844. This historical moment has been a cornerstone narrative that defines contemporary discourses of anti-Haitianism and Dominicanidad. In the founding narratives of the nation, the Dominican people cast the oppressive and violent regime out and since then has attempted to suppress what is often painted as the ever-present threat of Haitian invasion.

Haiti's position as external to the Dominican nation became even more concrete during the presidency of Dominican President Rafael Trujillo. Trujillo began a campaign referred to as the dominicanization of the borderlands that

sought to enclose the borders of the nation and make residents on the border region central to the fabric of Dominicanidad. The ever-present threat of a fluid, multi-lingual, multi-racial borderland began a campaign that historians often refer to as the Dominicanization of the borderlands. This process entailed changes that were legal, linguistic, and ideological, amongst others (Paulino 2005). According to Verdery (1993), nation building requires processes that render groups who fall outside of the national imaginary of the nation to be rendered visible and then either assimilated or removed. For the Dominican state, this process of solidifying the border was not just about delineating the physical boundaries of the border; it also meant solidifying what it meant to be Dominican and subsequently who was not Dominican.

The removal of groups who fall outside of Dominicanidad is most concretely and tragically demonstrated during the 1937 Parsley Massacre in Dajabon, Dominican Republic. According to lore, to distinguish who was Haitian, soldiers asked people to say the Spanish word *Perejil* to distinguish the Spanish "R" from the Kreyòl "R." Soldier killed those who did not say it correctly. Historians have noted that the massacre depended upon many other factors. Nonetheless, the performance of Dominicanidad through language became a staple in defining who belongs to the nation. In more contemporary times the removal of groups who are considered to be outside of the nation was shown during the Dominican Tribunal 2013 court ruling 168-13 that denationalized hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent as far back as 1929. The decision was based upon a court case in which a woman named Julia Desquis Pierre was denied her *cedula*, or national ID card because

she had a Haitian sounding name. What each of these removals demonstrates is the continuing role of anti-Haitianism in defining the borders of Dominicanidad.

This brand of nationalism was amplified during the Trujillo era. Trujillo not only crafted the symbol of the nation to be tethered to anti-Haitianism, but it also invoked other people to participate in this rendering actively. Verdery (1993) defines nationalism as, "the political utilization of the symbol nation through discourse and political activity, as well as sentiment that draws people into responding to this symbol use" (38). Verdery's definition points towards the active dialogue that occurs between the state and the people in crafting the nation. I refer to this particular kind of dialogue as borderland nationalism. This brand of nationalism made border residents central to the Dominican nation as opposed to peripheral to it. By focusing on the border regions, the Dominican state crafted a particular kind of nationalism that was aimed at border residents because of their extensive connections to Haiti. This placement meant that border residents, despite their extensive cross-border networks, were discursively placed within the fold of dominant renderings of Dominican national identity.

This nationalism coupled with people's continued cross-border connections created a *borderland stage*: an arena of social interaction defined by realities and lived experiences that run counter to the discursive and material landscape created and promoted by the state. I draw from the work of Arjun Appadurai's concepts of locality (1996) and ethnoscapes (1990) in my understanding of borderland stage. Appadurai explains that the production of

locality is the creation of a sense of a situated community. Outside the ethnographic tendency to situate people in static and bounded cultures, states, and histories, locality considers how global flows interact to create local subjects. Locality is not the opposite of the global but a manifestation of it. In other words, locality illustrates "temporary negotiations between various globally circulating forms" (Appadurai 2008). Border regions in many ways map on to this definition as they are localities produced through global flows. Technology, economy, and media all play an essential role in shaping the landscape of the region. In particular, when it comes to shaping the locality in relation to the nation-state. Yet it is those same scapes that also make it so that locality is defined outside of the nation-state. Additionally, they are both the local, and the global as the border presupposes the international.

The people who live within these landscapes and partake in these global forms fall under Appadurai's (1990) definition of an ethnoscape, "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and persons ..." (297). Border residents are an extension of this because their landscapes are defined by the particular ability to exist within and between nations.

Borderland stage points towards the various local-global scapes that exist in the border region. The borderland stage is a product of historical local and global forces. The dominicanization of the borderlands created a particular kind of nationalism that was aimed at border residents, borderland nationalism that sought to make Dominican borders residents subjects of the

nation-state. This process itself was a product of global forces of imperialism and global discourses of modernization deeply tethered to anti-blackness in which the Dominican nation cast itself as a modern, non-Black, Catholic nation which stood in opposition to Haiti. The ethnoscape of border region made this subjectivation less forward.

In the border of the Dominican Republic, despite the state's efforts to erase Haiti and its connection to the Dominican Republic, these entanglements continued. In a 1945 report by Army Captain Federico E. Castro explains the state's failure in Dominicanizing the population of Pedernales, Dominican Republic:

There exists in this town [of Pedernales] and its outskirts a numerous group of [men and women] that by having Haitian family members such as fathers, mothers, sisters, sons, nephews, concubines, etc. all residents in Haiti, their sentiments, way of thinking, and behavior are absolutely Haitian. It is logical to assume that these people, in one way or the other, and valuing their tricks, communicate with their family members living on the other side of the border. It is my opinion that the permanence of these people here is a great obstacle for the development of the Dominicanization of the Border Plan that is taking place here led by our Illustrious Chief Generalissimo Dr. Rafael L. Trujillo Molina and is a threat to national security. As a result of the aforementioned, I consider recommendable . . . that all these people should be ousted from this town and taken to live in other regions of the Republic far from the border (Cited in Paulino 2016).

Borderland nationalism's emphasis on pure Dominicanidad in which Haiti was external to the Dominican nation did not align neatly with people's everyday experiences in which Haiti was not external to the nation but intimately tied to their lives through extensive and varying networks. This contradictory reality created a feature that continues to define the border regions today a borderland stage. Within this landscape exists a borderland

nationalism that is at once loyal to dominant threads of nationalism, particularly anti-Haitianism, and deeply rooted in borderland entanglements. It is a reality that allows cross-cultural spaces to exist within broader landscapes of racism and ethnocentrism. The landscape is transitory and contradictory; various cross-border networks, such as economic, political, and personal, exist within the broader framework of anti-Haitianism.

Borneman (1992) calls this particular reality *nationness*, or "a subjectivity, not contingent on an opinion or attitude, but derived from lived experience within a state" (338 n 11). While much of nation-making occurs at the state levels, localities also play an important part in creating or contesting the nation. On the local level, localities rather than being consumed by the nation, become active contingents of the nation-state "where the techniques of nationhood (birth control, linguistic uniformity, economic discipline, communications efficiency, and political loyalty) are likely to be either weak or contested" (Appadurai 1996, 190). In setting up the concept of a borderland stage, I would like to consider how bodies within these spaces create strategies to navigate various kinds of contentious borders.

In the following section, I explore borderland nationalism present in a public celebration of Dominican Independence Day in Pedernales. Through performance, alternative narratives of Dominican nationalism were present in addition to dominant threads of Dominicanidad. The various performances demonstrated the complex borderland stage and showed how people both participate in and go against dominant threads of Dominicanidad.

Carnival, Independence Day, and the Polyphonic narratives of Dominicanidad

From the dancehalls in Jamaica to the salsa rhythms in the Palladium Ballroom to the Notting Hill carnival, performance has played essential roles in reaffirming, negotiating and contending cultural and national identities via somatic experiences in the Black Atlantic. Stuart Hall (1981) calls public festivals "cultural battlefields," in which the nation, state, and people enact diverse narratives of national identity.

In the Dominican Republic, at stake within these public spectacles, are competing narratives of dominicanidad that create battlefields in which the ideas of the nation, state, and people compete to create and sustain a collective national identity. At stake in public celebrations of Independence Day is the image of Haiti and its relation to the Dominican Republic, in addition to the racial and cultural identity of the nation. These invented traditions (Hobsbawn 1983) are based upon selective narratives of the nation that define who belongs inside and outside the borders of this nation.

The Dominican Republic is one of the very few sovereign nations in Latin America that celebrate their independence from a country other than Spain. Although the Dominican Republic also fought wars against Spain, the country instead celebrates independence from Haiti. The emphasis on this independence celebration can be considered an invented tradition because its annual repetition seeks to imbue historical narratives of the past as a part of the present. This narrative is one in which Haiti was cast out as an oppressive and violent force. Underlying this narrative is the rejection of Haiti (blackness)

in favor of a modern (non-black) Dominican nation. A myth that is central to this formulation of the Dominican nation is the rape of the Galindo virgins in which Haitian military men were said to have raped three young white virgins during Haitian President Boyer's rule over the entire island of Hispaniola. According to García-Peña (2016), this violent incident lacked sufficient evidence yet became the foundation of anti-Haitian ideology. In this myth, the invading black foreign army becomes a threat to the nation's core: the white (non-black) virgin woman. Therefore, the celebration of Dominican Independence Day is a space where these narratives are performed and reaffirmed.

Dominican Independence is both a celebration in which the state participates in order to inculcate narratives of the nation and where the people go to celebrate and provide their own understandings of these narratives. Dominican Independence Day, along with other public festivals, provide a stage for dialogue between the state, the nation, and the people. David Guss (2000) argues that public festivals are, "public stages on which competing interest converge to both challenge and negotiate identity" (23). This celebration creates polyphonic and dialogical stages in which narratives of the nation contend within a collective performative sphere.

I argue that performances in the borderland allow for a carnivalesque space to emerge that, according to Bakhtin (1984), "belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself but shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (7). The elements of play allow for peripheral discourses of borderland residents to exist congruously with competing discourses of the

nation. These competing narratives relate to how borderland nationalism has shaped the borderland stage in Pedernales, Dominican Republic. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the March 12^a event demonstrated how this contradictory landscape had residents of Pedernales both participating in and condemning the call for the removal of Haitians from the area. This same reality holds for public performances by which the effects of borderland nationalism (and its ongoing anti-Haitianism) competed with people's everyday lived realities in which Haiti was not external but very much a part of the nation. While many in the Dominican Republic's capital can claim little relation or connection to Haiti, in Pedernales cross-border networks are essential for both border locales. These networks include economic, spiritual, and political connections that forge despite the border that seeks to separate them.

The contemporary borderland stage of Pedernales was on full display during the celebrations of Dominican Independence Day February 27, 2016, 172 years after the Dominican Republic claimed independence from Haiti. The borderland stage showed a range of lived realities, none of which eliminated Haiti from its visions or cast Haiti as the anti-thesis to Dominican national identity. The different versions of dominicanidad showcased a range of sentiments in which residents of Pedernales demonstrated the contending battlefield of Dominican nationalism.

To understand the various narratives of performances is to listen to the registers of day to day negotiations that occur between people on the border. These negotiations point towards performative entanglements that occur on

linguistic, racial, and political lines. Within these entanglements, the political voice of a borderland narrative of the nation is rendered audible and visible via performing bodies. To see these entanglements as simple contradiction misses how discourses of the nation and the state do not always align. While discourses that stem from the nation-state are often privileged, the question at the heart of this study is how do people and their performances shape the nation? What do performative entanglements reveal about dominicanidad?

During the celebration, I followed various aspects of the performances, from the official performances that were put on explicitly for the celebrations, to the unofficial performances of parade-goers to the everyday performances of self. Methodologically this follows Schechner's formulation of a "performance sequence." Schechner (1985) argues that along with the main performance, scholars should analyze the entire performance sequence. This sequence includes training, workshops, aftermath, cool down, etc. This method centralizes both the official performances and the unofficial performances that were not a part of the planning of the events yet were central in creating a dialogue with the narratives of the official performances. This approach privileges the crosstalk that occurs between the realms of performance and performativity or the dialogue that occurs between official performances and performances of the everyday.

This crosstalk reveals various imaginings and articulations of dominicanidad that showcase the way border residents imagine and reimagine the place of Haiti within the nation. What is offered is various articulations of borderland nationalism in which the border and its extensive

cross-border realities figure centrally to dominicanidad. In following the performance sequence, I privilege the narratives of those who were official participants of the celebration, unofficial participants, and people who were not participating at all yet were central to the narrative. Each of these narratives offers a web of interlinked narratives that both assume and subsume the state version of borderland nationalism and provide different imaginings and therefore possibilities of dominicanidad.

On February 27th, 2016, I had just arrived at the border by foot, a 5-minute walk from where I lived. The sweltering heat was commonplace at this point. I quickly bypassed the Haitian immigration office -- or at this point, it was a few men sitting outside under a makeshift canopy. The men had been sitting outside because the immigration office was burned down earlier in the year. On January 1st, 2016 Haitians gathered to protest the Haitian government's ban on certain products entering the binational market from Haiti. The immigration office was also burned down because according to one person, the Haitians wanted an office just like the Dominicans.

Across from the dried-up riverbed where water was siphoned off for both sides of the border, lie a gate that separated the two nations. The differences were not stark and who was who got lost in the quick exchanges of Spanish and Kreyòl spoken amongst the sea of brown bodies passing through the gate. Today wasn't a market day, so the border was relatively calm. I approached the border gate where the immigration office on the Dominican side of the border lie. I walked to the gate to meet with James, a friend of mine who lived on the Haiti side of the border. At the time of this event, James had

a *cedula*, or Dominican national ID card, and was classified as a Dominican of Haitian descent. Now, James no longer has a *cedula*. After the tribunal court passed the 2013 TC 168-13 law in the Dominican Republic, James was misinformed and told he had to register as a migrant living in the Dominican Republic. His *cedula* was taken away from him, and he was given a migratory identification card that classified him as a Haitian national. When I finally arrived at the gate he smiled and yelled "Ele!" and then quickly scolded me for being 5 minutes late. I smiled and apologized, and we moved forward scoping out a bike to take us to the town square of Pedernales.

James had already crossed the border and waited on the other side of the gate for me. After crossing the border gate, we moved forward and soon after we were quickly greeted by a *concho* (motorcycle) driver who directed us to go on his bike so he can drive us into Pedernales. Before we could leave the border area, a border patrol guard hailed us as we were in motion to stop. *La Puerta* or *Pòt la* (translated as the door in both Spanish in Kreyòl respectively) is the official border crossing in which armed officers in army fatigue uniforms make sure that everyone's documents are in order. The frequency at which one may be stopped or just allowed to go was not clear to me. In fact, there was never anything official about the border crossing, at least not for me. Sometimes I was stopped, sometimes I stamped my passport, most times I walked right through without doing either. However, this day, as James and I crossed the border, we were stopped. "*Moreno, tus papeles?*" a border patrol agent yelled at James who was asked to show his documents. He pulled out an identification card that I could not identify. The border patrol agent

inspected the card and quickly passed it back to him. Immediately afterward, I reached into my purse to show my passport, but before I had the chance, the officer left and waved us through. As the motorcycle taxi pattered along *27 de Febrero* street, James and I both looked at each other and spoke about why they only asked him for his documents. He said, "it's because you are an American and you look like one of them." My American passport and my brown complexion allowed me to easily pass through the borders in ways that many people who have deeper connections to the Dominican Republic were unable. The conversation quickly subsided as we approached Avenida Duarte and turned towards the central square in Pedernales.

It was high noon as the motor driver pattered along to the melody of exhaust engines. The sun had yet to reach its full potential, but the heat emanated from the concrete sidewalks and buildings. A symphony of motorcycles zipped by with most people unfazed by the motorcycle's constant need to insert itself within any given moment. As we approached the town square, motorcycle engines quickly became displaced as the sounds of laughing children filled in the surroundings. Black robes, masks, costumes of old, bright blue uniforms and khaki jeans populated the visual landscape as the sound of whipping lashes hitting concrete begged for everyone's attention. The young children in black robes and masks seemed almost as if they were in competition for park goers' attention whipping lashes one right after the other with each consecutively becoming louder.

Dominican flags of all sizes surrounded us as I glanced towards the Minister of Interior's office and three large Dominican flags that boldly

marked the day. Across the park, a group of young girls dressed in school uniforms looked onto their phones unfazed by the spectacle occurring. They took selfies and shared laughs together. A young boy in a mask approached with his hand extended out to ask for money. He said in Kreyòl, "*senk (5) Goude*" and then extends his five fingers out transitioning into Spanish "*Cinco pesos*." I laughed, and James responds, "*todavía no,*" or "still no" and the child walked away, but others approached, intrigued by my camera. The day was Dominican Independence Day, February 27th, 2016. Because carnival was celebrated around the same time both Independence Day and carnival traditions were being mixed up for this celebration. According to the young children, the two were synonymous; Dominican Carnival was a marker of Dominican pride and Dominican Independence Day was about Dominicans in Pedernales celebrating their space within the nation and pride as Dominicans.

I asked the young boys to tell me about Dominican Independence Day. The children gathered around and began speaking which caused more interest and other costumed children drew closer inserting themselves within the frame of the camera and showing off their costumes and whips. They mentioned they came out every year and dressed up and slashed whips because it was the tradition. They were not quite sure about the meaning of the costumes and the whips, but they knew it was a time for them to have fun and be happy while celebrating a national holiday. I then asked the children to tell me about Dominican Independence, and in unison, they said the fathers of the nation were "Juan Pablo Duarte, Mella, and Sánchez!". The children raised their hands as if they were in school each adding an aspect to the official

history of the Dominican Republic. "The 27th of February 1844" the children collectively yelled out.

That day marked the official declaration of independence. A day in which the Dominican Republic became a sovereign nation and declared its independence from Haiti. After a 22-year reign over the entire island of Hispaniola, then Haitian leader Jean Pierre Boyer ceded independence to the Dominican Republic, and the formerly unified island became an island shared by two sovereign nations. The city of Pedernales was officially founded in 1927 and in 1938 it was deemed a municipal district. Bridging Pedernales to the other parts of the Dominican Republic, a highway was built in 1937. During the presidency of Rafael Trujillo, the border zones such as Pedernales were important sites of modernization (Adams Jr. 2006). For Dominican President Trujillo this demarcation was critical to the country's economic progress. Because of Pedernales location and the time in which it was founded, the border municipality was and continues to be an essential part of the country's modernization plans.

Border zones became significant places for the Dominican nation-state because they existed at the periphery of the nation and their existence was now predicated on the idea that these towns now served as barriers to another nation; not just any nation but the nation that the Dominican Republic declared its' independence from. Derby (1994) makes the case that, "The state began to craft a new national identity by partitioning space, sharpening boundaries, and expanding the public sphere, as enclosure and rank were introduced, codified, legally inscribed, and ritually protected" (502). The

exceptionality and fluidity that defined the border were being re-defined and recast as the barrier to the Dominican nation-state.

Today in Pedernales this history and solidification of borders were being celebrated. The city was celebrating the 172nd anniversary of Dominican Independence and the 89th year of its' space within the nation. Despite the loud sounds radiating from multiple places in the town square, the celebration was relatively calm, but the anticipation was palpable. Everyone was getting ready for the celebration, and the park was the meeting ground before the main events took place.

"Si!" was the resounding answer given by everyone to the question if they were proud of celebrating Independence Day. "I thank God for making me Dominican" exclaimed one man. Another person stated the carnival was significant in showing the "heart and soul" of the Dominican people by showcasing their "happiness and prosperity." A local politician participating in the celebrations explained the parade was about "raising the flag high," military marches, student parades, and to "reinforce the importance of the day, so it doesn't get forgotten [by younger generations]. It reminds us that we were liberated, and we left slavery."

I approached a group of young girls who were sitting on a bench wearing light blue school uniforms. Inquiring about the day of celebration one of the girls recited the history of the Trinity, a secret society in favor of Dominican Independence led by Juan Pablo Duarte. The young girls then went on to name Independence leaders Juan Pablo Duarte, Matías Ramón

Mella, and Francisco del Rosario Sánchez as part of this Trinity. One of the girls declared, "We threw the Haitians out. We didn't want them here."

In 1822, Haitian President Jean Pierre Boyer led an army in Santo Domingo, now the country of the Dominican Republic, and abolished slavery claiming independence for the other part of the island. From 1822 to 1844, Boyer reigned over the entire island of Hispaniola. Boyer's rule over Hispaniola would end in 1844, after 22 years of rule over the entire island. When I interviewed a resident of Pedernales, who is of Haitian descent the young man stated, "Haiti ruled over the island of Hispaniola and freed them [Dominicans] from slavery." The young man declared this as a way to counter the dominant narrative that Haiti occupied the Dominican Republic.

The verb used to define the rule of Boyer demonstrates a vital contestation--some use the word rule, and others use the word occupy. The difference is notable because in one version of history Haiti is the ruling party that liberated the Dominican Republic from slavery and in the other Haiti is the oppressive occupying force, and enslaved people were liberated after independence was declared. Both versions of history are salient to consider in that they reveal a central site in which the borders of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are performed, demarcated or challenged via history. Trouillot (1995) demonstrates the processual nature of history arguing, "For what history is changes with time and place or, better said, history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives" (25). The narrative of the occupation of Haiti versus the rule of Haiti showcases two pivotal sites of history production. The narratives are pertinent in demarcating different

stories about the role Haiti plays in the genesis of the Dominican nation and determining the borders of the Dominican Republic.

I asked the girls how they felt celebrating their independence from Haiti on the border of the two nations, and they all looked at each other and smiled and then generally expressed pride and happiness. One of the girls stated the pride was because "We [Dominicans] are together ..." Her words motion towards a critical aspect of nationalism which is that in this celebration for the current generation, Independence Day was not merely about celebrating freedom from Haiti but about celebrating pride in ones' national identity and nation. The crux of the celebration was not about this historical fissure between the two nations but instead a desire to have fun and be happy. Although Haiti was referenced as the force that occupied the nation, for the younger kids the celebrations were mostly about pride and passing along this pride generationally.

Often during the interviews, when I asked about how people felt about celebrating independence from Haiti here on the border, the question was greeted with moments of silence, smirks, and exchanged looks. Even though these young girls explicitly said, "kicking out the Haitians" others were more cautious with their words. Instead many spoke of *la patria* (patriotism) and *orgullo* (pride). In one interview a man continuously referred to Boyer's rule as "Yugo" a word that translates to yoke, an instrument used for farm animals. He used this word to refer to the historical moment the island of Hispaniola was united, but at the same time, he was metaphorically referring the Haitian rule as a kind of enslavement, the same way a master uses a yoke to control a

domesticated animal. While the sentiments generally ranged from silence, smiles, and metaphors of captivity, one man spoke of Haiti in the light of brotherhood. He proclaimed:

As Dominicans, we always respect Haitians and feel truly Dominican. Our Haitian brothers understand we are an independent nation. The Dominican Republic is a brother country to Haiti. We share the same island but not the same country. If we mutually respect each other, we can have a better island."

This response demonstrates both the connectedness and disconnectedness that many Dominicans on the border feel with Haiti. On the one hand, there is a proud sense of national identity that is separate from Haiti. On the other hand, there is an undeniable connectedness between both people via shared land and relations. As others spoke of Haiti in the past, as the oppressors or the ones who got kicked out, this man spoke of Haiti in its present form.

Pedernales and its sister city on the border, Anse-à-Pitres, are mutually dependent upon one another. As border regions that are often ignored by their respective nations, each location is forced to build important alliances and networks across borders in order to address the inadequacy of the government. Baud and Van Schendel (1997) argue that while borderlands represent the ultimate display of sovereignty, they are never wholly successful because of cross border political alliances. In Pedernales, these cross-border alliances are also appended by different kinds of alliances including economic, romantic, educational, and humanitarian amongst many other kinds. Because of this cross-border reality, multiple discourses live closely in conversation, sometimes in contradiction and other times in cohesion.

Following various actors during the performance sequences demonstrated the contemporary borderland stage; One that vacillates between allegiances to the nation and allegiances to the geo-cultural space of the borderland. Existing on the periphery of two nations, Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales often depend upon one another to make up for the ways that their states fail them. Many Haitians living in the border region often cross the border in order to gain access to opportunities such as jobs, material items not available in Haiti, banks, schools, and hospitals amongst others. Similarly, Dominicans living in Pedernales also cross the border in order to gain access to jobs, land, products unavailable to them on the other side of the border, religious ceremonies, and fun. These constant cross border exchanges also foster important civil relations between the two nations that allow for borders to become more fluid.

The interviews that I conducted with each of the participants of the Independence Day celebrations demonstrate the polyphonic narratives of dominicanidad. In dominant strands of Dominicanidad, Haiti is an external invading force that needs to be removed. This narrative was present in many of the people's responses and understanding of Haiti. Also present was the recognition of the close ties and connections that many Dominicans have with Haiti. Instead of focusing on the narrative thread that cast Haiti as antithetical to the Dominican Republic, many Dominicans in Pedernales took pride in a Dominican national identity while also recognizing the close ties to Haiti.

Up until this point, I have demonstrated the role the state played in creating a borderland nationalism for border residents. This nationalism was a

part of the Dominican nation-building project that cast Haiti as antithetical to Dominican people, history, and DNA. Despite these border campaigns to create a nationalism that made border residents feel a part of the nation and to uptake the discourses of anti-Haitianism, cross border networks and dialogues continued between many Haitians and Dominicans shaping the contemporary borderland stage. This landscape makes it so that people vacillate between the discourses of the nation-state, in which anti-Haitianism is a core tenet of Dominicanidad, and their everyday lived realities of living along the border. In the latter, Haiti is not the other but firmly fixed within Dominicanidad; Haiti was closer to them — it was many people's family, spouses, friends, neighbors, employees, and business associates. This lived reality of living in the border, and the entanglements that come with borderlands demonstrates that Haiti has always been central to dominicanidad beyond its antithetical positioning.

Now, I move to the lived reality of anti-Haitianism on the border. As the celebrations above show, Dominicans in Pedernales shift between loyalty to the nation and their own renderings and feelings of the nation or "nationness," one that facilitates a borderland stage. Although Haiti was cast as the "other" in official performances, the unofficial performances that happened during Dominican Independence Day, the linguistic shifts and uses of Kreyòl, the cross-border networks that each person had and represented, and historical figures who were honored, all demonstrate contemporary renderings of borderland nationalism. In the next section, I take a closer look at the role of anti-Haitianism in borderland nationalism. In an effort to include

those voices from the margins I also focus on three Haitian descendant people who participated in the Independence Day celebrations to varying degrees. Their participation or lack thereof also provide a glimpse in the polyphonic narratives of dominicanidad and the way anti-Haitianism is experienced and expressed to them given their different positionalities on the borders of dominicanidad.

The Shifting borders of Anti-Haitianism en la Frontera

James: Are you proud to be Dominican?

Local Politician: Well of course! It's the best thing to be in the world. Deep down I bet you wish you were Dominican too

James: I am Dominican. Legal.

The above exchange happened in a conversation with my friend and research associate James and a local politician in Pedernales during the Independence Day celebrations. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, James is a Dominican of Haitian descent. James has family that lives in the Dominican Republic and visits often but goes to school in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. James like most Haitians that live in Anse-à-Pitres often crosses the border to go to the Dominican Republic and goes to Pedernales to buy items, visit friends, or go out. One of the significant differences between James and many who participate in these cross-border networks is that James had the documented ability to cross and move around as he liked.

Before my friend James and I crossed the border to take the bus, I mentioned to him how nice he looked. He replied quickly, "I have to look nice crossing the border, so the guards don't think I look like a Haitian." In James

understanding his clothes and the performance of himself as someone who wasn't "Haitian" could help facilitate the ease at which he crossed the border. To James, not looking Haitian said less about his understanding of the complex nature of national identity and more about his understanding of the way "Haitian" is understood in the Dominican racial imaginary. In this imaginary "Haitian" is the straw figure that is evoked as the ever-present invasion or the plague of Dominican society. What is essential to understand here is the construction of an image that does not refer to any particular person but instead to an idea of a person or group of people. Thus, James performance of "non-Haitianness" was crucial in the ways he navigated the geopolitical border. While borders were mapped onto his body, he inversely through performance was able to navigate those borders. This attention towards bodies and their ability to shift borders points us towards how performances in the borderlands can provide narratives that center the shifting borders of dominicanidad.

Despite the fact that the border allows nations and ideas of Dominicanness to be "played" around with, moments of anti-Haitianism were still present in everyday interactions. Particularly in the way people interacted with my research associate James. Even though James had documents that stated he was Dominican, or that he spoke Spanish with as much proficiency as he did Kreyòl or the extensive connections he had to the Dominican Republic he was not seen Dominican enough by the politician. James performed his Dominicanness through language, dress, smell, and even documents yet he was still discursively placed outside the borders of

Dominicanidad. James' quick refutation that he was, in fact, Dominican and his follow up that he had documents to counter any claims otherwise provided a disruption in the narrative of Dominicanidad that cast him outside the borders of its nation. His performance of Dominicaness disrupted any stereotypical notions of Haitians that some may have and showed that his Haitianness in no way negated his Dominicaness. In fact, they were entirely congruous.

These kinds of micro-aggressions point towards the prevalence of anti-Haitianism as a central tenet in dominant threads of Dominicanidad. Kiran Jayaram (2010) defines anti-Haitianism as, "a constellation of ideas and practices negatively affecting people (as a person or a group) from Haiti, their descendants, and those perceived as being as belonging to one of these groups, whether or not they actually belong" (33-34). Sagás (2000) concurs that anti-Haitianism is not just directed at Haitians but also poor Afro-Dominicans.

Maja Horn (2014) adds that discourses such as anti-Haitianism can only be understood by recognizing the distinction between the way Dominican President Trujillo spoke of and enacted political discourses. One of these foundational discourses was the notion of a homogenous and united nation. This discourse of homogeneity erased internal differences of class and race under the guises of a united Dominican nation. Therefore, everyone that was considered to be "other" fell outside the borders of Dominicanidad. Horn's intervention is vital to consider because it historically locates modern forms of anti-Haitianism as remnants of the Trujillo dictatorship.

Anti-Haitianism has long been a reality for the Dominican Republic before and after its independence. Tracing the historical foundations of anti-Haitianism Derby (1994) asserts:

[it] arose initially as a consciousness of colonial difference, an identity marked first by language (French versus Spanish...), then by a series of derivative collective assertions of differences originating in colonial rivalries between the French and Spanish. Anti-Haitianism's second layer of meaning stemmed from Saint Domingue's (which later became Haiti) former economic supremacy and colonial grandeur, in stark contrast to the poverty of the Spanish colony.... the idea of Haiti derived from its status as an occupying force (1822-44) and thus as the traditional enemy of the Dominican Republic (495).

Throughout time the discourse of anti-Haitianism has shifted and has been influenced by multiple political, economic, and social institutions. Jayaram (2010) warns that scholars must pay attention to the shifting nature of anti-Haitianism from its initial manifestations during the Trujillo era to its current realities today. I contend that anti-Haitianism is critical to trace in its various local manifestations. In other words, while there is a discourse of anti-Haitianism that prevails how it manifests in the capital of Santo Domingo versus the border region of Pedernales is determined by varying and distinct fields of relations.

Most often, Anti-Haitian sentiment in Pedernales arises when a crime or adverse event occurred by someone classified as Haitian. Derby (1994) explains how this tension emerges, "Dominican border culture must be understood both as furnishing a common Haitian-Dominican identity in relation to centers of power and outsiders, and as containing fissures of separation, invisible internal indices of difference and differentiation that

could become divisive when conflict arose" (494). If the accused was of Haitian descent, the monolithic Haitian other was evoked. Particularly, discourses of Haitian difference and criminality were referenced. These discourses existed uneasily with living and breathing counter-examples that were available to many because of these cross-border networks. Here we see how discourses shape ideas and realities, but people's actions demonstrate alternative narratives. I argue both these performative narratives are important to heed when understanding the continuation of anti-Haitianism and its particular lived realities on the border.

The contemporary borderland stage shapes the current reality of anti-Haitianism in the border region. During the dominicanization of the borderlands when the state attempted to solidify the borders of the nation, borderland nationalism sought to make residents central to Dominicanidad. Despite these campaigns, residents continued to live their lives across borders. This schism reveals itself in Pedernales as discourses and actions of anti-Haitianism occur in tandem with cross-border entanglements between those two nations. In Pedernales, there are two Haiti's: the discursive Haiti that is represented as the monolithic "others" and the experiential Haiti that is composed of individual Haitians who are their friends, families, employees, customers, or neighbors. The distinction between the two is quite significant because they demonstrate a particular reality of the border.

During the Independence Day celebrations, many people represented Haiti as "other" always different from the Dominican Republic. Cultural and linguistic differences were the most cited differences between the two groups,

but the lived reality on the border demonstrates a different narrative. Many Dominicans in Pedernales speak both Kreyòl and Spanish, listen and dance to *Kompas*, and most importantly participate in each other's national days of celebrations-whether intentionally or not. The everyday realities and actions of people stood in contrast to the words that people used to illustrate their understanding of the reality. Although the discourse painted Dominicans and Haitians as fundamentally different, the realities of the border demonstrated an alternative lived experience and narrative.

When pressed to identify the similarities between Dominican and Haitian carnival one man during the celebrations reasoned, "yes they [instruments] are similar. But it's mostly almost never the same." Austerlitz (1998) argues that Dominican merengue music shares common foundations with other African Diasporic musical forms, locating merengue explicitly within a Black Atlantic framework. The same holds for carnival celebrations. Even though the man recognized the similarities such as carnival practices in Haiti and the Dominican Republic he relegated them as different because these practices were happening within a different culture. The man was unable to locate the shared African influence both countries share because the discourse of Dominicanidad locates Haitians as always outside of the nation. The discursive binaries recited during the celebrations were as follows: Dominicans spoke Spanish, Haitians spoke Kreyòl, Dominicans dance merengue and Haitians dance *Kompas*. Davis (2007) demonstrates that this same attitude holds for Vodou. While Dominicans practice many of the

spiritual tenets of Vodou, it is instead referred to as *Las 21 divisiones* because of the stigmas associated with Haitian Vodou.

The town square was emptying so James, and I decided to walk to the streets to see what else might be happening. As we made our way towards the street, the sounds of snare drums and trumpets approached from afar. In the distance men and women dressed in army fatigues marched in a brigade with their weapons and school children with banners marched not so far behind them. The banners displayed the faces of the founding fathers. Parade participants waved paper made flags and sang along to the Dominican national anthem which goes "*el genio de Sánchez y Duarte a ser libre o morir enseñó.*" (the genius of Sanchez and Duarte taught us to be free or die). Ice cream vendors, mostly of Haitian descent, zoomed by keeping pace with the parade. As the parade passed, the public was solicited as an audience to this display of Dominican pride and independence. The parade came to a halt near the public statue of the founding fathers, Duarte, Sanchez, and Mella each bust with the words God, Liberty and Patriotism embedded on each structure. Across from these statues lies an official CESFRONT immigration checkpoint at which all buses stop. These buses are required to stop at this checkpoint in order to verify that all passengers are documented. Students stood in front of the statue with a banner displaying pictures of the founding fathers with the words "*Somos Dominicanos*" (We are Dominicans). Dominican pride and identity were vehemently being displayed and celebrated in physical, visual, and audible ways.

Local politicians and school officials took turns reciting the history of Dominican independence. One man loudly exclaimed, "We Dominicans feel more than proud because in reality women and men forced us to have an identity. To speak of Duarte, Mella, Rosario Sánchez, and Gregorio Luperón is to speak of the men who gave everything for life, dignity, and honesty for our Dominicaness." The citing of Duarte, Mella and Rosario Sánchez in this speech points towards the significant role that the founding fathers had in creating and establishing a Dominican national identity. Many scholars have argued that the declaration of independence from Haiti meant that the rejection of Haiti became the cornerstone of Dominican national identity. Taken in part one might assume that the reclamation of the founding fathers as central to Dominican national identity means that anti-Haitianism continues to be a cornerstone of Dominican national identity. Complicating this narrative, historian Anne Eller (2016) has argued that if we take the various independence wars fought by the Dominican Republic, we see an emphasis less on anti-Haitianism and more so an emphasis on anti-imperialism. This narrative includes the Wars of Restoration and the resistance against the US occupation in 1916. Understanding the complicated relationship that the founding fathers had with Haiti instead points towards a reclamation of dominicanidad in which the relationship with Haiti is multifarious; it is both fraught with tension and collaborative at the same time.

The inclusion of Luperón is also revealing of the polyphonic narratives of dominicanidad in Pedernales. Gregorio Luperón was a central political figure during the Wars of Restoration in the Dominican Republic. Luperón

maintained an anti-imperialist outlook not only in his critiques against Spain but also in his critiques against US imperialism in the Dominican Republic. According to the Historian April Mayes (2014), Luperón's vision of dominicanidad was one that decentered whiteness in favor of a "mulatto" vision of the nation that was not anti-Haitian and anti-Black but instead premised on a vision of a multi-racial Dominican nation. Although Luperón understood Haiti as culturally distinct from the Dominican Republic, he also understood the people of the two nations as sister nations who shared a similar racial lineage. On full display in Pedernales was a borderland nationalism that did not exclude Haiti from its narrative but instead embraced a Dominican identity in which Haiti was not the anti-thesis to dominicanidad but lived closely with Dominican national identity. When read together, the public embrace of the founding founders in addition to the emphasis on Luperón aligns more so with historians recounting in which the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is filled with both tension and collaboration.

I spoke to one man named Pierre who was of Haitian descent. During the celebrations, he and his colleagues were selling ice cream to parched parade participants. When I asked him what he knew of the celebrations, he said he didn't know much about Dominican Independence, but he was ready to celebrate with them and sell them ice cream. He admitted his status was undocumented but was hoping to regularize his status when he made enough money. Many of the ice cream sellers were in fact of Haitian descent and in a similar situation. The local economy depends on their labor in various ways.

These individuals either live in Pedernales without documents or cross the border every day as day laborers.

When asked about his experiences living and working in Pedernales, Pierre answered positively, "I don't really see any deportations going on lately...at the border, we buy and sell goods with no problems. We always talk to the guards so they could protect us if anything goes down." Even though Jean does not have the documents to work in Pedernales, he crosses every day to sell ice cream for the popular vendor *SkimIce*. The guards often allow undocumented individuals into Pedernales without proper documents usually with a small exchange of money because the local economy of both cities depends on these workers and those in Anse-à-Pitres depend on the economic system of their neighbors. This arrangement allows each to form a mutually beneficial relationship. With the lived realities of each cities' entanglements, cross border networks become a necessity of the border and are essential to forging necessary economic, political, familial and religious bonds. These bonds are representative of the borderland stage of Pedernales: systems work to both uphold the nation while simultaneously making those borders more fluid to allow people to forge networks across nations.

Pierre went on to say, "I could consider myself as a Dominican in some sense, I could walk amongst them with no problems, but at the same time I don't have the legal papers, so I'm not a Dominican." The dichotomy between who is and isn't Dominican for Pierre was a matter of papers. Although he worked and sustained relationships in Pedernales his inability to be mobile because of his undocumented status determined his claim to being

Dominican. Yet, as we saw with James, papers often have little to do with if one is accepted as Dominican.

Although Pierre was not an official part of the celebrations, his presence provides an alternative narrative that shows the importance of cross-border networks and border nationalism. His ability to walk amongst Dominicans and participate in their national celebrations and economy makes him feel Dominican in a certain sense, but at the same time, he understands the reality of the official border. Immigration trucks, although not as frequent at that time, are still a reality for Pierre but for this moment, the border was negotiated in favor of forging cross-border networks, and Pierre was able to participate in the national celebrations of identity.

After a few others spoke near the bust of the founding fathers, Consul Máximo Féliz Terrero took the mic stressing both history and its contemporary relevance today, "Today Pedernales says to the people of Pedernales that this shield you see in our flag, we must respect it and we must take it up...to serve the people and not yourself." Recently Consul Terrero was awarded a plaque of honor in Anse-à-Pitres due to his role in maintaining harmonious relations between the two border municipals. For Terrero, dominicanidad and Pedernalian identity were intricately tied to both history and the contemporary struggle to serve both the nation and the local community. In these particular moments in time, taking up arms is no longer about removing foreign rule and influence but instead about improving the community. While each speaker placed their pride firmly within the nation

and pride of being Dominican, there was also a significant emphasis on improving local condition because of its place on the border.

There is a delicate balance that occurs between national and local forms of nationalism: One that reinstates the nation and the other that subverts the borders of the nation in order to consider the reality of the border. In this instance, performances of the nation can either attempt to solidify the borders of the nation-state or make those same borders more fluid to take into account the lived realities and networks of a borderland. Pedernales location on the fringes of the nation allows it to celebrate national pride and firmly state its location as a part of the nation while also developing its own sense of nationalism. In this case, Dominican nationalism veers away from the narrative of Haiti as the antithesis of the Dominican nation and instead emphasize community, unity, and advancement.

During the official speeches, Haiti was not mentioned once. The speakers recited the Fathers of the nation many times, but the historical fissure between Haiti and the Dominican Republic was never mentioned or suggested. This silencing of this aspect of independence in the narrative performance of Dominican Independence Day in Pedernales is telling. By focusing on the founding fathers and the narrative emphasis on the creation of a Dominican identity the organizers allowed the narratives to craft a dominicanidad that focused more on anti-imperialism and less on anti-Haitianism. This narrative focus is indicative of the borderland stage that veers in between dominant and local ideas of the nation.

The set of performances that occur annually in Pedernales change and respond to contemporary times. Through repetition, Independence Day celebrations transmit selective narratives of the nation through generations that are influenced by the landscape of the borderland stage. Each of the speakers and many of the parade participants recited a notable ethos of the celebration: the children must continue these traditions. Independence Day was not only paramount in reaffirming borders of the nation and dominicanidad through the public performance and affirmation of historical narratives, but it was also crucial in passing down these narratives to the next generations of Dominicans responsible for maintaining the borders of the nation, particularly the border of Pedernales, Dominican Republic. Yet, simultaneously while calls to the next generation were being made to take up the shield of the flag, the next generation was both experiencing and being taught an alternative vision of dominicanidad that stressed their identities as Dominicans but did so in a way that recognizes the importance of the local realities: cross border relationships and networks. In this rendering of dominicanidad the next generation is being taught to both uphold the borders of the nation while also making the borders in Pedernales more fluid.

Because of this cross-border reality, not only was a national identity being celebrated during this day, but a different kind of border nationalism was being celebrated: "Pedernalian" -- a name locals use to define themselves as Dominicans from Pedernales. When I asked one man if he was Dominican, he said, "Claro! Pedernalian!"--of course a Pedernales Dominican. This kind of nationalism depends upon dominant narratives of the nations such as the ones

recited above by the parade participants, but at the same time, this nationalism takes into consideration the particularities of living on the border. In Haiti, a similar kind of pride was visible. One man chastised another man for not speaking Spanish saying, "what kind of Anse-à-Pitres person are you?"

This border nationalism stressed that they were Dominican but at the same time a Dominican of the borderland; one that was often fluent in both Kreyòl and Spanish, made businesses in Haiti, crossed borders to visit romantic partners or forged other kinds of cross-border networks.

During my fieldwork it was normal to see Vodou ceremonies in Spanish and Kreyòl, motorcycle drivers in the Dominican Republic who spoke Kreyòl, shop owners like Maria who gained credence with the Pedernales Haitian community because she spoke Kreyòl, Dominicans who opened businesses in Anse-à-Pitres, Haitians who lived in Pedernales but went to school in Haiti. This is the reality of the border. Yet, even with those realities, there were still clear demarcations of each country's individuality and difference.

As the parade started to wind down, James and I walked back towards the town square to see if any other celebrations were occurring in town. On our way back we passed a man named Ronald working on a bus that was being repurposed. Outside of the yellow bus was a scaffolding where the windows lay and a gas tank. The bus was scattered with brightly colored graffiti that cogently seamed the windows and side panels word Gomero sprawled across the bus, a tire repair shop.

Shuffling around with paint brushes and scattered tool, Ronald gave half his attention to me and the other half to the tasks at hand. In Spanish, I asked him why he wasn't celebrating, and he said he didn't know what the celebrations were about but assumed they were a part of the carnival. When I told him it was Dominican Independence Day, he shook his head and quietly went back to work. Anthropologists have long debated the significance of intent in describing and understanding meaning in ethnographic interactions. This debate was made most famous in Clifford Geertz (1973) attempts to explain the difference between a twitch and a wink. While identical in physical movement, what separates the two is intent. The ethnographer's job is less to determine if one is telling the truth or a lie, but instead to ascertain meaning as relayed through various layers of an ethnographic interaction. In the case of Ronald, our interaction pointed towards an ethnographic wink: Was Ronald really unaware of the history of Independence Day or was that his way of signaling to me that this celebration wasn't central to his identity? As someone who was working class, did he not have the time or the care to take off work and celebrate Independence Day?

Later on, in the short conversation, Ronald told me that he was a *rayaño*- the term locally used to identify the offspring of Dominican and Haitian parents. He switched to a Kreyòl-Spanish mix and in a Spanish accent said "*nan mitan Haitiano, nan mitan Dominicano. Mi papa es Dominicano et mi mama Hatiana.*" In his response, Ronald begins in Kreyòl expressing "half Haitian and Half Dominican." Afterward, he switched to Spanish and stated that his father was Dominican, and his mother was Haitian. He then smiled

brightly as he bragged that he had documents from both countries. He pointed his left finger towards the border crossing and his right hand on the opposite side and said “*de alla y de aqui*” which translates to from there and here.

His indifference to the celebrations indicated a possible narrative reality for many *rayaños*: is it possible by means of existing between and within two nations that there are people who belong to no nation? While he has legal rights and protections in both countries, could his allegiance to either nation be nullified due to his reality of belonging to both here nor there? Was his indifference to the celebrations due to a lack of knowledge or just a lack of feeling of belonging? Alternatively, is it possible he was articulating an entangled identity—one that was neither of Haiti nor the Dominican Republic but instead the interconnectedness of the two. The answers to these questions are of course complicated. What was revealed was various layers of not only Ronald’s words but also the context, his background, and what was not revealed.

Rayaños in Haiti and the Dominican Republic are borderland figures in multiple senses of the word. Their ability to exist and belong to two nations acts as a disruption in dominant forms of Dominicanidad. As two cultures that are discursively represented as opposites (through their language, race, and culture), Ronald represented the coalescence of these discursive opposites. The Dominican-Haitian represents a disturbance in the narrative of the divided island because they exist in both spaces simultaneously. This is why the Dominican-Haitian has taken front stage in recent debates about

Dominicanidad and nationalism. Although he was not participating in the official performances, his presence outside the celebrations and in Pedernales was a performative narrative demonstrative of border entanglements. What Ronald represents is the epitome of a borderland: a person that doesn't belong to one particular place but to both--two nations that consider themselves to be different culturally and linguistically and yet are connected and bonded through the border.

Conclusion

After the March 12th event that occurred in Pedernales when Haitians were told to leave Pedernales or else be forcefully removed, Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent fled out of fear of their lives. While the governments of both countries were attempting to assuage various constituents after the March 12th event in Pedernales, locals on both sides of the border were feeling the strain of the border closure. The event and closure of the market led Pedernales to a dangerous economic crisis as traders were unable to sell products and many businesses were being forced to close either because of a lack of employees or customers. A local business owner named María Cuevas said to a local reporter, "It's that they eat from us as we do from them, we are two siblings that we cannot separate (Ramirez 2018).

Responses from the locals in Pedernales ranged with some in agreement and others angered by the brigade's actions. One local confided, "it was all politics. Those people [from the brigade] were not even from here," gesturing towards the fact that the people from the brigade were said to have

come from Barahona, a city in the southwest of the country. Similarly, their words motioned towards two competing articulations of dominicanidad. The brigade represented a dominant form of Dominicanidad that holds anti-Haitianism at its core. The mention of the brigade not being from Pedernales demonstrates an alternative articulation of dominicanidad in Pedernales in which the brigade was intruding upon.

The border closure not only affected the binational market but other sectors of the economy as well. *Pepe* is the Kreyòl and Spanish term used locally for the used-clothes sector. Derived from the abundance of Pepe brand clothes that came into Haiti during the Kennedy administration, the *pepe* trade has been a crucial cross border sector for the Haiti and Dominican Republic border including Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres. *Pepe* is the primary trade used for La Zona Franca, a free trade zone, in which approximately 89% of formal jobs, depend upon this sector in Pedernales (ADOZONA 2015). The border closure has also had a domino effect on businesses who admit that although Haitians may not be a primary customer, their absence creates a butterfly effect in which businesses are suffering (Ramirez 2018).

In Haiti, the mayor of Anse-à-Pitres, Harry Bruno, demanded that all Haitians boycotted the binational market when it was reopened a week after the initial event as a stance against anti-Haitianism. A local in Anse-à-Pitres who crosses the border frequently explained that "no one wanted to go to the market or else they would be called a traitor. People would stand at the border crossing and throw their stuff away if they did [buy anything]." Yet locals there were also feeling the strain since many people depend on crossing the

border to buy essentials that may not be available locally such as gas, portable drinking water, or ice. Similarly, many depend upon the informal economy for their economic livelihoods.

Despite the closure of the market and the boycott that sought to enclose the borders between the two nations the realities of the border began to emerge soon after and cross-border networks resumed. This event is indicative of the borderland stage of Pedernales that wrestles with the tensions of the borderlands competing with dominant forms of Dominicanidad.

In this chapter, I have shown how performance demonstrates the deep entanglements on the border between Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres. The history of the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is one deeply immersed within global landscapes that have shaped the stages that performances take place in the border region. By focusing on performative entanglements that were present during the Independence Day Celebrations in Pedernales, a polyphonic landscape of dominicanidad emerged. This polyphony vacillates between upholding and undoing the borders of the nation. This fluctuation is indicative of the borderland stage in Pedernales that teeters between dominant forms of Dominicanidad and local forms of dominicanidad that hold cross-border connections as a core reality to their everyday lived experiences. This landscape determines the manifestation of anti-Haitianism in Pedernales in which the image of Haiti versus the reality of Haiti on the border provides for a tense landscape of cross-border entanglements and anti-Haitianism.

CHAPTER 2

“WE ASK THE STATE:” PERFORMANCE AND THE INTERMITTENT STATE ON THE HAITIAN BORDER

On July 6th, 2018, after Brazil lost its world cup match to Belgium, thousands of people in Port-au-Prince, Haiti took to the streets in mass protest. While the protests were initially dismissed as an overreaction to the world cup loss, rumbling under the demonstrations was an anti-corruption movement. Earlier in the year, the government of Haiti came to an agreement with the IMF (International Monetary Foundation) to hike gasoline prices to \$5 gallon in order to receive a \$96 million loan. In a country where the average person makes \$2 a day, the drastic increase, in a resource that is vital for people's day to day life, caused anger and unrest. The mass protest lasted for a few days making the country come to a standstill before the day to day activities resumed. While life continued, as usual, the Haitian people were by no means done as more details began to emerge about the Haitian government's dealings with oil and gas.

Months later as protests continued throughout the country, a tweet by Gilbert Mirambeau Jr. captured the spirit driving the protests: “*Kot kòb PetroCaribe A*” or Where is the PetroCaribe Money? The question spurred an ongoing movement in response to the mismanagement of billions of dollars from the Venezuelan funded PetroCaribe initiative that gave Haiti and other Caribbean and Central American nations oil at a discounted price. The initiative’s goal was to provide oil to countries at a percentage of the going rate with the remainder to be paid off over 25 years. The long-term loan

would give many countries access to oil and also invest in their infrastructure. Today, protests continue throughout Haiti as people make demands from the Haitian government to deliver on their promises.

As protests and demands spread throughout Haiti in the summer of 2018, things continued as usual in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti, a border town in the Southeastern part of the country. Because of its location on the border Anse-à-Pitres' connections to the central government are particularly weak. Statistics show that Anse-à-Pitres is one of the most impoverished communes in Haiti. The local economy is largely dependent upon cross-border labor trade which includes fishing, commerce (in the binational market, an outdoor market for Dominicans and Haitians located on the border crossing) and informal border trade. Foreign religious ministries and international NGO's such as the Red Cross and the United Nations support much of the infrastructure of Anse-à-Pitres.

In many ways' foreign investment into the local political structure often supersedes the specter of the state making the state in Anse-à-Pitres what I call an *intermittent state*. The border's social, economic, and political conditions make the state an entity that is said by residents in Anse-à-Pitres to be non-existent (*Leta pa existe*). The non-existent state for people in Anse-à-Pitres is less a reflection of the presence of state actors such as mayors and senators and more a reflection of the role the central government plays in the state on the border. The notion of the intermittent state gestures towards the inconsistent presence and absence of the state that many people have become accustomed to in Anse-à-Pitres. The term also highlights the tension that

occurs between local and central government enactments of the state and the different way that people articulate and call upon each version of the state.

As anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990) notes, there has always been a disjuncture between nation and state. The instability of the state in the borderlands is a product of the disconnect between the state and the everyday realities on the ground. Anse-à-Pitres location on the fringes of the nation makes it a peripheral concern for the Haitian state. The weak and unstable presence of the state, in turn, drive people living here to forge networks across borders to provide for themselves in the way that the state is unable.

Foreign intervention and influence on the Haitian state has weakened the central government. In the border region, this dynamic reveals itself through foreign intervention to militarize and strengthen Haiti's borders. Foreign governments such as Canada and the United States have led recent efforts to strengthen the border in Haiti. The U.S involvement in securing the Haiti and Dominican Republic border has been under the guise of its *Global War on Terror*. Canada frames its involvement as a part of democratization efforts and political stabilization (Walby and Monaghan 2011). In Anse-à-Pitres, the international influence of the Haiti border is seen most evidently with the Haitian border policing force called Polifront (*Police frontalière*) funded by the Canadian government and US Embassy in Haiti and a Border Resource Center (BRC) that is funded by the Canadian government and International Organization for Migration (IOM).

In opposition to the Dominican Republic, Haiti has not relied on the idea that the border is needed to separate and prevent the invasion of its neighboring country. In the Dominican Republic, the state promulgates discourses of the image of the "dangerous foreigner" seeking to circumvent the national border. For the Dominican Republic this has taken place in a variety of ways including a period of time that historians refer to as the Dominicanization of the border (elaborated in the introduction and chapter 1) in which a variety of campaigns sought to make Dominican border residents "more Dominican" by erasing Haiti and enforcing the border. The Haitian state's enforcement of borders has come mainly at the hands of foreign interests. With this foreign interest, the development of the border is also beginning to represent possibility of a stronger state. By enforcing the border, the Haitian state not only makes a statement to its neighbors militarized border but also circumvents the unregulated cross-border trader that officials are unable to tax and tariff.

In this chapter, I show the role that the *borderland stage*, which I defined earlier as the contradictory landscape that reveals the slippage between nation and state on the border, plays in shaping the state and the locals' relationship with the state. In the case of Anse-à-Pitres, the borderland stage is shaped by the need for cross-border networks to survive in the place of the intermittent Haitian state. The networks are both a necessity and the product of the weak state. Expanding upon Trouillot's (1990) argument that in Haiti, the state, and nation have not always aligned, I show how this disjuncture takes place in a borderland region.

Furthermore, I look at the way performance facilitates a dialogue between state and nation and encourages vernacular forms of sovereignty to emerge. I focus on the process by which people "democratize sovereignty" a concept that Aslam (2017) argues involves "transforming juridical institutions so that they are more responsive to the claims made by citizens and more participatory, as well as addressing the conditions of economic life which shape the ability of citizens to exercise their rights and routinely participate in public life" (10). The Anse-à-Pitres borderland questions the very concept of sovereignty, and its relation to a single nation. Through various performances, Haitians solidify and at other times dissolve the borders of the nation in their enactments of sovereignty and show the contentious landscapes of sovereignty in the Caribbean (Bonilla 2015).

The crucial link between performance and politics lies in the importance of performance for many in Haiti. Performance provides an avenue for pleasure away from the everyday *mizè* (misery) they experience in the face of an absent state. It also provides people economic opportunities when their performances are sponsored or given state funds. The popularity of public performances creates a unique space for politics to interact due to visibility and audience. Through sponsorship state actors and organizations gain visibility (with their names on t-shirts or billboards) and performing bodies serve as mobile vehicles for multiple audiences.

I argue that performance allows people to dialogue with, critique, and enact the state through what I term *call and response politics*. I draw upon this concept from the Black Atlantic tradition. Call and response is defined as,

"spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker's statements ('calls') are punctuated by expressions ('response') from the listener" (Smitherman 1977, 104). In the case of call and response politics, there are two crucial aspects to call and response: When a call is made it is often spontaneous and unplanned. In much of these circumstances, people rarely get an opportunity to dialogue with their national government. While they have the opportunity to do so with their local government, it can often be limiting. When these opportunities do present themselves the government then responds and addresses the needs of the people. Analyzing call and response in the Haitian church, Richman and Rey (2009) argue, "Call-and-response singing at rituals, under the transparent veil of objectified sacred discourse, can also serve as a vehicle for persuasive maneuvering, venting hostilities and exercising personal power" (153). I draw from this understanding in order to assess how call and response serves as a model for political engagement through performance.

The call and response politics demonstrate the multi-directional dialogue that people in Haiti have with their nation. As Smith (2001) has argued, "Haitian peasants have responded by creating a number of less-direct though still pointed strategies through which to gain some control over the social order, and some voice in the public sphere" (47). In the absence of a state, alternative modes of political engagement have become crucial for people in Haiti. Far from passive bystanders, people take an active role in their government. Yet, a significant tension exists within this call and response that is defined by the realities of the Haitian nation-state in the borderlands.

Residents are not only affected by Haiti state but also the Dominican state. Thus, their call and response politics are imbued with a borderland reality that serves to enact and dissolve the borders of the nation-state.

In Anse-à-Pitres, call and response politics acts as a mode of vernacular sovereignty. On the borderland stage of Anse-à-Pitres, call and response politics allows people to dialogue with the state in an effort to bridge the gap between nation and state and at times it conversely furthers the disjuncture between nation and state. Performance allows people to make a call to which the state responds fostering a dialogue between the nation and state. In the absence of performance, or what I call *non-performance*, the people make a call, but the intermittent state does not answer. The consequence is a lack of dialogue that furthers the schism between nation and state in the border region. The transitory nature of the state makes cross-border performance and networks a necessity which in itself serves to weaken the state. The defining feature of performance in the borderland stage is that people both do and undo the borders of the nation-state to the extent it benefits the borderland.

In the following sections, I detail three major performances of national and local Haitian identity. The first section recounts a patron day festival in Banane, Haiti that occurred before the election and demonstrated the re-emergence of the intermittent state in the border region. The reemergence of the state during the festivals allowed participants to engage in a dialogue that sought to mend the juncture between nation and state. In the second performance, I show the disappearance of the intermittent state after the election during Haitian flag day. Despite the day having symbolic importance

for the Haitian nation, the lack of state participation and funds demonstrated the intermittent state and the stark divide between nation and state on the border. Finally, I end with a series of cross-border performances that demonstrate how the border figures into state and nation dialogues in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. The performances exist within a borderland stage that seeks to both solidify and dissolve the borders of the nation through performance.

My task here is to arrange a series of performances in order to make broader generalizations about the role performance plays in the nation-state. In focusing on the border, I show how performance often functions to solidify and dissolving the borders of the nation. In the backdrop of the election, I show how the intermittent state led to a lack of performances that furthered the divide between nation and state yet showed the strong sense of nation that exists in the borderlands. In the face of a weak and non-existent state, performance facilitates and demands cross-border networks that in turn invalidate the very boundaries of the nation-state that the government attempts to uphold.

Background: The 2015 Haitian Election and the Intermittent State

The election season of 2015 was a tumultuous one in which the candidate Jovenel Moïse was elected as President of Haiti. Moïse win came with significant accusations of widespread voter fraud from international watch groups and local organizations. Due to scores of protests, a run-off election was scheduled for December 2015 and then again multiple times in January 2015. The delay of elections was due in part to Moïse's opponent who

did not believe then-President Michel Martelly could hold a fair election. In February 2016, President Martelly stepped down to an agreed-upon interim government whose primary purpose was to organize the runoff election successfully. Delayed again by Hurricane Matthew, the run-off election finally took place over a year later in November 2016 resulting, once again, in Jovenel Moïses being announced the winner of presidential elections. The elections created a particular residue that affected each municipality in different ways. In the Anse-à-Pitres border region, the residue left behind was an intermittent state that no longer was campaigning and making promises to merge the disjuncture between nation and state.

While the national elections were fraught with accusations of fraud, the local elections in Anse-à-Pitres were consistent. After the runoff election in November, each candidate patiently waited for the turbulence of the national politics to calm down so that they could take their posts. In the municipality of Anse-à-Pitres, candidates Marcelin Onell and Pierre Bel-Ange were running for Deputy representative in the National Assembly of Haiti. Harry Bruno and Albert Sanon were the candidates for mayor of Anse-à-Pitres. After the runoff election in November, the people voted Bel-Ange as the Deputy of Anse-à-Pitres and Harry Bruno as the Mayor of Anse-à-Pitres.

Reports indicate that on a national level only 17-26% of registered voters turned out for both election day votes demonstrating the fragile state of Haiti's democracy (NLG 2017). Anse-à-Pitres reflected a similar voter turnout for the elections. A report by the National Lawyers Guild (2017) argues that

disillusionment, fraud, violence, and lack of voter campaigns are all significant barriers to full democratic participation in Haiti.

Scholars have argued that the lack of political participation by the majority in the country is reflective of a historical and contemporary trend. Smith (2001) contends, "Haiti's *leta* [State] has developed systems and structures ...ensuring the population's lack of control over the formal economic sector... As a result, peasants have generally found themselves excluded" (22). These systems of exclusion have made the nation and state entities that do not always align or work in favor of each other, a core idea developed by anthropologist Michel Rolph Trouillot who argued that "Peasants were the economic backbone of the nation, yet peasants had no claim whatsoever on the state" (1990, 16)

In the case of Haiti, while the nationhood and nationalism have always been strong culturally and ideologically (Largey 2006), the state itself has not always aligned with the realities of the nation. According to Trouillot (1990), this disjuncture is the product of the colonial history of Saint Domingue. After Haiti gained its independence in 1804, various rulers held two core tenets as central to the nation-state: 1) the complete abolishment of slavery and 2) the maintenance of a plantation system in which peasants would work the land to produce similar profits seen during the colonial times. While peasants aligned with the first tenet, it was the second one that created a core fissure between the nation and state. The states modes of production were dependent upon a plantation system that many people in the nation deemed counter to their experience of freedom. This core fissure continues to this day, or at least the

legacies of these tenets, as the state's modes of production run counter to the core ideology of the people's belief in freedom.

The first tenet that foregrounds the abolishing of slavery now lives within the narrative of Haiti being the first independent Black nation in the Western hemisphere. This historical legacy creates a potent symbol for the nation that paints Haiti as an unambiguously Black nation; the only nation to gain its independence through a slave revolt. This narrative, of course, obscures the colorist and class discrimination that itself is a colonial legacy. Nonetheless, this narrative remains today and creates a strong sense of nationhood and identity for many Haitians.

In contemporary times, the state's current modes of production now continue to run counter to the nation because it exists within a contemporary framework of globalization and foreign intervention. According to the CIA World Factbook as of 2017, the primary source of Haiti's GDP comes from Services at 57.3%. These percentages include transportation (airlines), travel, and communication. This sector has been on a steady rise in the past decade, and the current state plans place service as a priority.

Agriculture accounts for 21.9% of the economy and industry leads closely after at 20.8%. Although agriculture only accounts for 21.9% of the GDP, the sector employs over half the country's population, increasing to 2/3rd of the population in rural areas (Caribbean Development Bank 2013). This focus and investment in the service sector point towards a turn away from agriculture and the masses who are employed by it meaning that the state is

actively disenfranchising a majority of the population from one of the country's most active and growing economic sectors.

NGOs and foreign interventionism are other factors that define the state and its relation to the nation. Take for example that foreign aid accounts for 20% of the governments annual budget (Labrador 2018). Foreign governments and organizations play a significant part in forming the Haitian state and challenging the very definition of sovereignty (Bonilla 2013). The inability of the state to define the field of relations in which it governs leads to an intermittent state; one that is only able to manifest itself in particular ways while navigating a complex set of dynamics.

Within the context of Anse-à-Pitres, a border region located in the southeast part of the country, the state does not exist in various facets of their life. Poverty, education and infrastructural issues make the commune one of the poorest in the nation. According to an IMF report (2014), 39.6% of people live in extreme poverty with the highest rates of vulnerability to poverty in the Southeast department of Haiti. The way that this breaks down in the particular municipality of Anse-à-Pitres is a very weak rating concerning access to education, primary health services, running water, and essential social services, compounded by an extremely weak rating with access to electricity. The state's inability to provide necessary living resources to the community make cross-border trade a crucial part of Anse-à-Pitres sustainability. According to a report, trade with the Dominican Republic, fishing, and agriculture (coffee, avocado, exported vegetables, and corn) are

crucial economic sectors (Duret 2010). Approximately 5.57 million USD of exports are transported from Pedernales to Haiti by road (CFI 2016).

In Anse-à-Pitres, the state is defined by its non-existence in core aspects of their daily living. What this means for people on the ground is that the state is present but absent in significant ways. A phrase that I often heard in Anse-à-Pitres was, *Leta pa existe* or "the state does not exist." This expression points towards the inability of the state to address some of the country's most persistent problems including poverty, malnutrition, economic sustainability, and education.

The intermittent state is represented in the partially built roads that were supposed to pave the way for economic development but instead became long-awaited promises of hope. The local state (mayors and senators) continue work on behalf of the state but become limited when the resources are not provided or available for them to enact the state. The porous nature of the border is an essential characteristic that allows people to fill in the gaps left by the state. Cross-border trade is a representation of the need to both restrict and dissolve the borders of the nation-state because of the state ephemerality.

The intermittent state was quite evident during the election and post-election season. While the masses often do not experience or interact with the state on an everyday basis, during the elections the presence of the state (or the potential state) was quite strong. Candidates traveled throughout departments making promises of a stronger state and this reappearance allowed people to engage in call and response politics in a way that gained them access to various economic and political resources.

During the elections, the presence of the state in performances became even more prevalent as candidates were vying for voter's loyalty. As presidential, mayoral, and deputy candidates competed for votes in the region, the people in Anse-à-Pitres used this as an opportunity to dialogue with the state in a way they are usually unable to do so. They were no longer actively excluded from the state and in fact, were being invited to actively shape it.

The Church and Performative call and response

On Sunday, October 18, 2015, the community of Banane, located in the broader municipality of Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti celebrated the community's patron, Saint Gerard. Gerard is a saint known for his humbleness and kindness. He grew up in poverty and dedicated his life to the lord. He is the patron saint of Banane and celebrated every year with a variety of activities. Even though the celebrations focused on religion, there were also church celebrations, soccer games, and other public performances.

At the beginning of the day, I accompanied Deputy Mayor Momplaisir of Anse-à-Pitres, through the town as he visited friends and family and practiced a particular brand of politics in Haiti known as pòt-a-pòt or door to door in Haitian Kreyòl. Each person was greeted in some way because it was election season and the deputy mayor was making sure that his political career continued beyond the current moment. Deputy Mayor Momplaisir was appointed by Haitian President Michel Martelly. Although Momplaisir was never elected, he was a favorite in the town of

Banane because his family was from the region and he was born in Tet Alo, a fact that he liked to point out to me every time we passed the area.

With the election just a week away on October 25th, everything in Banane was about politics. Jude Celestin, one of the front runners for president, was a local favorite because he promised to build a road from the capital to the southern border region. The road from Anse-à-Pitres to Port-Au-Prince is a rocky, mountainous and dangerous path that prevents easy access to goods and resources from moving between the periphery and heart of the country. Tourism is another primary reason locals want the road built because they believe the undeveloped beaches of the southern region will be a significant source of economic sustainability. The possibility of connecting the border region to the flows of the capital and its link to the international community made Celestin a favorite of many.

As I walked around town, I stopped in the central square of Banane, a small space with three connected benches where people gather to talk, a kind of community space also known as Baz Refleksyon (Reflection base). After prompting from the youth of the community, Deputy Mayor Momplaisir built the base as a space for the town to reflect and debate the happenings of the town and country. Today, the mayor's cousin Francique Jean was the main attraction. He vibrantly spoke about politics, the issues plaguing the country and other issues concerning the community. Some people passed by and participated before going on with their days while others sat and contributed to the dialogue. Simple in its design, the reflection space was a small example of public performance of sovereignty in which minds are being swayed, demands are being made, and topics are being debated.

Another dialogue and performance of sovereignty were happening at the Catholic church. On this day, every political candidate in the municipality attended mass, whether they were Catholic or not. Church began at 9:30 am, and the first two rows of the church were reserved for political candidates. Accompanying the current deputy mayor Momplaisir, I sat in these rows along with the candidates for mayor and deputy mayor. Mayoral candidate Albert Sanon and deputy candidate Onell sat in the front. On the opposite side of us was the opposing deputy candidate Bel-Ange.

Church began with the smell of burning sage and a choir of young girls in Pink and blue uniforms singing in French accompanied by the drums and a metal grater. Father Luc Leandre began the service reading parts of the bible. Yet, despite the celebration of Saint. Gerard, politics and the upcoming election took front and center of the father's sermon.

The 4-hour service was filled with political statements clearly sometimes not so clearly connected to God. The father asked the rhetorical question to the crowd, "Who will win the election?" Candidate Bel-Ange emphatically raised his hand and said that he would. The crowd laughed, and then the father asked the opposing candidate Onell the question in return, and he responded, "only God knows." This response from Onell prompted a loud cheer from the crowd and led the father to state, "God gives power...all power comes from God (*Bondye bay pouvwa...Tout pouvwa vin de Bondye*) referencing Roman 13 from the bible. Later on, in the service, the Father asked Bel-Ange who the first president of Haiti was to which he had no response. The Father never directed the question at candidate Onell. Despite the fact, the Father

never once stated a preference for a candidate his preference for candidate Onell was evident by the way he prompted the candidates with questions and swayed the crowd.

At this moment the stage of the nation was set in a small church in Banane. The father spoke on behalf of the church, the local state representatives including candidate and elected officials represented the state, and the parishioners represented the voter base and the people of the nation-state. The church became a space, similar to the *baz refleksyon* in which different state and non-state actors were being called on, and ideas of the nation and state were being debated, but here it was through religion.

Many times, during the service the father began his statements with, "We ask the state...." These statements called upon the state to act on behalf of the church and its parishioners. While people were not able to debate in a traditional format, their participation via song, gesture, laughter, and clapping represented a particular engagement with local politics. If a candidate said something that was not to their liking, they could respond in a variety of ways that would then require either the pastor or the candidate to respond.

Later on, during the service, Father Leandre thanked presidential candidate Jude Celestin and candidate Onell for the promises they made to the church if they got elected --like toilets and metal benches and seats for the church. He also thanked the other candidates as the church clapped along in celebration. The Father was deliberate in thanking the candidates who made monetary gifts to the church. He went through the lengthy task of listing each candidate who gave monetary gifts even going so far as to name the exact

amount that they gave to the church with the implication being that these candidates were also for the local community. Those who did not give gifts were called out by the pastor. Mayor Momplaisir was one of the people called out and labeled stingy (*chich*). This particular moment is demonstrative of the crucial tie between performance spaces and politics. The church became a performative stage in the backdrop of the election. The appearance of the state during the service meant that the state was now the audience. The visibility of the event made it crucial to attend by all politicians in the region. Although Celestin was not there, he was there in terms of his promise of monetary gifts he would make if he became president. The politicians' success was dependent upon the nation, who were the parishioners. The Father's shaping of his sermon to sway the crowd in one direction or paint a candidate in a certain light was a moment in which he was engaging in call and response politics. He called upon the state to meet the demands of the church (and the nation), and the state responded by providing these resources. The church is a political arena in which different actors, both state and non-state make demands and participate in what I call a call and response politics. The churches ability to sway and act as a moral compass of its parishioners makes it an essential place for politicians to debut their platforms and can often act as a political arena in which the state comes face to face with the nation.

Cultural and religious festivities are critical spaces for dialogue in Haiti and the broader black diaspora. During the political turmoil of the late 1980s in Haiti after the fall of the Duvalier regime, the power of the church and its relation to the nation and state came into full view with the emergence of the

Lavalas political party. A young priest by the name of Jean Bertrand Aristide was beginning to make waves, and at St. Jean Bosco church in Port-au-Prince and the Ti Legliz (Little Church) movement was picking up steam. After the St. Jean Bosco massacre, in which Tonton Macoute members killed congregation members of St. Jean Bosco, Aristide was expelled from his position at the church. Tens of thousands of people protested the ruling; thus, it came to no one's surprise when Aristide announced his presidency in 1990. His liberation theology and fiery sermons in which he condemned Duvalier and the international community moved his supporters. The power of the church in defining and reimagining a vision of the nation came into full fruition. For Aristide, his politics aligned directly with his liberation theology in which he sought to uplift the masses and create a seat at the table for them (Aristide 1993).

While in this example the call and response politics were focused primarily on strengthening the Haitian state other examples show less attention to the Haitian state and more attention to the cross-border relations. According to a report, on February 12, 2015, protestors took to the street during the Patron Day celebration of Notre Dame de Lourdes in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. While churchgoers sang songs and prayed, protestors on the street demanded the resignation of the municipal council. They were protesting the treatment of Haitian market vendors in the binational market shared with Pedernales, Dominican Republic. During this religious day of celebration protestors not only made demands from their state they also made demands from the Dominican state demanding better cross border networks. While the

protestors took to the street, the priest offered similar visions asking for better relations between the two nations while demanding peace (Bonicet 2015). The protest represented a cross border call and response where people made demands in the absence of a Haitian state. In the border region, people vacillate between attempting to strengthen their state to undoing those borders in the face of an absent state. What both of these moments show is the crucial role the performance plays in creating dialogue and acting as an alternative mode of political engagement.

Although the St. Gerard day celebrations occur every year, it was this particular year during the elections in which the patron day celebrations of Banane took on the weight of the nation and the state. During these celebrations, the state appeared in the form of candidates and their promises for a stronger state in the region. While the goal of the politicians was to sway the voters the church and its parishioners were by no means, passive bystanders. During this moment a crucial dialogue occurred between the nation and state, a call and response, in which people were making demands from the state. Cultural performances as such become crucial spaces of dialogue because they represent the nation (the Catholic morals of the nation) and because of this the state depends upon these spaces to relay their platforms and creating the building blocks for a potential tomorrow. Politicians depend upon these performances in terms of visibility and because of this people depend on these to make demands from the state.

Haitian Flag Day and Non-Performances of the intermittent state

Several months after the initial presidential election occurred in Haiti, Anse-à-Pitres was once again approaching a major national holiday, Haitian Flag Day. The protests in Port-au-Prince had already calmed, and the interim government was planning the second round of the elections. The flux created by the interim government made the intermittent state non-existent again for people in Anse-à-Pitres. The candidates who appeared during the patron day festivals were no longer interested in making promises and life continued as most people expected. In Anse-à-Pitres, the pending new government and the elections did not make much of a difference. The acting government officials continued to work with limited resources, and people continued to live their day to day lives disconnected from much expectations from the intermittent state. The disappearance of the intermittent state at this time rendered the call and response politics of performances inaudible. While the nation was calling the state was no longer responding creating a further schism between nation and state.

Each year Haitian flag day is celebrated on May 18th to commemorate the creation of the Haitian flag. According to popular lore, this moment marked the vital moment in which the revolution's goals would turn explicitly towards independence. Taking the French flag, Jean Jaques Dessalines tore out the white portion of the tricolor flag signifying the removal of the colonial separation between black and mulatto. There has been much debate amongst historians and other scholars on whether or not this story is true but what this story signals is an essential ethos of the burgeoning nation: unity and freedom

from colonial rule. The contemporary retelling of this story demonstrates less of what actually happened and more of the hopes for the future of the nation. The rippling effects of the call to revolution would go on to inspire an age of revolutions. Despite its silencing in history textbooks and popular culture (Trouillot 1990), the Haitian revolution would have lasting effects on the Western Hemisphere in ways this nascent country whose primary focus was freedom, was unprepared to deal with.

For Jean Jaques Dessalines, the father of Haitian independence, the flag was an opportunity to create a new identity of union; the flag's slogan, "L'Union Fait La Force" emphasized the unity as the strength of the nation. Lauren Derby (2014) has argued about the importance in recognizing fugitive forms of speech; or the cultural and expressive ways that knowledge is contained, spread, and recognized that are not always audible or legible. These forms include rumor, gossip, Vodou bottles, and flags. The Haitian flag is no exception, and its various manifestations contain significant histories, ideologies, and experiences that may otherwise be silenced.

Flags are significant in that they symbolize a nation. They are not simple markers but instead representatives of ideologies and futures of a nation. Catherine Elon sewed the symbol of Haiti's and its promises into the seams of the first Haitian flag. According to historians, before the official adoption of the horizontal bi-color red and blue flag, various flags were used for different purposes including red, French-inspired red, blue, and white, black and red amongst others (Fombrun 2013; Girard 2009). The different flags represented a nascent nation attempting to reconcile various ideas about the

future. A distinct *Kreyòl* Haitian identity emerged, and the flag was representative of both history and future possibility.

On May 18th, 2016, I woke up early in the day eager to watch the celebrations of this historical moment. I told all of my friends that I would be staying in Anse-à-Pitres for Flag day to which they replied in shock, “*Ansapit pa genyen anyen* (Anse-à-Pitres doesn't have anything).” The idea was if I wanted to see a real celebration I had to go to Port-au-Prince and Jacmel. I smiled and replied I know they have great celebrations, but I was more interested in seeing how people celebrated Haitian pride on the border.

As the dust lingered in the air from bypassing trucks filled with *pepe* clothes entering from the Dominican Republic, I left my house and walked towards the main road. Contemplating what to expect, I sat around and waited for the big parade, the drums, and celebrations. But to my surprise there was nothing. After waiting for about half an hour, finally, a noise rang in the distance. As the sound came closer, a brigade of 10 or so young men marched down the street. Each young man in the brigade wore clothing that hinted at a military aesthetic. The brigade was small, and as soon as they came, they left. Hoping this was a sign for upcoming celebrations, I sat around and waited for more celebrations to come around, but nothing else came. Curious to know if something was happening, I asked around and was told by young students that there usually is a celebration planned by the schools, but today there was nothing. No celebrations had been planned and just like that Haitian flag day was something that was celebrated elsewhere—in Jacmel or Port-au-Prince.

I went to visit a friend who was involved in planning celebrations in prior years. I told him that no celebrations were happening for flag day and he tisked his tongue in disapproval. He said, "I don't know what happened this year but, in the years, before we had beautiful celebrations." He took his smartphone out of his pocket browsing through his Facebook page to find videos and photos of the previous year's celebrations. In the videos, young women dressed in red and blue dresses danced down the street as the crowd loudly cheered on in the back. A small group followed and then the video came to a sudden end.

In Anse-à-Pitres major holidays such as Haitian flag day are funded by the Haitian state and distributed to local officials to use as they see fit to celebrate. In past years, Anse-à-Pitres celebrated Haitian flag day with parades, music, and dancing. Yet this year in the aftermath of an election and amid an interim government, Haitian flag day celebrations did not occur in Anse-à-Pitres. Curious to know why this year was different from the previous year's celebrations, I went to visit a local government official and inquired about the lack of celebrations. We had a long discussion where he generally referenced the lack of funds the municipality was receiving. He went on to confide, "I haven't even gotten paid in 6 months! How am I supposed to help other people?" Yet, as the young brigade of men showed, people continued to celebrate showing that there was still a nation on the border and if the state was able to provide people would be able to celebrate and reinforce the borders of the Haitian nation in celebration of the flag and what it represents to the nation.

In talking to this official and other people in Anse-à-Pitres, it became immediately apparent that the lack of celebrating Haitian flag day was not about a lack of pride but instead a lack of resources and funding. The local mayor told me these celebrations are dependent upon someone willing to take charge and use state funds accordingly to celebrate. But this year in the face of an intermittent state that was being made even more fleeting by an interim government, with little power the state was unable to support its nation on the border. The non-performances of Haitian Flag Day were indicative of the disjuncture between nation and state. The performances that did occur despite the state funding showed how the nation was performing itself despite the state's inability to do so.

I call the lack of performances on major holidays such as Haitian Flag Day *non-performances*. I theorize non-performance as the void where performative narratives of the nation were supposed to take place. National celebrations are often stages in which people forge local articulations of identity with and against the narrative of the nation. Victor Turner (1982) argues that cultural performances allow for beliefs/ethos to be affirmed or challenged in order to "take stock of its current situation in the known 'world'" (11). When performances occur a set of narratives and dialogues occur between the nation and state. When official performances are unable to occur due to a lack of state support, non-performances represent a series of narratives unable to emerge. In the presence of an intermittent state how might have the performative narratives of Haitian flag day in Anse-à-Pitres engaged in a call and response politics? The varied discussions leading up to

the anticipated events that never happened instantiated an imbalanced performance where the nation called but the state was unable and/or unwilling to respond representing the ongoing tension between the nation and state.

Despite a lack of support from the central and local government, people still celebrated Haitian flag day and other major celebrations in Anse-à-Pitres. What was missing from the celebrations was an opportunity for the nation to dialogue with the state in call and response politics. Non-performances of Haitian Flag Day demonstrated the continued disjuncture between nation and state. In the following section, I will show how the intermittent state leads itself to performances that un-do the border of Haiti. In the face of a weak and absent state, the borderland stage emerges and influences how Haitians engage with both the Dominican and Haitian state. What makes performances in the border distinct from other places in Haiti is that in addition to being in dialogue with the Haitian state they are also in dialogue with the Dominican state.

Cross-Border Performances: The Shifting Nation and State

I made my way from my house in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti, a border town located on the Southern coast of the island. I walked through the rugged rock path that transformed into a smooth pathed road on an all too common sweltering hot day. This road led me to the official border crossing in Anse-à-Pitres that marked the end of Haitian territory and the beginning of Dominican territory to a town called Pedernales. My plan for the day was to cross the border to visit Pedernales with one of the three appointed mayors

of Anse-à-Pitres, Ylly Momplaisir, or Majistra Ylly as the people commonly called him. Majistra Ylly and primary mayor Guilène Daphnis were both appointed by then Haitian President Michel Martelly.

The border crossing point is one of four official crossing points between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The crossing point is located immediately after the riverbed of Rio Pedernales, and each country's customs office lie on opposite sides of the river. On one side of the river stands a partially built iron gate with the Haitian flag and on the other side of the river lies another partially built iron gate with the Dominican flag on it. While named after the Dominican municipality, the river itself snakes in and out the geopolitical border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The riverbed that lies at the official border crossing is instead a dried-up space filled with rocks since both localities use it as the primary source of water. Waves of people, cars, and trucks whose lives and sustainability depend upon the permeability of this geopolitical border now run where the water used to run.

On market days, the movement of people is less restricted. Every Monday and Friday Motorcycle taxi drivers zoom in and out of the riverbed on both sides carrying passengers moving between the two territories. These passengers carry loads of used clothes, or pepe as it is referred to in the area, that they purchased from Jacmel, Haiti to sell in Pedernales, Dominican Republic. Other times pepe clothes are bought from Pedernales to be resold in Pedernales or Haiti. The pepe trade is a vital transnational economic sector for this region.

Another vital economic sector is the binational market. The market is an open-air market located at the official border crossing on the Dominican side. Haitian and Dominican sellers alike sell all kinds of products from household items to fresh meat.

On market days, people from Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales freely cross in and out of the official border crossing carrying items bought or sold from the binational market. On the Haiti side, men sit across the riverbed ready to sell phones and technology alike. Others sit with backpacks full of cash ready to sell and buy pesos, goudes, and US dollars alike. A very recent addition to the border scene, a few police officers apart of Haiti new border police force, PoliFront (Police Frontaliere), sit in the shade monitoring cross-border activities. On the Dominican Republic side of the crossing, armed guards sit monitoring the movement in and out of the gate. Motoconchos (motorcycle taxis) who own motorcycles purchased in the Dominican Republic sit waiting for their next customer. Officials with badges and professional clothes sit at the immigration office controlling the documented movement that occurs between the two countries.

Today, the border crossing was bustling with people and motorcycles as many merchants and buyers made their way to the binational market. I made my way past a sea of moving parts to reach the official border crossing. Before I could make it to the gate on the other side of the riverbed, I noticed that the Haitian immigration office, which was a large trailer, had been burned down. No longer able to work in the trailer the immigration officers sat stamping passports of people officially crossing into Anse-à-Pitres.

Two days earlier on October 12th, 2015, the people of Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti protested at the official border crossing to Pedernales, Dominican Republic. The protest was in response to the recent ban on goods coming from the Dominican Republic. The customs office in Haiti seized various goods that

they deemed to be illegal. The seizures were a part of a broader ban imposed by the Haitian government that listed 23 products no longer allowed to be transported by ground, only by air and sea. For people in Anse-à-Pitres, this meant that the ban was blocking the cross-border trade that is a vital economic source for people on both sides of the border. As a land-based border, ground transportation for imports is the only sustaining mode of transportation for many local sellers and business owners.

While the disconnected capital of Haiti was making decisions on banned goods, people in Anse-à-Pitres and other border locales such as Ouimanthe were taking a stand against their government's restriction on their cross-border networks. In Anse-à-Pitres, during the protest, the immigration office on the Haiti side was burned down. No one was hurt or killed, but the protestors burned the container and rendered it unusable.

As I passed the burned down customs office, I asked Majistra Ylly why the customs office burned down. He explained there were two primary reasons: on the one hand, the burning showed that the people were angry about the ban on goods. On the other hand, it would force the central government to provide funds to rebuild the customs office and make it "just as nice as the Dominican side." According to Foucault (1979), the spectacle is meant to be a public event whose aim is to highlight the uneven power between the sovereign and the one who has violated the law. In this case, the sovereign is not a state-actor but instead non-state actors. People refused the power of the sovereign state and instead enacted their own sovereignty; one that seeks to strengthen the nation while weakening the state.

For people in Anse-à-Pitres, the customs office on the border represented their only real link to the central government. By burning down the office, people were refusing the ban that was a central life force for them and simultaneously making it so that the central government pay attention to them. It was a protest that represented both the doing and undoing of the nation-state's borders. In this protest, the people of Anse-à-Pitres were dialoguing with their government and at the center of this dialogue was the border. At stake was both the Haitian nation (in wanting to perform aesthetic modernity in the face of the national border) and the Haitian state (yet also wanting the state to undo the restrictions that prevented the very undoing of the borders). The protest represented the desire to perform a strong nation while also demanding that the state dissolve the borders it sets to the nation. The disjuncture between nation and state is quite evident in this protest.

As a border town, it is not only the Haitian state that residents are calling upon but also the Dominican State. Take for example a protest that occurred on January 2nd, 2015 in which people in Anses-a-Pitres, Haiti surrounded the border crossing in protest of the seizure of a Haitian boat and four fishers by the Dominican Navy whom they claim had crossed oceanic international borders. In Anses-a-Pitres and Pedernales much of people's sustainability comes from fishing/the ocean. Haitians were outraged at what they perceived to be a continuation of the countries anti-Haitian sentiments. Locals not only directed their protests at the Haitian government but also at the Dominican state. In both protests, underlying people's demands is a desire for a border that allows cross-border networks, particularly within the

framework of economic sustainability. In each protest, the states of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic were being called upon to address issues that were particular to the border and its cross-border networks. The call and response politics demonstrate the multi-directional dialogue that people in Haiti have with their nation. Far from a passive bystander, people take an active role in their government. Yet, a major tension exists within this call and response that is defined by the realities of the Haitian nation-state in the borderlands. Residents are not only affected by Haiti state but also the Dominican state. Thus, their call and response politics are imbued with a borderland reality that serves to enforce and void the borders of the nation-state.

While I have only focused on two protests that occurred on the border, there are many more protests that have taken place over the years. These protests have been aimed at both Haitian and Dominican government and will continue to occur because the feature that defines so many people's livelihood in the region is cross border networks. Once those networks become blocked people take action and the government responds.

I theorize that the protests at the border are performative events that sought to enact its own kind of sovereignty, counter to that of the Dominican and Haitian state. Paloma E. Villegas (2015) argues "The border encounter is an important site where sovereignty is performed and negotiated" (2359). These performative events demonstrate how borders allow for alternative articulations of sovereignty, in this case, borderland sovereignty. The protests

sought to both enforce and fragment the borders of the nation-state in favor of more fluid borders that privileged free flow over regulated exchanges.

Literature that focuses on the performance of sovereignty often focus on the role state actors play in the border encounter. Take, for example, a border guard who waves a person through the border crossing or an immigration interview, a process that Friedman (2010) refers to as bureaucratic border performances. The protest at the border is a demonstration of the way that people can enact their own nodular forms of sovereignty. Through protest, people make demands and the state at times responds. In the above example, the state responded by building a new large customs office that surpassed the customs office on the other side of the border.

In the first protest, people were demanding that the Haitian government respond to the local needs of the community. In the second protests, people were calling upon both the Dominican and Haitian governments to address the concerns. This type of politics is a central feature in Anse-à-Pitres, and often the fluidity of the border for cross-border exchanges becomes a defining feature for many people's calls.

When the customs office was burned down, the protest served as a call to the central government. The demands were to modernize the face of the Haitian nation at the border and also to allow cross border networks to continue. While this may seem contradictory, this very act of doing and undoing is the central reality of the borderland. After the burning of the immigration office, it took some time for the central government to respond but eventually a new

large building was erected to process cross-border customs forms. Close to a year later, the Haitian government agreed to lift the ban on land-based goods entering from the Dominican Republic.

The protests represented a borderland performance that sought to make the borders more fluid. At the center of this performance were people whose livelihoods were dependent upon the fluidity of the border and the enactment of a vernacular borderland sovereignty. At the same time, the protests represented a call and response politics that sought to align the nation with the state. People's demands for a customs office that was just as beautiful is representative of a desire to show a strong nation at the face of the border and the desire to have a stronger state presence.

Conclusion: The Meeting of Two Cultures

Conversely, during another cross-border performance, a state-sponsored event in Anse-à-Pitres sought to discursively enclose the borders of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Every year in the summer both Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales the border towns come together to celebrate an event titled "Rencontre De Deux Cultures" or the meeting of two cultures with the sub-headline: Between young Haitians and Dominicans. As the title suggests, it is a day designated for the official sharing of Dominican and Haitian culture. The event is not for tourism but instead is aimed at the youth populations of Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales. The goal of the event is to officially encourage cross border networks forged via cultural, political, and economic activities. A variety of Dominican and Haitian cultural and political organizations hosted

the event such as the provincial governments from both Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres.

I often went to the beach reserve in Anse-à-Pitres in order to conduct interviews. On this day, with a stroke of luck and timing, I stumbled upon a group of men sitting in a circle under one of the beach canopies. As the meeting began, the men began discussing the main committees and activities of the 6-day event: sports, culture, financing, arts, and public relations. The committee identified each of these as important activities that could foster cross border relations and harmony between the two border towns. As the meeting continued forward newly appointed Mayor Harry Bruno explained the history of the event: according to the mayor, the event started as a way to join the two cultures together and to share their music and dance. Mayor Harry gave the example of *Kompas* and *Bachata* (Haitian and Dominican music and dance respectively). He stated that the two musical genres were perfect examples of the two different cultures. According to him, being on the border, it was the perfect opportunity to share these cultural expressions while fostering cross border community and connections.

Others in the group went on to explain that each culture would be able to share their activities for others enjoyment in order to create and keep harmony between the two countries. Harmony was the primary adjective used to explain the purpose of the day's events and culture was the avenue in which this was to be achieved. Also, on the forefront was the need for pleasure and fun for both localities. Officials on both sides of the border understood that fun, entertainment, and culture were essential spaces to create cross

border networks and enact local cross border politics within and beyond the nation-state.

The committee listed a variety of events that would help facilitate this local enactment of sovereignty: soccer, dominos, folklore music, and popular music. Despite the emphasis of the event to share two distinct cultures what became apparent immediately was that the event was emphasizing shared cultural spaces. Dominos, cockfights, soccer, and music are just a few examples of activities that individuals on both sides of the border vehemently participate in and enjoy.

As the meeting went on, I asked where the events would take place. Mayor Harry Bruno responded that the event would only take place in Anse-à-Pitres. After all, it is and has been significantly easier for Dominicans in Pedernales to cross the border to Haiti. Despite the border gate closing at 7 PM often Dominicans often crossed after hours to visit local nightclubs. Kens, the head committee member and founder of this event, went on to explain that when he first started this event some seven years ago, it was an even exchange--events were held in Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres, but today due to an increasingly militarized border the sharing of culture was becoming less multi-directional.

Midway through the meeting my friend who had accompanied me to the meeting, Sonald posed an issue: why aren't the Dominicans participating just as much as Haitians. He mentioned how the event seemed to be just a form of flattery where Haitians were presenting their culture, but the Dominican presence was lacking (both in terms of people and politicians).

Sonald posed this as unfair and something that needs to be fixed. Everyone in the group nodded their heads in approval. Yet, the group seemed confident this year would be different, after all, it was an election year for both sides-- both fraught with allegations of fraud. The event could be a chance for both sides to meet the ruling parties and establish their new order of border politics.

Later another young man posed that it was important when meeting with Dominican officials that officials bring up the issues of denationalization. During this meeting, it became immediately apparent that the meeting of cultures was facilitating a demand from people in Anse-à-Pitres to address the less harmonious aspects of Dominican and Haitian relations.

I then asked if the Dominican authorities are also a part of this planning to which they replied yes. The other woman present was interested in translating for both. They were not present at this meeting, but Mayor Harry Bruno had plans to meet with authorities to get them involved. It was former deputy chief, Marc Aurel who told me that this event was all about politics and during the meeting Evens stated this event is not just about "folkloric music" instead it was about new governments meeting to discuss the development of the border zones. One of the local deputies confided, "it is the stuff of pure politics" admitting that the event was less about sharing culture and more about the new mayors and political officials on the border to get to know each other and establish how they will mold their borderland spaces.

The Meeting of Two Cultures is an event that is given top priority by the Haitian national government with an estimated 3-5 million *goudes* sent to

spend on these events and to pay local artists and athletes. This event was not only a way to share culture but also a way for many of the underemployed and unemployed people of Anse-à-Pitres to use pleasure and fun as ways to gain economic traction. The event demonstrated the intricate connection between politics, pleasure, and performance.

The governments were keen on using performance as a way to create a national narrative of cohesion and unity, and people were willing to use their performing bodies to not only gain economically but to make demands bi-nationally and discuss important issues that both countries face. Politicians were using this event and the performing bodies to gain visibility and also foster dialogue between the two governments. The people were using this as a space to make demands from their local government. A political call and response in which cultural spaces were being used to enact local forms of sovereignty not only within Haiti but also across the border in the Dominican Republic.

Later in the day, after the meeting, I went to have a couple of drinks at Majistra Gillen's bar in Anse-à-Pitres, a favorite spot for both Haitians and Dominicans. I scanned the terrace noticing how packed it was. As I approached the bar, I noticed a lot of Dominicans who live in Pedernales there. I recognized a few faces from the cockfighting tournaments popular in Anse-à-Pitres. The men listened to *Bachata* and *Kompas* and danced, kissed, and held their Haitian companions. A mix of Spanish and Kreyòl filled the night, and in this space, locals created bi-cultural space. Here in a bar in Anse-à-Pitres these two cultures met without the intervention of state officials--they

not only met but they rested easily within their commonalities of living on the border--between two nations.

In each of the performance highlighted in this chapter, the state and nation took part in a dialogue. What shaped these political calls and responses that took place in the Haitian border region was the *borderland stage*. The disjuncture between Haiti's nation and the state becomes even more pronounced in this landscape as the lack of a strong state becomes imbued with cross-border realities and demands. Despite the transient nature of the state on the border, people work to solidify and dissolve the borders of their nation in a way that aligned less with geopolitical lines and more with unstable and shifting borderland networks. In the *Meeting of Two Cultures* event, local state officials sought to create an event that distinguished the two countries as distinct while also creating bilateral relations between the two states. People engaged in this event under the premise of the two cultures being completely different yet when the official performances were over, they continued to live their lives not as two distinct cultures but instead as people's whose lives are shaped by the very connections the event sought to make official.

CHAPTER 3

KISKEYA FUTURES: GINEN, RARA, AND BORDER CROSSINGS



Figure 1: Feeling Rara marches down the streets of Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti on Good Friday (All photos by the author¹⁵)

*The sun was setting along the ocean's edge in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. Many of the fishermen were wrapping up their day by tolling the neon green netting they used to catch fish in the sea waters. I sat on a small chair outside, reveling in the embrace of the cool breeze coming off the water outside the house of Jean Rony, the founder and *houngan* (Vodou priest) of the Rara group Feeling Rara.*

¹⁵ I use photos to demonstrate many of the visual aspects of Rara and while also valuing it as a form of data that can be analyzed as a kind of knowledge I privilege Ruth Behar's call for anthropology to move closer to the arts, "It is in sense that if ethnography is to have a life beyond the academy it will need to move closer to the arts...visual, musical, theatrical, cinematic, and literary" (1999:483). My goal is not to mark ethnography as a "second fiddle genre" but instead to use both ethnography and the visual together.

Joining me outside was Jean Robert, the vice president of Feeling Rara. Jean Rony sat next to Jean Robert in a sturdy straw chair as we were joined by a guest, Henry Gonzalez, the founder of a Dominican Cultural activist group *Kiskeya Libre*. I met Henry, the founder of *Kiskeya Libre* at Cornell via our shared interests in Afro-Dominican and Caribbean performance and music. In the summer of 2018, I met the members of *Kiskeya Libre* when I participated in an artist residency in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The founder, Henry and I had devised a plan to research and explore the shared musical connections between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. My connection to Feeling Rara was based on long term fieldwork I conducted with the group where they had named me *marenn* or godmother of Feeling Rara. Sitting outside of Jean Rony's house, I began the meeting by introducing Henry to Jean Robert and Jean Rony. I started the meeting off in Kreyòl and explained that Henry was the founder of a group that was interested in collaborating with Haitian artists.

Kiskeya Libre is a collective of Dominicans and Dominican Americans who define themselves as a "pro-black, pro-queer, pro-feminist, anti-ableist" community that strives to "[bring] together the diaspora & Kiskeya through cultural, educational, community programming" (Kiskeya Libre 2018). Through Dominican roots music the group foregrounds Afro-descendent music and in doing so creates bridges across the island. One of the primary ways they do this is through the promotion of Afro-Dominican music groups which includes Dominicans and Haitians. They hold concerts in the Dominican Republic and collaborate with Haitian artists in Haiti such as the

band *Lakou Mizik*. Through their work, Kiskeya Libre creates transnational networks between the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and its diaspora communities which has included a small U.S. tour of the Dominican group *Enerolisa y su grupo Salve* whose lead singer is a Dominican woman of Haitian descent. The group's name Kiskeya is derived from the word Quisqueya, the pre-colonial indigenous name of the entire island. For founder Henry Gonzalez, the use of the "K" recognizes the shared linguistic Kreyòl languages that unite Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

After introducing everyone, Henry began to speak in Spanish explaining his background and the kind of collaborations he was interested in pursuing. Jean Robert, who had spent many years in the Dominican Republic responded to Henry in Spanish and subsequently translated for Jean Rony in Kreyòl. In the hour-long meeting, each person in attendance explained their interest in collaboration. For Henry, the desire to collaborate stemmed from his own goal to create bridges of collaboration between Haitian and Dominican artists. Jean Rony and Jean Robert interests in the meeting stemmed from their aspirations to collaborate and to play internationally. While other members of Kiskeya Libre were not able to join the meeting due to visa restrictions, Henry and members of Feeling Rara sat outside Jean Rony's house plotting Kiskeya futures¹⁶ yet to come between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

¹⁶This included concerts in the Dominican Republic where Kiskeya Libre would promote concerts with Feeling Rara and also opportunities for Dominican artists to come to Anse-à-Pitres and participate in the Rara festivities

I set up this meeting as a part of my obligation to Feeling Rara as their *marenn*, or godmother. In 2015, I began research with Feeling Rara in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. According to the founder and *houngan* (Vodou priest) of the group, Jean Pierre Rony, the name of the group was inspired by the *bel feeling* (beautiful feeling) that one gets when hearing the music and dancing with Feeling Rara. According to Jean Rony or Roro as he was called, "I don't believe there is any other place I can find [the feeling] ...Because for my Rara I am ready to die for it (laughs)." Roro's emphasis on *feeling* mirrors anthropologist Chelsey Kivland's (2017) theorization of Rara as a feelingful program. For Kivland these *feelingful* activities are not only crucial for the pleasure they bring to people but also the power it affords people who are able to provide pleasure to particular communities.

When I first approached *Roro* about doing my research with Feeling Rara, and he asked what I was hoping to gain, I explained to him that my fieldwork would involve me doing interviews, filming, and participating in their festivities. Listening carefully, he paused after I finished speaking and then said I could research with his group under the condition I take the title of *marenn* or godmother. In Latin American tradition, godmothers and godfathers are essential roles and often provide financial support. I told Roro that I wasn't sure I was fit to have such a title, after-all tradition states that any role in the Rara requires a 7-year *angajman* (engagement) not only with the group but with the *lwa* or Vodou spirits the group serves as well. But as he understood it, if I was to be taking from the group through my research I also had to be giving back to the group; a lesson in fieldwork reciprocity.

So, after a few meetings with Roro and other members of Feeling Rara, we negotiated the title of *marenn* and everything that would include for me. Traditionally the role of *marenn* entails significant financial support. During the festivities, which primarily occur for the 3 day period of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the *marenn* is expected to bring *kleren* (a cheap cane liquor) during rehearsals and performances as well as cook and feed the Rara, provide them with water, sometimes they are expected to dance and dress with the queens, and overall they are expected to see to the well-being of the Rara both during and after the Rara festivals. I knew for various reasons that I would not be able to fill this traditional role and so through a series of meetings with the board of Feeling Rara, and we negotiated what my title would entail¹⁷. What became evident very quickly was that my role of *marenn* was a new one being crafted to address varying fields of power and privilege.

It was the merging of these two connections that led to the meeting described at the beginning of the chapter. As a foreign *marenn*, it was these exact kinds of meetings that Feeling Rara ultimately hoped I would be able to provide for them. Having foreigners participate in their Rara group not only meant increased notoriety within the community but also more capital and possibilities beyond the borders of Haiti. The cross-border theme of the meeting was partly due to my background as a Haiti/Dominican Republic scholar yet the plotting of the Kiskeya futures were products of the cross-

¹⁷ With this understanding, I told Roro and the group that I could provide some financial support to buy shirts and food, make a film and take photos for them, and introduce people, specifically foreigners, to Feeling Rara. I also occasionally brought *Kleren* for the group during rehearsals and provided water during the marches that occurred in the day time.

border experiences that both Roro and Jean Robert had in the Dominican Republic. Their experiences gave them the linguistic and cultural background to foster this connection and plot their own futures. As I sat in the meeting, I pondered: was there something underlying the various ethos of Rara that facilitated these kinds of meetings in which cross-border and African Diaspora futures were being plotted? It is this question that serves as the impetus to this chapter.

In this chapter, I argue that the performance of Rara maps physical, historical and spiritual points of the African Diaspora in Haiti and beyond. I argue that through this mapping, Rara makes visible and evokes communities that exist beyond national identities and borders. This mapping is made possible in two ways: the performance of Rara in diaspora and transnational spaces outside of Haiti and the imagined community (Anderson 1983) that Vodou and its connection to Ginen *Lafrik* evoke. I draw from Sonah Stanley Niaah's (2010) work on performance geography or the "mapping of the material and spatial conditions of performance" (33) to explore how Feeling Rara gestures towards a broader African Diaspora future yet to come through performance.

In conceptualizing Rara's ability to map futures of the Black diaspora, I draw from Paul Gilroy's (1993) idea of *politics of transfiguration* where Black Atlantic performance signals the "*post-modern yet to come.*" What makes these expressions post-modern is that they exist beyond the modern framework of nations and borders. Solidarity is composed through a shared experience

rather than national identities because performance “reconstructs its own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden public sphere of its own” (37-38). In the case of Rara, I argue that through Vodou and Ginen, *Feeling Rara* maps a post-modern genealogy.

I am particularly interested in Gilroy’s phrasing of “yet to come” because it highlights the process of these futures becoming. Doing work that highlights solidarity through cultural expression necessitates a framework that avoids romancing resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990). Focusing on the process rather than an imagined endpoint allows one to see both utopia and its utopic failings. This matter is particularly prevalent in the case of Haiti, and the Dominican Republic as these counter discourses of modernity are juxtaposed to violent histories of anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic. Rara’s ability to map futures of the African diaspora cannot be separated from these histories that make solidarity difficult.¹⁸ My fieldwork with the Rara group *Feeling Rara* demonstrates how Rara, Vodou, and Ginen forge difficult diasporas. *Feeling Rara* is a group based in Anse-à-Pitres, a border town located in the southern part of the island and as such the people who play in *feeling Rara* represent a series of the cross-border entanglements that exist between the two countries. The social and political landscapes influence Rara’s variation from region to region. Crossings and crossing borders define the landscapes that *Feeling Rara* performs.

¹⁸ Samantha Pinto (2013) calls on scholars to map difficult diasporas that point to the contours and limitations of diasporic concepts such as the Black Atlantic and diaspora in order to disorder them.

By mapping the futures that Rara creates, I show how the attempt to create a community at times fail and at other times succeed. The forging of collective belonging between Dominicans and Haitians is difficult, but there have *always* been cross border connections between these two countries. The weight of Dominican nationalism has made it difficult for Dominicans and Haitians to forge collective belonging and imagine a shared future. Thus, these postmodern futures are not just solely just a product of the past or the present—they are becoming. The word become suggests an ongoing process that is working towards a future.

In what follows, I start by exploring a core ethos of Rara: crossing. According to Yanique Hume (2015) at its very essence, the practice of Rara is about, "Crossings, passages, and journeys." I explore how crossing is broadly conceived and experienced in Haitian Vodou through the symbol of the cross and the crossings present in the Rara ceremony of *Jouke Rara*. With a particular focus on Feeling Rara, I show how Rara's ability to cross or not cross geopolitical borders is another ethos of crossing in Rara. This particular reality of crossing for Feeling Rara relates to my broader argument in that it shows how the performance of Rara creates maps beyond borders and national identities. In the case of the meeting described earlier, Rara was the vehicle in which Afro-Diasporic futures were being plotted.

I then analyze Ginen from the perspective of members of Feeling Rara and other people from other Rara groups in the border region. In Vodou, the notion of Ginen refers to Africa as remembered and lived in a contemporary world. It also refers to an underwater location where the *lwa* live. For the

members of Feeling Rara, their collective cross-border experiences influenced their understanding of Ginen in which Ginen was not only served by Haiti and Haitians but also other countries. Their experiences in the Dominican Republic and other locations geared their understanding of Ginen in a more global framework. In recognizing these connections, their mapping of diaspora pointed towards futures in the making between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, or Kiskeya futures, yet the historical and political realities between the two countries still undergirded these futures.

These various levels of crossings gesture towards futures yet to come in which Rara and Vodou connect people throughout the African Diaspora, allowing them to imagine a space beyond borders of an African Diaspora connected by and through Afro-Diasporic cultural expressions. In Anse-à-Pitres, it one not only defined by metaphysical crossings but also the crossing of a geopolitical border; one filled with a complex history that has separated and bound the two countries at different times. In following the various lines of the map made audible through Rara, I follow Pinto's (2013) call to disorder diaspora and map difficult diasporas.

Background: Rara, Vodou, and Ginen

Every year after Ash Wednesday utterances of the African Diaspora become audible as carnival comes to an end and the religious Lenten day festivals of Rara commence. Rara varies from region to region in Haiti and includes its Dominican and Cuban counterparts Gagá. Throughout Haiti and its diaspora, Rara groups start their rehearsals and begin preparing for the

official commencement of Holy Week. Rara is a parading performance that includes music, dance, and ceremonial Vodou rites. Performers often commit to a seven-year contract (*angajman*) to dance and participate in Rara which allows them to serve the *lwa* and engage in fun activities. Singing songs, marching down the street, and performing Vodou ceremonies, Rara groups commemorate and recall their ancestors while also performing embodied memories of Lafrik Ginen (Africa).

Vodou is a creolized religion that contains Dahomey, Kongo, and Yorùbá cultural influences (Fandrich 2007). Vodou is the term used to refer to a wide array of activities such as service to the *lwa*, medicinal herbal practices, and Bizango (secret societies) amongst others. The Haitian Vodou spirits, or *lwa*, are mediators between the physical and the spiritual world and *Bondye* or God. Through a reciprocal relationship with the *lwa*, worshippers can address life's day to day issues and in exchange provide various kinds of service to the *lwa*.

Rara publicly celebrates Ginen during the week where countries all over the world commemorate the life of Jesus Christ. The celebration represents the syncretization of African spiritual traditions and Christianity that defined many enslaved people's experience in the New World. According to Abel, a *Vodouisant* (Vodou practitioner) in Anse-à-Pitres, "Rara came out of the stomach of Vodou, it came out of the stomach of Ginen." It is a time when many countries cross the boundaries between the spiritual and physical worlds in celebration of Ginen.

When Rara groups march down the street during Holy Week, the goal is to have fun and gain fans. They sing catchy songs about life, love, and sex often blurring the boundaries between decorum and profanity. Drinking, smoking, and *banboche* (celebrating) are all standard parts of Rara but underlying that is crucial spiritual work. Rara is a way for people to honor their ancestors and maintain a service and connection to *Ginen*. Jean Robert, the vice president of Feeling Rara, explained why Rara is used to serve the *lwa* and honor *Ginen*, "As a spirit, if you like Rara you ask for Rara, you liked Carnival you ask for it. If you were a part of the evangelical church, you would come back as an offering." Jean Robert's understanding of Rara as a service to the spirits closely aligns with M. Jaqui Alexander's (2005) assertion that, "There is no dimension of the Sacred that does not yearn for the making of beauty, an outer social aesthetic of expression ... The Sacred is inconceivable without an aesthetic" (323).

The aesthetic of Rara is filled with colors that represent and evoke different *lwa*; from the sequins to the flags and the general color scheme. These visual aspects reveal what Lauren Derby (2014) calls fugitive speech or forms of expression that "reveals layers of lived experiences and thus embedded affect that are otherwise occluded from view" (132). I invite the reader to look at the photos of this chapter not merely as illustrations but as forms of fugitive speech with layers of meaning and histories¹⁹.

¹⁹ I think of the photos in the chapter as representing two layers of fugitive speech. On the immediate level, these photos are a representation of the Rara festivities from my own perspective. I cannot remove myself or the camera as a neutral observer because cameras are never neutral. The framing, angles, and other aesthetic choices represent my own artistic voice and my own framing of Rara. On the other hand, the images in these photos do represent



Figure 2: The Majò jon Jean Robert dances as he twirls his multi-colored skirt made of various fabrics and used clothes (pepe)

In order for a Rara to go out, it must have a host of players. The extent and use of each position vary amongst groups and is often shared by one person. The main performers of Rara groups include *renn* (queens), *wa* (kings), and the *majò jon* (baton major) (see Figures 1 and 2). All of the performers are tasked with creating and sustaining *chalè* (heat) for the Rara group. The creation of *chalè* occurs through dancing, singing, playing instruments and enacting other forms of *mistik* (mystery).

Other performers include the people who play instruments. The *banbou* gives Rara its distinctive sound serving as what McAlister (2002) calls a sonic

fugitive speech. The colors, drawings, and various elements tell a story about Feeling Rara and the performance of Rara.

flag. Usually made of zinc or plastic, the *banbou* is a long circular tube that players blow into in a particular beat while also using a stick to beat the side of it (see figure 4). The *konye* is another essential instrument in a Rara group. It is a brass instrument that expands out from the mouthpiece into a horn shape (see figure 5). Other percussion instruments of the Rara include the *kes* (snare drum) and *tanbou* (drums) (see figure 6). These are the most common instruments for Rara groups but depending on the group itself it can also include other percussion and brass instruments such as a saxophone, clarinets, or symbols although it is worth noting that these considered to be “non-traditional” instruments. Then there are the Rara members whose roles are spiritual. Their job is to remove, or lay traps set by other Rara groups and generally to protect the group from both physical and spiritual threats. Ranks include the *pèt drapo* (flag bearers) and the *avan/laryè gad* (front and rear guards) (see Figure 3). During a ceremony known as Jouke Rara, Rara groups will enter into contracts with particular *lwa*.

In exchange for protection and various other needs, the Rara group will perform various ceremonies to serve the *lwa*. The *lwa*, in many ways, also walk with and play with the Rara group providing a variety of services and forces. The *fòs zonbi* (power of the zonbi) is also another (invisible) spiritual player within the Rara. The *zonbi* is usually obtained during a ceremony at night where a series of rites and secret processions are done to put the force of the *zonbi*²⁰ in the group. This force not only protects the group but also

²⁰ Elizabeth McAlister (2012) makes the distinction between *zonbi astral* (astral zonbi) and *kò kadav* (walking corpse). *Zonbi astral* is the spirit of a zonbi captured in a bottle at a cemetery through a series of secret Vodou processions. This is the zonbi that often accompanies many

provides it with a mystical force that allows groups to walk, play, and dance for miles on end in hot temperatures.

Then there are a host of roles that attend to the logistics of the Rara, *sekretere* (secretary), *prezidan* (president), *vis-prezidan* (vice president) and *Maestro* (group leader). Each of these roles ensures all parts of the Rara run smoothly both in front of and behind the scenes. For example, a maestro may recruit people to play certain instruments, write songs, and during the public marches make sure that everyone is playing right and in harmony.



Figure 3: Leserne, the flag bearer, stands in front of the Rara holding one of the three flags of Feeling Rara

Rara groups. Then there is *kò kadav* which occurs when a spirit is separated from a body before its death. The distinction between these two was made quite evident to me during my time in Anse-à-Pitres at a lush garden filled with avocado and mango trees. When I walked past this garden, I was told never to pass the gate because a *zonbi* protected it. When I inquired further my friend explained to me it was not a *zonbi astral* but *kò kadav*. No one in town dare steals from the garden because this *kò kadav* was dangerous. I never passed the gate, but I *always* remembered the warning

Many roles in the Rara also take influence from military hierarchies such as the *kolonèl* (colonel), *jeneral* (general), and *minis lagè* (minister of war)²¹. According to Laguerre (1993), “the study of the importance of the army in Haitian history and political life is central to an understanding of the dynamics of the total societal system. ...the army has *always* served as a mechanism for social promotion or upward mobility” (8). Since the inception of the Haitian nation, the military has played a central role in Haitian society. This centrality mirrors itself in Rara as military personnel are tasked with leading, organizing and protecting all aspects of a Rara group. In this sense, Rara can be said to serve as a mirror that reflects the prominence of the military in Haitian society.



Figure 4: Marching forward, a group of men blow into a metal banbou instrument or vaksin using a tree branch

²¹ See McAlister (2002: 137) for more information on the various roles in Rara and their connection to military hierarchies. Also, see Laguerre (1993) for more on the role of the military in Haitian society. It is important to understand the place of the military in Haitian society in order to understand the importance of military titles in Rara.



Figure 5: Feeling Rara members blow into a metal trumpet known as a konye



Figure 6: The percussion section includes a traditional *tanbou* drum and more contemporary snare drum

This notion of societal mirroring is reflected in Jean Rouch's film *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955) in which he demonstrates how the ritual performances of the Hakua in Ghana mimicked British colonial hierarchies as an act of cultural resistance. This kind of analysis that focuses on resistance within postcolonial performance has been heavily critiqued in anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1990; Mahmood 2011; Puri 2003). Ferguson (2002) warns the danger emerges from an "anthropological insistence on interpreting gestures of similitude in terms of parody and magic has the effect of obscuring the continuing claims of Africans and others to full membership rights in a world society" (559). The notion of mimicry suggests that the anti-modern African subject performs the conditions of the modern European subject in order to wage a critique against the institutions they exist outside of.

Taking these various analyses in consideration, I would like to suggest that, in the case of Rara, the military roles do not only reflect a critique or even embrace of modern state formations through traditional performances but also the way Rara encapsulates and creates alternative visions of military hierarchies for the purposes of Ginen. If, as I suggest, Rara postulates post-modern futures yet to come, then military roles not only represent a reflection of society but also become a tool to imagine these futures. Through a military ethos, Rara groups are able to protect their group and wage battles in service of the *lwa*. This kind of analysis "comes to terms with the politics of the post-colonial world" (Ferguson 2002, 558) by recognizing that Rara groups are filled with people who after the Rara go home and engage in and against an increasingly neoliberal world. The military roles in Rara not only reflect

Haitian society but also show how Rara uses these structures for spiritual, physical, and monetary purposes.

In stressing this point about the military, my goal is to more broadly show the way that Rara is immersed in changing political, economic, and social landscapes. Although Vodou does not draw from western notions of linear time progression, Rara groups are composed of people who exist within post-colonial state formations²². When Rara groups march down the street, they are doing so within highly politicized spaces and lands. When Rara group members are done playing they return home to families and jobs. The practice of Rara does not exist within a vacuum and must be understood in dialogue in both historical and contemporary times²³.

What emerges is a tension in epistemologies, a kind of borderland one might say, in which the epistemology of Vodou interacts with the Western concepts of the modern state-formation that delegitimize that way of being²⁴. Yet, Vodou was born within these very tensions. The use of Catholic saints in place of the *lwa* was not just a matter of disguise but of hybridity or in other words the combination of two epistemologies. This tension that exists within hybridity is also present within the way Vodou and Rara interact with linear

²². By showing the practice of Rara and Vodou enmeshed within discourses of modernity, I move away from the conceptual baggage of "tradition" and instead sees it as living and breathing religion that interacts with various other institutions. Moving away from static concepts of "tradition" towards what Largey (2000) calls traditionalizing, places Rara within a framework that highlights the process in which Rara draws from the past while also recreating practices that fit within a contemporary context. This makes it so that the relationship between past and present is not linear but instead multi-directional

²³ Kate Ramsey (2002) explains how the Haitian state framed Vodou and its associated practices as traditions and revivals of the past. This tradition then came to represent a modern national identity via its claim to a transcendent and unifying past

²⁴ See Kate Ramsey (2011) for more about how Vodou was prohibited legally by the Haiti state in the early 19th century under the auspice of discourses of modernity

notions of time. Although Vodou does not suggest linearity, Rara does because of its location within socio-political landscapes. This tension is at the heart of the futurity that Rara is able to evoke through the concept of Ginen. In other words, the past that Rara evokes in the present is used to create futures.

Rara Crossings: Christianity, Jouke Rara, and Border Crossings

According to Rara lore, Rara's connection to Easter can be traced back to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Ace, a Rara organizer from Banane, Haiti explained, "it was a rara group that was passing by and stole one of the four nails [from Jesus Christ]. That was why they only hammered him with three nails; one in his left hand, another in the other palm of the hand, and one on his foot. The one that they were supposed to hammer into his heart got stolen by a rara group. That is why they usually tell you each Good Friday that rara is allowed to perform all over in the country."

In colonial Saint Domingue, enslaved people were forbidden to practice their spiritual practices and beliefs and forced to convert to Christianity. Elizabeth McAlister (2014) notes that many enslaved people who originated from the Kongo-Angola region had practiced a form of Roman Catholicism since the 16th century so by the time the Haitian revolution began in 1791, Vodou was already strongly influenced by Catholicism. This background explains why the cross is a prevalent symbol in Vodou cosmology and why a Christian holiday would resonate so strongly with Rara.

The cross in Rara has a variety of symbolic and spiritual purposes. On the one hand, the cross represents the four cardinal directions: north, east,

south, and west. Crosses are often placed to help guide *lwa* as they manifest. Additionally, crosses also represent crossroads. A crossroads occurs at the intersection of two or more roads. In Haitian Vodou and other African diasporic spiritual traditions, crossroads are important locations imbued with significant spiritual power. As a Rara marches down the road and they reach a crossroads, they salute the *lwa Met Kafou* (Master of the Crossroads). The ethos embedded in the cross marks the power that is imbued at the intersections of the body, the spiritual world, and the built/physical world.

Emile, a member of Feeling Rara, explains the power imbued at the intersection of these various entities:

Yes, I circled in the crossroads, I'm turning because that is the knowledge to turn, if there's something in the crossroads when I turn around, I'm already picking it up...you have to turn in the crossroads before the other group so that they can see your flag. You have to show respect to *Met Kafou* (master of the crossroads), there are several entities in *Met kafou* like *Kalfou minwi* (midnight crossroads), *kafou midi* (afternoon crossroads), there is *kalfou barye* (barrier crossroads). You have to respect all of them anyway. It is like an angel, someone who is buried in a cemetery, you know that they used to serve in the crossroads, you know that this person died in this spot, let's say it was a *Houngan* or Vodou practitioner died in this area, a known houngan that used to be part of rara, You have to circle because there is spirit of dead people that participated in the rara in the intersection. People that died but when they were alive, they had been in Raras, this is called *Met Kafou*, *Met Simityè* (Master of the Cemetery), *Met batwon* ... The intersection has a *mèt*, and if you are going to pass a crossroads, you know that you are going somewhere, and you can say to *met kafou* that you are on that road. You pass because there is a master in the way.

In this detailed account, Emile explains the role that individuals have to facilitate crossings between the spiritual and physical worlds. As Emile understands, the crossroads contains the spirits of people who served the *lwa* and the *lwa* themselves such as *Met Kafou* and its various entities. By

performing a series of ceremonial rights, described in the action of circling of the crossroads, Emile demonstrates how a physical crossroads is a space in which crossing between the spiritual and physical worlds occur. The particular crossroads that Emile mentioned was a product of the natural environment. The crossroads was also the product of the lack of city and regional planning for interior roads yet for Feeling Rara, the crossroads was a space to enact a crossing. Regardless of original intent, the *lwa Met Kafou* still resides within this physical space and people are able to invoke and therefore connect with the *lwa*. This connection between the spiritual and physical worlds brings to light Joan Dayan's (1995) contention that, "The gods are not only in your blood but in the land" (33). The *lwa* do not only exist in the embodied memory and practices of Ginen but also within the built land itself.

Another Vodou *lwa* that is associated with the cross and crossroads is Papa Legba. During Holy Week, while visiting the house of a well-respected *Vodouisant* in the community during their nightly practice sessions, Feeling Rara sang this song as they patiently awaited someone to receive them at the door. Not only was the group asking permission for Papa Legba to open the physical door of the house they were being received at but also to the spiritual realm. It is Papa Legba that is the gatekeeper and decides whether other *lwa* can cross the door. Through the bodily practice of Vodou rites, Rara groups call to and serve *lwa* embedded in everyday objects of life.

We are in the *Lakou* open the gate (4x)
Papa Legba we are asking you to open the gate for us
We are in the *Lakou* open the gate for us (several times)

We are entering the *Lakou*

We are wondering who will welcome us in the Lakou
We are entering the Lakou
We are wondering asking who will welcome us

*Nou la devan barye a (4 fwa)
Papa Legba nap mande w ouvè pou nou
nou lakou a ouvè barye a (plizye fwa)*

*Mwen antre oooo nan lakou a,
Mwen ap mande kiyès kap resevwa mwen nan lakou a (lid, 4 fwa)*

As the guardian of the gates, Papa Legba guards the door that allows or doesn't allow other *lwa* to cross into the physical realm. In other words, Papa Legba is the guardian of crossing.



Figure 7: The president of Feeling Rara stands to the right of his father as he greets and receives Feeling Rara with water, Haitian rum, and a candle (*chandel*)

The ceremony *Jouke Rara* also contains the ethos of *crossing*. Ace, a leader of a Rara group in Haiti, explains the importance of the Jouke Rara ceremony in Rara:

Jouke rara is a huge mystical exercise. It's an important ritual. As long as the rara is "jouke," they will know whether they will be able to go out. In the ceremony of "jouke rara," it invokes several spirits: spirit from *kalfou* (crossroads) let's say, earth, sky, they call all those entities to "jouke" the rara. Mostly, *gad kafou* (guard of the intersections), *gad simitye* (guard from the cemetery), *gad granbwa* (guard from Granbwa) they are some of the hot guards... It is not supposed to miss anyone because the contract is signed while they "jouke" the rara.

During the Jouke Rara ceremony, Rara groups enter into a contract with the *lwa*. The ceremony involves a series of rights in which *lwa* are called upon and in exchange for protection. In a circular motion, the houngan draws *vèvè* or sacred drawings made of cornmeal and baby powder on the floor, that correspond with particular *lwa*. Then all the materials of the Rara (instruments, powders, potions, perfumes, clothing, etc.) are put into the circle of *vèvè* to imbue them with the power and protection of the *lwa*.

During Feeling Rara's Jouke Rara ceremony, Roro, the houngan of Feeling Rara, drew a series of *vèvè* on the ground around the *poto mitan* (a central column). The drawings included *vèvè* that called to various *lwa* including Ayizan, Damballah, Ayida Wedo, and Baron Samedi amongst others. After Roro drew the *vèvès*, he placed a variety of items inside the circle including rum, instruments, clothes, and perfume that would later be used to douse members before they went out. This ceremony was crucial in protecting members of the Rara from traps and magic left behind to *kraze* (break) the

Rara. Jouke Rara is a prime example of the *lwa* and their connection to the land.

The drawing of the vèvè on the ground at the center of a *poto mitan* is indicative of an Afro-Diasporic ethos that has its origins in Kongo cosmology as demonstrated in the *Yowa* cross. According to Robert Farris Thompson (1983), the cross represents "the circular motion of human souls about the circumference of its intersecting lines. The Kongo cross refers therefore to the everlasting continuity of *all* righteous men and women..." (108).

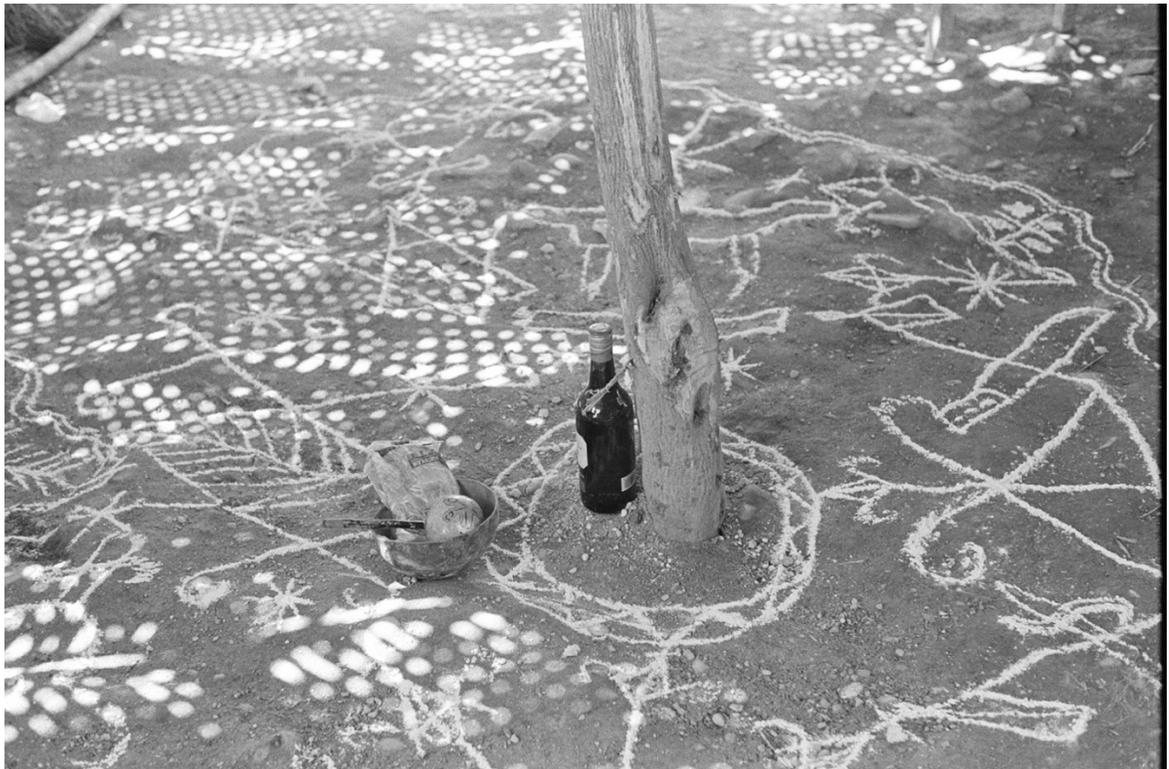


Figure 8: A bottle of Barbancourt Haitian rum stands next to the center pillar around a circular set of vèvè drawings that correspond to various lwa including Ayizan and Agwe.



Figure 9: Instruments, spiritual garments, and other mystical items are put in the middle of the vèvè during the Jouke Rara ceremony in order to protect and imbue them with power and force

At the middle of a horizontal and vertical line is an intersection. This intersection represents a nexus between two planes: the spiritual and physical world. The circular motion between points gestures towards continuity and connection between splitting planes. In the case of Haitian Vodou, the *poto mitan* or center pillar represents a vertical plane while the ground represents the horizontal line. The vèvès drawn on the ground invoke the intersection between the physical and spiritual worlds (see figure 10). The circular shape of the vèvè drawings gestures towards the connection and crossings that occur between the various planes.

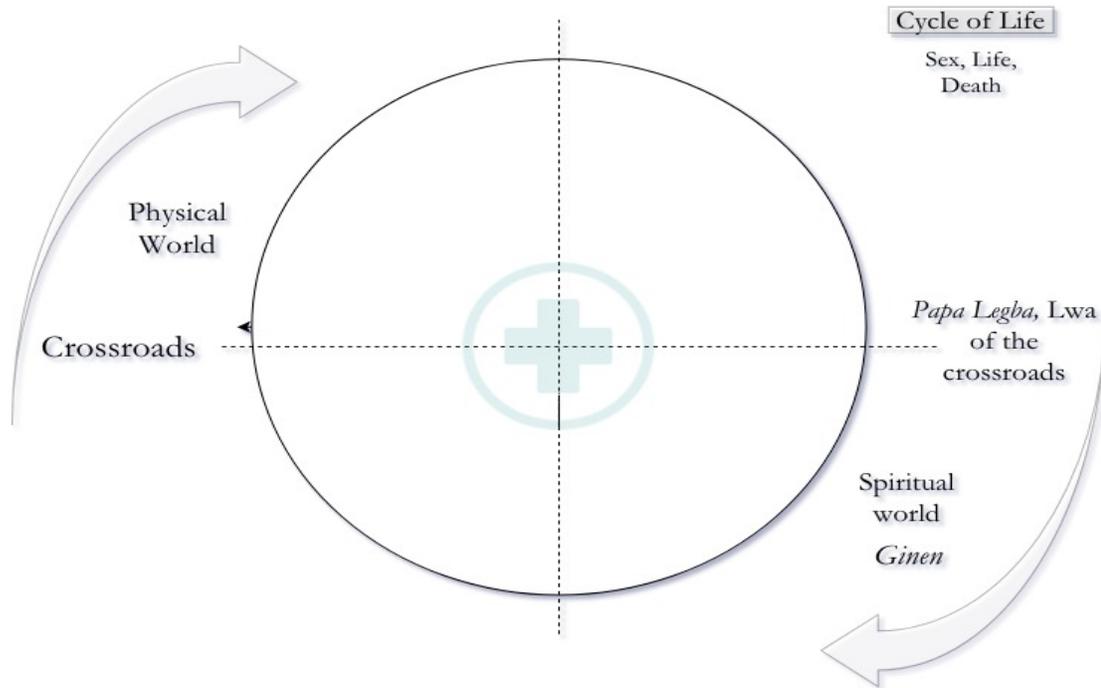


Figure 10: A drawing that represents the circular ethos of the crossing

Within Vodou cosmology, the built and natural environment are intimately connected with nature, the physical, and the spiritual world. By focusing on the ethos of crossing, my goal is to show how spiritual and physical notions of crossing are intertwined and influence each other. For example, spiritual crossings at a crossroad expand the purpose and intent of physical roads that intersect. This ability to influence and shape the land through spirituality has broader implications. Marching down the streets and performing various rituals, Rara groups map futures and have the power to claim and embed an identity and epistemology within the built environment. Sonah Stanley Niaah (2010) conceptualizes this as performance geography. The performance geography of Rara details how the ethos of crossing becomes embedded within the physical landscape and allows Rara groups to

ultimately map an ethos of crossing into the physical landscape shifting its original purpose and intent.

This point is particularly poignant in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. The ethos of crossing is not only prominent within Vodou but also within the historical landscape itself. During the colonial period, Anse-à-Pitres was seen as "dangerous" and "one of the most notorious haunts of the maroons" (Brown 1839, 124). It was known for its maroon communities of African and Indigenous Taino people. Historical documents show that the Taino figures of Enriquillo and his aunt Anaconoa lived in the area of Anse-à-Pitres and were vital components of the maroon community (Ardouin 1832, 162). Enriquillo led a revolt in the Bahoruco mountain region which is the current day Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres area (Altman 2007). These communities represent a critical anti-colonial and cross-border history between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Yet this historical landscape of crossing exists within the contemporary landscape in which Anse-à-Pitres and Pedernales contend with a geopolitical border. While many can cross the border, this crossing exists within increasing surveillance and technology that seek to limit the mobility of Haitian and Haitian descendants. For many in Feeling Rara, cross border networks are a crucial part of their lives. Roro, the *houngan* of Feeling Rara is a fisherman in the community. The local fishing community in Pedernales and Anse-à-Pitres depend on border crossings to sell and fish. Tata, a queen of Feeling Rara, lives in the Dominican Republic and sometimes come back to dance Rara in Anse-à-Pitres.

Similarly, many of the queens of Feeling Rara such as Violette and Noeleda, sell in the binational market, a market at the border crossing that predominantly consists of Haitian women sellers. Jean Robert, the vice president of Feeling Rara, lived in the Dominican Republic for many years and speaks Spanish fluently. Despite these extensive cross-border connections, Feeling Rara has not been able to cross the border as a group to play Rara in Pedernales, Dominican Republic.

By focusing on these various realities and ethos of crossing, I suggest that each influence and mold the other. The ethos of crossing present within Rara and Vodou demonstrate how spirituality can shift the original intent and purpose of landscapes. Through crossings between the spiritual and physical worlds, such as at crossroads or during ceremonies at *potomitan* (center pillars), Rara shifts physical landscapes through Vodou's intimate connections between the built and natural environment. This interaction provokes me to argue that spiritual crossings can shift physical landscapes and this ethos interacts and shifts other kinds of crossings, like a geopolitical border crossing.

I contend that this ability to shift the landscape and create spiritual crossings also allows Rara to enact political border crossings. These crossings across geopolitical borders mean that Rara has the ability to map futures of the African Diaspora. One way that Rara is able to map these futures is because of its practice outside of Haiti in countries such as the Dominican Republic, the United States, Chile and other places where there is a significant Haitian diaspora. As the reverberations of the Rara ring throughout Haiti, they are also doing so in these various locations. Each Rara group enacts their own

ethos of crossing and in doing so gesture towards a broader community beyond national borders. Rara's work through the concept of Ginen means that not only Haitians are celebrating Rara and creating various kinds of crossings, but also other people of the African Diaspora are able to do so. Through the natural or built environment, a person, no matter their location, is able to connect to a spiritual world and a broader community. These crossings gesture towards futures yet to come in which Rara and Vodou connect people throughout the African Diaspora and imagine a space beyond borders of a Black Diaspora connected by and through Afro-Diasporic traditions.

Rara, Ginen, and Futurity

I said Rara of Africa, Rara of Ginen
Look at the Rara of Africa coming
Ah Oh Ah oh Ah oh
Here is the Rara of Africa coming

This Rara of Africa! Rara Ginen!
Dead children, rise.

M' di rara lafrik sa, rara ginen sa!
Men rara lafrik la rive!
Anye! Anye oh! Anye! Anye oh!
Men rara lafrik la rive.

Rara lafrik sa! Rara ginen!
Ti moun mouri, leve.

The Middle Passage; a moment in which more than twelve million Africans were forced or as Dionne Brand (2001) argues flung into a new world. The creation of a twilight zone (Boyce Davies 2013); where beginnings ended, ruptures were born, memories

forgotten--a site in which we could belong or not belong from emptied beginnings, an abyss (Glissant 1997) a door of no return (Brand 2001) and chaos is a structuring force (Benítez-Rojos 1992). Even with fissures of the Slave Trade, scholars of the African diaspora have held memory as a core part of the Black experience. Through music/ cultural expression, spiritual traditions, speech, and concepts embodied memories of the past are crucial links to contemporary experience that connect the African Diaspora. Music and spirituality take vital roles in Afro-Diaspora theory because it is the venue in which the world becomes negotiated and reimagined in subversive and poetic ways.

The past, as it is memorialized in Haitian Vodou, is a core part of understanding Rara and its present. Rara alludes to histories of Africa, enslavement, adaptation, and survival. These histories are significant in a variety of African Diasporic religious and cultural traditions. During Carnival, enslaved peoples would participate in rhythmic boundary crossings and subversive critiques of the plantation or what Glissant (1997) terms detour. Detour is defined as an act of survival in which orality became disorganized, and Poetics became a subversive space. "It is understandable that in this universe every cry was an event. Night in the cabins gave birth to this other enormous silence from which music, inescapable, a murmur at first, finally burst out into this long shout" (73).

In the song above, the singer rejoices at the commencement of the Rara season. As the song details, people celebrate as Africa returns through the return and performance of Rara. The celebration of Rara also ushers in the

return of the dead children of Africa; which can signal a return to ancestral origins through the continued celebration, the Vodou *lwa*, those who have perished either through enslavement or in more contemporary times.

On Good Friday 2016, Feeling Rara took to the streets to continue their celebration of Holy Week. According to the United Nations, that day was also the National Remembrance Day of enslaved people. While the official holiday wasn't on display or celebrated on a border town in Haiti, Rara groups took to the streets to create their own kind of remembrance of their past; to honor those who passed and to continue to serve the *lwa* in their honor. As the story goes, it was the beat of a drum that initiated a revolt that led to Haiti's independence. According to the Vice President of Feeling Rara Jean Robert, "It is with Vodou that we took our liberty. It is our culture. It is the culture of our home." Vodou and its practices were not only important in the revolution of the nation but its continued liberty.

The role of history in performance is most aptly seen in the figure of the *zonbi* in Vodou and Rara. Highly misrepresented in the media, the *zonbi* is a crucial part of a Rara because it provides a mystical force and power that protects and does powerful spiritual work on behalf of the group. McAlister (2002) parallels the figure of the *zonbi* to the history of enslavement, "The poignant plight of the *zonbi* as it is expressed in myth and ritual is a graphic memory of the experience of capture, transport, and enslavement of the Africans in Saint-Domingue who lived and died far from home" (107). The notion of capturing a *zonbi* and putting it to work for the Rara mirrors

conditions of enslavement and demonstrates how Rara serves as a site of embodied memory.

A core component of this embodied memory is shown in the concept of Ginen. Ginen is interchangeably referred to as Lafrik or Africa. When people say that Rara comes from Ginen, they are suggesting that Rara's origins lie in Africa, or in other words, Rara stems from the history of the Atlantic Slave Trade in which millions of Africans were kidnapped and forced to the New World. Ginen also refers to a place under the water in which the Haitian Vodou *lwa* resides. When people say they serve Ginen, they are pointing towards a relationship and service they have with the *lwa*. The link between these two tenets is that the *lwa* are from Lafrik, Lafrik is both in the present and the past that can never be returned to, and service to the *lwa* is service to Lafrik Ginen. Rara, Vodou, and Ginen are audible manifestations of ways of returning to Africa "by another route'...as we retell it through politics, memory, and desire" (Hall 1990, 232).

When I asked Othello, a member of Feeling Rara, he explained Ginen as, "... a guarantee. Because with Ginen, sometimes you are sick and when you need it you call it. It can stand and do treatment for you, you understand. Even if you have family that is really sick it can treat them too...it is from Ginen that that comes from." In his explanation of Ginen, Othello points towards the service that one undertakes to Ginen through the Vodou *lwa*. With service to Ginen comes expected reciprocity in which Ginen will protect the people who serve it. The idea of Ginen as a guarantee also points towards its permanence through shifting times and spaces. Whether in Haiti or Chile,

Ginen is guaranteed. It suggests a kinship that exists beyond borders and times.

Violette, a queen of Feeling Rara also highlights how service to Ginen creates a kinship not only through service but also how Ginen highlights and creates connections based on a shared history and lineage.

Lafrik Ginen is where they like to give the *lwa* food. There is a Lafrik where the spirits are inherited. Right now, we have an offering of Lafrik. It has returned to the inheritance, that means a place that has spirits. Now we serve what they call Lafrik. A place we serve, and we can do spiritual things.

Violette's mention of inheritance demonstrates how Ginen continues to exist in contemporary time and various places. Her quote demonstrates how tradition is never static but dynamic and contextual. To inherit service to a *lwa* is to inherit a piece of the past as it fits within the present. It also suggests a connection between those who inherit Ginen.

Both Violette and Othello's definition of Ginen motion towards an experience that binds descendants of the African slave trade; a kind of familial relationship not only in regard to one's family but also one's ancestral lineage. Service to the *lwa* maintains a connection to Lafrik Ginen and this connection points towards a broader community that has inherited Ginen. Abel, a *Vodouisant* in the Anse-à-Pitres community, expanded on this notion:

I didn't find my father serving Africa, my mother either...Africa is like an irrational person. My children who know nothing of it [Ginen] can be reclaimed by it and asked to give what I couldn't give it. It can tell them your father used to give me cows, pigs, goats...and now you have to give me, and if you don't give those to me, I will eat you. Or I will make you sick. That's why I like it if it tells me to do a certain thing, I'll do it, but I can't tell you I am attached to it, but I like it.

Abel's labeling of Africa as an irrational person points to a kind of intense kinship by which Africa is personified as having a mercurial attitude that will claim its descendants regardless of their knowledge, service, or connection to Ginen. In other words, one is *always* connected and in service to Ginen. Tata, a queen in Feeling Rara, explored this connection to Ginen regardless of one's background:

My father served Ginen, but I didn't know anything about Ginen. So, I would hear them say Ginen, because I used to see when my father used to give the spirits food, buy goats, pigs, cows, and other things and I would see them cook those, but I didn't know anything about it; how the spirits ate and how they didn't eat. But that didn't interest me, you know. It is a thing I used to be in, and I liked. There wasn't a place where they were dancing, and I wasn't there. It's something I love to see, but it's not something I used to practice. It's something that is in my conscious. ...it's, not something that I had to practice to know it.

In explaining her complicated relationship to Ginen, Tata explains how she knows Ginen, not through learning of Ginen but it is something that she already knew. Rosemarie A. Roberts (2013) believes privileging the body as a site of knowledge reveals, "knowledge construction and production and when embodiments of histories, experiences, and effect are accessed and confronted rather than evacuated" (5). Her words point towards the significance of embodied memory, on how legacies and memories continue to exist not only because of practice but because their ways of knowing that exist within the epidermis of the body. For Tata, Ginen informs a core part of who she is regardless of her service to Ginen. Although she doesn't serve Ginen in the same way that her parents did, she does serve through song and dance. Rara is a place for her to pay homage to Ginen while also engaging in pleasurable activities.

The emphasis on embodiment points towards the role that performance plays in sustaining and creating community through embodied memory. This memory becomes embodied not only by those who serve Ginen but also by the spirits as well. Jean Robert, the vice president of Feeling Rara, demonstrates how embodiment allows for a connection to the spirit and subsequently Ginen.

When [the *lwa*] is inside a person they will say [to the spirit] who are you? [The spirit will say] I am so and so, I used to dance Rara, and I have appeared to come to find you to do Rara for me. When it tells you that, to do Rara, you ask, how can I do Rara for you? They will tell you "good you will do it like this. I will tell you how to do it—" ... The spirit that asks you to do Rara for them, it has been a long time since they have danced Rara, they love Rara, or used to do Rara, they love the rites of Rara. Every time the moment comes, you make sure you keep the culture in the rites of Vodou.

M. Jaqui Alexander (2005) argues that the body serves as a site of Sacred memory and knowledge because it is a medium for spirits or *lwa*. Through service to the *lwa* a person's head is mounted (*monte tèt*), and they have access to a wealth of information that the *lwa* brings; Sacred knowledge of the past, present, and future. Jean Robert's own words show how people embody Sacred memory through the *lwa* and how Rara serves as a site for this embodied memory.

This multiplicity leads McGee (2008) to define Ginen as both "Africa as continent and Africa as heaven" (31). While this reference back to Africa can signal the continued relationship that Haiti and Haitians hold to a contemporary Africa, it also indicates a connection to an ancestral Africa that can never be returned to. The performances of Africa are then a performance of the past that continues to live and the ongoing service to it in the present.

McAlister (2002) demonstrates its complexity stating, "Ginen is a mythical place, but it is also an ethos" (87) This ethos is one that is firmly rooted in Lafrik, and its memory, legacy, and continued tradition.

What each person's understanding of Ginen demonstrates is that Ginen evokes a sense of self that is intimately connected to a community in both the spiritual and physical worlds. Through Ginen, Rara acts as a space of embodied memory in which the fractures of the past of the slave trade to Hispaniola are remembered and honored through the body or what Roach (1996) calls counter-memories which show "the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences" (26). Ginen's evoking of a broader community highlights Alexander's (2005) concept of the Sacred as community: She argues "In practice, the daily living of the Sacred idea in an action occurs in the most simple of acts of recognition, such as pouring of libations for and greeting the *lwa*...as a gesture of mutual exchange and as a way of giving thanks and asking to be sustained;...each moment of reflection of that act, brings a new and deepened meaning of self in intimate concert with the Sacred"(307). The notion of self is broadened to include the *lwa* and service to Ginen.

I suggest that the conceptualizations of Ginen and its connection to embodied memory and community allow Rara to set up a stage in which the past and the present set up possibilities that gesture towards other futures. If as Largey (2000) suggests "Rara enacts the past through the concerns of the present in performance" (241) then I argue through an interaction with the

present other future possibilities are created. This kind of body praxis is seen most evidently in Rara in which practitioners perform for and serve the *lwa* through music, dance, and spiritual work while also locating their bodies in various socio-political landscapes. Take for example a strike that occurred where the women of Feeling Rara demanded their spiritual labor be monetarily compensated. Their service to the *lwa* was not only one of tradition but also one located in broader globalized and gendered landscapes in which they were attempting to secure their personal and familial financial futures (further explored in chapter 4).

Ginen enable futures through Rara. In other words, the performance of Rara enacts the community that Ginen evokes. Who this community is was most concretely explained by Jean Robert's articulation of Rara's broader appeal and connection to other people:

Every nation no matter which has spirits. American culture, Canadian, German, Haitian, Spanish [Dominican], African, Jamaican...all of them have spirits... let's say you have a child, you recognize that child as yours, it recognizes you. You cherish it, and it recognizes you as its mother but if you don't cherish it ... so the nation of Ginen that serves Vodou they also cherish the spirits because the spirits become a guide.

Jean Robert recognizes the cross-cultural potential of spiritual worship. Jean Robert understands spiritual worship as existing in the same plane regardless of nation, culture, or even one's religion. Yet, to serve Ginen is to serve and recall a shared history and past of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Andre, a *Vodouisant* in the Anse-à-Pitres community, explained how Rara connects distinct communities across nations:

Rara represents all nations that say they are African...when you serve *Lafrik* then you are a person who was born in the race of Ginen...but when Africa comes and finds someone, you yourself, you don't know it can be on you, and you don't even know it. If it reclaims you it, then you will know you are one of Africa.

Through Ginen, Rara allows for the possibility of a community of the African diaspora beyond nations and borders. Jill Dolan (2001) argues performance allows for a momentary imagining of, "new ideas about how to be and how to be with each other...theater and performance can articulate a common future, one that is more just and equitable" (455). Performance not only provides a space for the audience to engage in imaginings of futurity but also it allows performers to engage in that same practice through the enactment of a future. Rara and other Black Atlantic performances provide spaces for audience and performers to engage in a body-praxis of mapping futurity of the African diaspora through performance.

One of the ways in which this mapping is made possible is through diaspora and transnationalism. Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (1994) show how transnationalism works to deterritorialize nations and create transnational spaces of belonging that counter the hegemonic spaces in which transmigrants are subordinate. In diasporic settings such as New York where there are multiple Caribbean diasporas, the ethos of Rara is one that is also defined by displacement and collective identity. Rivera's (2012) work on the liberation mythologies present in New York roots music shows how a shared collective identity is created amongst Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Haitians. This new identity is one in which Vodou and other African diasporic traditions are fashioned as imagined political communities (Anderson 1983) where cultural

and spiritual practices serve to not only advance political causes but to claim a Black identity that moves beyond nation-states. Berberena (2014) argues that Gagá in New York is “associated to the genre of Palo...integrates other nationalities such as Puerto Ricans to its performance, and ...loses the more rigid religious rules of the Holy Week and its rituals” (100).

In the Dominican Republic and Cuba, Gagá is practiced by Haitian descendent communities while also being immersed within the local African diaspora identity. According to Yanique Hume (2015) in Cuba, Haitian-Cubans perform Gagá as a way to create a home through collective memory. In this process, Haitian traditions such as Gagá become submerged within the Cuban national imaginary gesturing towards a shared African diaspora sense of collectivity. In the Dominican Republic, Landies (2009) claims that identities such as nationality, race, and gender do not, “entirely define who they are, and they have the opportunity through procession to access a source of greater power than individually each of them possesses” (Landies 2009, 205).

Rara and Gagá create a space for people of African descent to come together and through a collective identity. Yet it is also important to note that while Rara provides a space for collective future imaginings, there are still stark divisions that occur based on race, language, and nationality. In both the Dominican Republic and Cuba, Haitians location within the labor economy, particularly within the sugar cane fields (*bateyes*), have made them marginal to the national sense of identity. In New York, Berberena (2014) notes that despite the concerted efforts to create a collective identity based on a shared ancestral heritage, Haitians and Dominicans remain spatially segregated as

Rara happens in Brooklyn and Central Park and Gagá happens in Washington Heights. Rara's utopic cartographic imaginings become limited by the social and political landscapes that it exists in.

In Anse-à-Pitres, Rara's ability to map futures of the black diaspora is immersed within the complex landscape of the border. It's one not only defined by metaphysical crossings but also the crossing of a geopolitical border; one that is filled with a deep history that has separated and bound the two countries at different times.

While Rara in general is defined by crossings and passages, Rara on the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic is one that is defined by border-crossing. Anse-à-Pitres' location on the border next to Pedernales, Dominican Republic makes cross border networks a vital force for the two border locations. While economic networks are the primary focus in most analysis of the two border regions, spiritual cross border connections also serve as an important mode of cross-border exchange. These exchanges happen very concretely when Dominicans cross the border to participate in Vodou ceremonies and Rara celebrations.

Dominican Gagá has many similarities to Haitian Rara. June Rosenberg (1979) details how little accounts of Gagá existed in the Dominican Republic due to the erasure of African influenced practices. Gagá originated in the bateyes with Haitian cane cutters and fused with local Dominican African influenced traditions. Rara is based on the Vodou rites and *regleman* while Gagá is based on *Las 21 Divisiones* or what Martha Davis (2007) calls Dominican Vodú. Although it is not referred to as Vodú by practitioners, there

are many Vodou influences. *Las 21 Divisiones* includes many similar *lwa* to Haitian Vodou such as Guede spirits, Ogun Ferray, Met Kafou, and Ezili Danto. Jean François, a Vodou practitioner in Anse-à-Pitres, elaborates further on the similarities between Rara and Gagá:

[Dominican Rara] is not really different. Here in Haiti, we have *Granbwa* who plays an important role in the Rara but the Dominican Republic they have a spirit they call [*Candelo Sedife*]. [*Candelo*] is a spirit that leads Rara in their country it's still the same Vodou but in another rhythm. The difference is based on the language ...Profoundly, the difference is you are Haitian, and I am Dominican, but there is a link where we meet.

Although there are many similarities between Rara and Gagá, Jean François' profound statement highlights how these differences are a product of history. Joseph Roach's (1996) concept of surrogation highlights how memory, performance, substitution is crucial to circum-Atlantic performance. The substitution of Gran Bwa for Candelo Sedife points towards the fundamental distinction between Haitian Vodou and *Las 21 Divisiones*. Although both are considered to be fire or *petwo lwa*, Candelo is more prominent in *Las 21 Divisiones*. The link at which these two meet is a shared cosmology, yet the profound difference is a product of the history and context that made these *lwa* more prominent than others. Landies (2009) argues that Dominican and Haitian Vodou practitioners distinguish their practices as different yet recognize the significant connection. She explains the moment in which a person was mounted by the *petwo lwa* Gran Bwa and shot flames from his mouth after intaking gasoline. This performance represented a shared moment connection via the Kongo cosmology that emphasizes heat and fire (88).

Given the cross-cultural influence of Vodou and the history of exchange between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the Dominican Republic's relationship to Ginen is more than metaphorical. Rara creates a sphere of commonality in which people regardless of their spiritual practice or national identity can participate and enjoy the festivities. Yet, because of Vodou's connection to Ginen, Rara provides a space that imagines a nation beyond borders for people of the African Diaspora. Ace, a founder of a Rara group, explained the similarities between Rara and Gagá:

The Dominican Republic has the same custom of Haitian Rara. Haitians went to the Dominican Republic to practice rara there in the past. We used to use tambou instruments, but nowadays the rara organizers in the Dominican Republic go to Peredo [Haiti] to buy tools for making instruments and buy their other things in the Dominican Republic like *kònyes* made with zinc. They also use the same rhythm that we use in Haiti.

Ace highlights both the similarities in Rara and Gagá and the cross-border exchanges of instruments and rhythms that occur between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

For many in Haiti, Rara is understood and practiced as an explicitly Haitian event. Given Haiti's representation as an African nation, Rara subsequently becomes a practice that connects all people of the African Diaspora.

Holy Week is a significant celebration in both the Dominican Republic and Haiti. In Anse-à-Pitres, the most public celebration was Rara. In the neighboring border town Pedernales, there was no Gagá but instead a Catholic public celebration. During Holy Week in Anse-à-Pitres, much like other days, it was prevalent to see Dominicans participating in the Rara

celebrations. One such occasion occurred when Roudy, a *rayano* (a term used to describe the offspring of Haitian and Dominican parents) sat drinking beers with his Dominican friends. When Feeling Rara approached, the men happily participated and received blessings from the group. When offered a monetary donation, Roro, the houngan of Feeling Rara, rejected the offering. When I later asked why he explained that he performed the blessing for the men because he wanted them to feel welcome.

For many in Feeling Rara, cross-border connections are a daily reality yet for others the link between Haiti and the Dominican Republic was not so self-evident. For example, Andre argued

Dominicans don't really know Vodou. They can sing it and try it to understand Vodou just like any nation that tries to know Vodou...me I was already born inside of it. Rara was baptized and came from Vodou. Rara came out of the stomach of Vodou; it came out of the stomach of Ginen. That is why you will find people in Haiti doing Vodou.

For Andre, even though Rara, "represents all nations that say they are African," for him Dominicans did not fall within that equation. Having spent eight years living in the Dominican Republic, Andre experienced the discursive rejection of Blackness and the prevalence of anti-Haitianism. For Andre, Rara is a Haitian practice Ginen gave birth to Vodou and subsequently Rara. Therefore, for Andre, Dominicans' ability to practice Vodou and Rara is only performative. While they may be able to sing and dance Rara, they will never be able to be a part of Rara or Ginen fully. Andre's words reflect Lauren Derby's (1994) analyses in which she argues that Haitians were discursively imagined as distinct from Dominicans by means of their proximity to "magic." She argues, "Race came to be marked not by skin color, as in the Anglophone

world; nor blood genealogy, as in Dominican nationalist discourse; but by an unstable set of symbolic associations linking Haitian Vodoun (or Vodou), fertility and value itself" (490). For Andre, Haitians have an inextricable relationship to Vodou that separates them from Dominicans and any practice of Vodou or Rara that they may have.

The relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has influenced how people on the border perceive many Dominicans' relationship to Ginen. While many people in the Rara were able to concede to the similarity, others saw the juncture between Haiti and the Dominican Republic as too stark. This distinction wasn't necessarily the case for other nationalities. During one of the Rara festivities, a friend of mine asked if I was scared that the *lwa* would mount me during the ceremonies. He quickly followed, "you know they say if you have one drop of African blood in you the *lwa* can mount you." My friend had spent many years in the Dominican Republic and was exposed to both Rara and Gagá. This experience provided him a broader understanding of Blackness outside of the Haitian context in particular when it comes to mixed-race Afro-descendent people.

As a mixed-race Afro-descendent person, my friend and Andre both saw that I had a possible space to claim or be claimed within Ginen. As Andre explained, whether or not someone practices Vodou or is aware of their ancestry, they can *always* be reclaimed by the *lwa* and subsequently Africa. In the context of Haiti's racial schemas I am labeled *blan* (white and/or foreigner), yet at other times depending on the context and because of my fluency in Haitian Kreyòl, I am also read as a *milat* (a term reserved for mixed

race and lighter skinned Haitians), at other times I've been called *grimmel* (light skinned Haitian of mixed background). On the border, in addition to these labels, I was also mostly read as Dominican or *panyol*. My racial image led to many interesting encounters including a time when a Haitian man accosted me for filming the Rara festivals and asked why Dominicans didn't film the "good stuff" going on in Haiti. When I approached him and explained in Kreyòl that I was actually Puerto Rican and told him more about my project he changed his tune and gave me his blessing to continue. The historical baggage of the history between Haiti and the Dominican Republic meant that many were willing to conceptually place me within the sphere of Ginen while others were unable to do that entirely for Dominicans.

Scholars have long noted the significant presence of anti-Haitianism in historical and contemporary times. Yet, it was not until the presidency of Rafael Leonel Trujillo that these discourses and practices were amplified with disastrous effects. In the 1930s in an effort to modernize the Dominican nation Trujillo's administration enacted a series of border campaigns that sought to close the border both physically and ideologically. According to historians Edward Paulino (2005), this included erasing Kreyòl sounding names and using schools and church to enforce the notion that Haitians were radically different from Dominicans despite their lived experiences saying otherwise. Part of enclosing the border for Trujillo also meant distancing the Dominican nation from its African ancestry. This distancing tragically took place during the 1937 Parsley massacre in which Dominican soldiers and citizens were tasked to ethnically cleanse the border region of Haitians.

In marking the ethnic borders of the nation, Haitians were excluded from the Dominican nation by means of their proximity to blackness. As the story goes, soldiers told people to say the word *perejil* or parsley. The idea was the Haitian Kreyòl speakers would say "R" differently than Spanish speakers. Historians have long argued that, in fact, a host of factors decided whether someone was deemed as Haitian. Skin color was often an unreliable factor as was language when regional linguistic variations are considered. Thus, the Parsley Massacre represented the erasure of a particular kind of Blackness that the Dominican Republic wanted to erase from the border; ethnically, linguistically, and economically. The marking of the Haiti and Dominican Republic border is one tragically tied to race and ethnicity.

Andre's separation between Haitian and Dominican blackness (via the connection to Ginen) is one that has historical and contemporary precedent on both sides of the island. Dominican Studies scholars have noticed a similar trend in the Dominican Republic that marks particular kinds of blackness. To be "Haitian" or *negro* (black) is to look and act a certain way, a performance of blackness that exists outside of the norms of Dominican blackness. According to April Mayes (2014), Dominican imaginings of the nation's racial identity fall "between the blackness of Haiti and the whiteness of the United States and Europe" (7). Therefore, one's perceived distance from Haitian blackness is one proximity to Dominicanness.

In Anse-à-Pitres, crossing the border without being accosted or harassed by border officers and officials is to perform a particular kind of non-Haitian blackness. This includes official border mechanisms such as showing a

cedula (Dominican national ID) in order to cross the border. For many Haitians, regardless if they were born in the Dominican Republic, obtaining and keeping a *cedula* is difficult for anyone who has proximity to Haitianness (such as with appearance, last name, language, etc.). Historian Lauren Derby (1994) further elaborates on the performance of race and Haitianness in the early 20th century. What emerges from this historical moment is a discursive landscape in which Haitians and Dominicans see themselves as different racially even though there were significant cross border connections with maroon communities (Ricourt 2016) and after the wars of Independence in the Dominican Republic (Eller 2016).

Despite the various spaces of connection via their shared history and ancestral lineage, Haiti and the Dominican Republic continue to explore futures yet to come; futures in the making. The conceptual and historical entanglements between the two countries make these Kiskeya futures ready, but the ongoing tension and historical baggage make their forging difficult.

Conclusion

Despite the promises made during the meeting between Kiskeya Libre and Feeling Rara, the futures that these two groups were plotting during that meeting have yet to arrive. While each party continues to express a desire to collaborate the realities of solidarity are much different.

Nonetheless, the Kiskeya Futures present in this meeting were not just based on a one-off meeting that occurred between Feeling Rara and Kiskeya Libre but instead embedded within the ethos of Rara. Rara encompasses

notions of crossing is visible both in its cosmology and in its work through Ginen. These notions elaborate on Rara's ability to forge post-modern futures that exist beyond nations and borders. This post-modern future is further in the case of Feeling Rara in which the group is attempting to forge these futures across geopolitical borders between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Yet, the coordinates for their maps also demonstrate *difficult diasporas* (Pinto 2003). The relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic continues to be marked by tension and anti-Haitianism. But cross-border connections have and continue to exist in spite of these changing landscapes.

Rara as performance allows for people within Haiti and beyond its national borders to map futures of the African diaspora. Its ethos of crossing interacts with other realities of crossing making Rara adept at performing beyond borders. The work that Rara does through Ginen makes it so that this mapping is not only crossing borders but mapping futures of Ginen. Ginen as a concept evokes futures of the broader African diaspora bound by a shared experience and ancestral lineage. For Feeling Rara, this mapping was complicated by the reality of crossing that exists between Haiti and the Dominican Republic border. Many people in Feeling Rara conceded and recognized the similarities and possibilities of a community between Haiti and the Dominican Republic while others were unable to locate the Dominican Republic within that community. This tension points towards the tense history between Haiti and the Dominican Republic in which both have built the image of the other as different.

CHAPTER 4

THE QUEENS GIVE HEAT: WOMAN, RARA AND BORDER CROSSINGS



Figure 11 The queens of Feeling Rara march and sing along the main road in Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti on Good Friday 2016

Erzulie, Erzulie I enter in the lakou, I am going to perform magic
Erzulie, Erzulie I am going to perform magic,
I am going to perform magic (5x)

*Ezi, Ezi mwen antre nan lakou a, mwen pral fe maji an mache,
Ezi yo, Ezi oooo, mwen pral fe mache
M pral fê maji an mache (5 fwa)*

---Feeling Rara

It was Easter Sunday, and the heat of the blazing sun beamed down my back as the heat or the *chalè* of the Rara vibrated throughout the streets. Children ran to follow and dance with the Rara, young girls swirled their hips to *gouye* or wine to the repetitive sound of the *banbou* (see Figure 4), passersby marveled in happiness and sometimes in disapproval, as Feeling Rara, the Rara group I conducted research within Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti, marched down the main road making its presence known. As Feeling Rara took a break from playing and dancing, Roro, the founder and *houngan* of the group, approached me and told me to head home because soon the Rara would be performing at my house and I needed to receive them properly. As the *marenn* or godmother of the group, the group was performing a blessing for me and my home for the second year in a row. Soon after, I ran home and began prepping my house for the Rara.

When a Rara group is invited to a house to perform a blessing the recipient must have various items: a homemade candle, a cup filled with water, and a bottle of *kleren*, (a cheap sugar cane alcohol). Each of these is essential to the blessing. With my items neatly standing on the stool, I waited outside my house in the yard as the sonic, and affective wave crests of Feeling Rara drew closer. Approaching the gate, the Rara began to sing collectively:

We enter in the lakou
 We are wondering who is going to be welcoming us in the lakou (4x)
 We enter into the lakou
 We are wondering who is going to be welcoming us in the lakou (4x)

Mwen antre oooo nan lakou a,
Mwen ap mande kiyès kap resevwa mwen nan lakou a (lid, 4 fwa)
Mwen antre oooo nan lakou a,
Mwen ap mande kiyès kap resevwa mwen nan lakou a (gwoup)

Afterward, I formally invited the group in with the queens and Roro leading at the forefront. Next came the *majò jon* twirling his skirt made of torn up fabrics of varying colors and artfully twisting his baton (see Figure 2). Like the queens, the role of the major is to dance and help in creating heat. The instruments soon followed as the players repetitively blasted their *konye* and *banbou*. The *tanbou* players batted their drums, and other percussion musicians batted their *kès* and grated the *graj*, (see Figures 6 and 15). Each component of the group followed Roro and the queens as they ran in a counter-clockwise movement through the yard. After revolving a few times, each section of the Rara performed for me: the majors twirled their skirts as they expertly juggled machetes and batons, the musicians blasted their horns and moved in unison with the *tanbou*. As the final part of the performance, Roro and the queens approached me. Roro performed a series of ceremonial rites on me and the house with blessings for my success and safety.

After the blessings, the queens began to dance. Leading them was Tata, the first queen. Propping a flag pole against her pelvis and connected with the two other queens' flag poles, each queen slowly approached stepping to the whistle of Roro's 4/4 beat. Tata then began to whine her hips in my direction as I reciprocated her moves. Moving her legs in between mine she placed her hand over my shoulder, and we both descended our hips downwards as the other two queens joined in behind me in a sandwich formation to which Tata screamed loudly over the *konye* and *tanbou*, "*Marenn konn danse!* [The godmother knows how to dance!]."

The queens were performing what is popularly referred to in Kreyòl as *chalè* which translates to heat. At this moment, as women grinded against each other, heteronormative and patriarchal expectations were subsumed as our dancing evoked pleasure, fun, and beauty. The performative space of Rara allows Black Haitian women from low socioeconomic backgrounds to perform beauty and sexuality within and outside the norms of patriarchal and heteronormative expectations.



Figure 12 The queens lead Feeling Rara forward on the streets of Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti.



Figure 13 The queens assist in a ceremony around a tree to help untie the Rara

In this chapter, I argue that Rara provides an avenue for women to traverse the boundaries of gender and sexuality through performance and refusal of performance. According to the women of Feeling Rara, it is their heat, which they provide through dance, beauty, and feeling that makes their position particularly unique in the Rara and therefore deserving of compensation. This demand to recognize their performance as labor lies in their ability to create heat and provide pleasure. Thus, pleasure becomes an avenue in which the queens create local forms of sovereignty. As a dominant male space, Rara allows women access to what McAlister (2004) terms big men (*gwo neg*) within the community, which allows them to navigate and make demands for compensation. Through pleasure, women not only

demand that their pleasure performances be recognized as labor; they also demand that their femininity, gender, sexuality, and womanness be understood as complex. While women are traversing the boundaries of respectability and womanhood, they also use Rara to cross borders and empower themselves financially.

In keeping with my larger argument about Rara, I also argue that Rara maps cartographies and futures of the African diaspora. Through the work of Ginen, the futures that the women in Feeling Rara were attempting to secure were financial futures in which their labor was recognized and valued. Furthermore, the women in Feeling Rara used Rara to expand definitions of Black womanhood and sexuality mapping queer and gender fluid futures of the African diaspora.

Refusing to Perform and Feminist Ethnographic Methods

On a hot summer day during Holy Week the queens of Feeling Rara marched down the street dancing and singing breaking the monotony of the everyday lives. As crowds drew onto the street, the group played in unison and fans joined in singing their favorite songs. Soon after Feeling Rara stopped to take a much-needed break. The blistering sun made it difficult to march and dance for too long, and the break served as a nice pause for people to catch their breath, drink water, and relax under the shade before recommencing the activities.

Unable to find water, Noleda, one of the main queens of Feeling Rara refused to join as Feeling Rara prepared to continue their march down the

street. Noeleda was fed up with what she perceived as unfair and inhumane treatment. She took off her costume in the street and reproached Jean Rony, or Roro the Vodou priest of Feeling Rara, for not adequately taking care of the performers by providing them with water and food. Noeleda complained that the water was too hot and admonished the fact that the queens were not fed any food, as is customary to do before a Rara begins their marches. Roro and other leaders in the Rara group argued with her back and forth to try to convince her to rejoin, but she refused to do so. It wasn't until after a friend spoke to her that she eventually returned to her role, slowly putting the costume back on.

While Feeling Rara could have continued without her given that there were other queens to take her place, her dancing and the heat that she brought was irreplaceable to the group. After all, she had years of experience dancing Rara as a queen. It was Roro that sought her and her husband out to perform with Feeling Rara. For Noeleda, the impetus to participate in Rara was multifaceted: Rara provided her a space to have fun and enjoy herself, it also allowed her to serve the *lwa*, and it provides her economic opportunities to provide for her four children. While she is not employed within the formal economy, she sometimes depends upon the binational market between Haiti and the Dominican Republic to sell whatever occasional goods and foods that she can muster up. Money is not the primary reason that women participate in Rara, but it nonetheless acts as a space for social and economic mobility.

I locate Noeleda refusal to perform within the broader scholarship that looks at acts of refusal. Tina M. Camp's (2017) work looks at the everyday

quotidian practices of refusal within the African diaspora. Camppt understands everyday practices refusal as “as a signature idiom of diasporic culture and black futurity” (9). Even though the moment was temporary, Noeleda’s refusal set the stage for a series of other refusals that would go on to inspire a strike from Noeleda and the other queens in which they demanded that they be treated equally to the men in Feeling Rara and be compensated for their labor. A refusal within a space of refusals²⁵.



Figure 14: Noeleda puts her Queen costume back on with the help of a friend after refusing to perform

²⁵ I locate Rara itself as space of refusal because it refuses and traverses socially imposed boundaries and rules. It, after all, exists between the Lenten ethos of sacrifice and the carnivalesque ethos of *Kanaval*. Despite the boundaries that are traversed, Rara still exists within heteronormative and patriarchal landscapes. It is a male-dominated practice where men often dominate leadership positions. Noeleda’s own refusal is a refusal of these imposed boundaries

Rara's ability to traverse the boundaries of private/public, decorous/vulgar, pre-colonial/post-colonial amongst others suggest it as a space of refusal. Yet it cannot be removed from its trappings: Rara is located within the post-colonial landscape of Haiti in which the sovereignty of the nation is being reshaped by NGO's and foreign governments (Kristoff 2010; Schuller 2012, 2016a). Gender violence and inequity is a common reality for many women in Haiti where 1/3rd of women report experiencing sexual and/or physical violence (USAID 2017): a statistic with deep historical roots in Haiti's history of slavery and colonialism. As Deborah Thomas (2011) has argued for the case of Jamaica, contemporary manifestations of violence are not cultural but instead a reflection to a mirror of colonial terror. For the Queens, although they sought equity within the patriarchal hierarchies of Rara, it was their gendered understanding of *chalè* that inspired their moments of refusal. Noeleda located her refusal within the broader understanding of the role of women in Rara to bring beauty and heat. By capitalizing on this gendered understanding of *chalè*, Noeleda marked her labor as specialized and deserving of respect and recognition.

I set up my camera as Noeleda sat across from me patiently waiting for me to finish setting up and reading my required IRB consent form that asked if she agreed to be interviewed and filmed. After I finished speaking, she looked at me and said, "of course *marenn*." The role of *marenn* was given to me when I began my fieldwork with the group Feeling Rara. As I sat across from the leader of Feeling Rara, Jean Rony, I explained to him my general

research project and asked if I would be able to research with the group. He agreed and gave me the title of *marenn*, or godmother.

In addition to the performance and spiritual roles required of the Rara, the positions of *marenn* (godmother) and *parenn* (godfather) are equally important. Godparents are a vital responsibility throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. Godparents usually provide support for teams, groups, graduations, marriages, etc. In the context of a Rara, a godmother and godfather are usually the primary sources of financial support for a group. Like all participants in the Rara, the godparents usually agree to a 7-year *angajman* (spiritual engagement) and must participate in the Rara for the agreed time. Aside from giving financial support, the role of the godmother also has normative gender expectations of domesticity. For example, the members of the Rara are referred to as the *piti* (children) or *fiyèl* (godchildren). In this relationship, the godmother is expected to feed, cook for the Rara members, provide water and alcohol during parades, and generally look out for and care for the children. What this has looked like for me since 2016 is purchasing food and drinks (not cooking though), handing out water during the day parades, breaking up fights and looking out for the general safety of the Rara members²⁶, and purchasing shirts for the group.

²⁶ There is one particular interaction that I recall that is worth mentioning. During the *Retou Rara*, a celebration that occurs after Easter Sunday to close out the Rara season, there was a group of the musicians who were angry and causing trouble as we were marching towards the public water reservoir to swim and have fun. When there is disharmony in the Rara, the group generally comes to a standstill since all parts have to function together in order to move forward. There was one young man in particular who was quite angry because he was hungry and hot, and his hands were hurting from beating the drums. While arguments were occurring a member of the Rara quietly approached me and told me it was my job to talk to them and calm them down. I quickly jumped out of my observer position and moved towards my position as a godmother. I spoke to the angry young man, and he explained to me what

Like feminist ethnography that seeks to make power relations visible, my primary goal was to attempt to create a reciprocal relationship rather than assume an extractive position in which I took from the group through the imposition of my role as a researcher. According to Ruth Behar (1999), “ethnography becomes the genre that was silent about the privileges of gender, race, class, and nationality, the genre that was silent about power, the genre that was silent about desire” (473). Ethnographic writing often struggles to reveal the messiness inherent in fieldwork. Instead, through my fieldwork and writing, I sought to create reciprocity, mirroring feminist anthropologists Checker, Davis, and Schuller’s (2014) definition of feminist research: “Rather than deny or ignore such subjectivities, feminist methods stress equality, intimacy, dialogue, and reciprocity between researchers and participants” (408). Initially, this reciprocity took the form of being a provider. Soon after, I realized that the role of *marenn* also contained a component of advocating and working on behalf of the Rara members: A reality that became evident during my interview with Noeleda.

I glanced at the list of questions I had prepared to ask Noeleda: tell me more about yourself, what is the history of Rara, when did you begin performing, etc. In my understanding, we were meeting so I could do an interview that provided me further information about Rara and the people

the issue was. I spoke to other people in the group to see how we could address the issue and move faster so we all could relax and have a good time. After a series of conversations, everyone was in agreement, and the young man thanked me and continued forward marching with the group. I highlight this to demonstrate the tensions inherent within the notion of a participant-observer. Traversing between the two is never seamless and often at odds with how people expect you to act and exist within the space. Additionally, it showed how people saw me not just as a foreign system of support but also someone who was supposed to be looking out for the welfare of the group and its members.

who performed in Feeling Rara. Before I could ask the first question, Noeleda began the conversation:

Do you see Roro's Rara, the first year it was us that performed in his Rara? All those women that you saw yesterday when the Rara was performing they played but during the first year when the Rara began it was us: myself, Tata, Violette, a bunch of other women who aren't here now. Those of us who play in Roro's Rara, we have kids...Roro doesn't give us a single *goude* (Haitian currency) for us to leave our homes and give the money to our children...

Noeleda went on to explain that Roro treated everyone, but in particular the women unfairly. Roro paid for a boat to transport the queens and other people from the Belle-Anse region to Anse-à-Pitres (a 6-8-hour boat ride). Noeleda complained to him that she did not want to take a boat under the hot sun to which he responded that anyone who didn't want to go on the boat could stay. Noeleda's refusal to go on the boat subsided momentarily as she asked a friend to take her to Anse-à-Pitres because ultimately, she wanted to partake in the Rara so she could have a good time.

After she explained this to me, I was a bit caught off guard. I soon realized that while I was expecting to interview Noeleda about Rara she was more interested in talking to me as the *marenn*, a person who was supposed to look out for her and other performers in the Rara. Charles Briggs (1986) notes that the context of an interview is based on, "the interpretive frames that are constructed by the participants..." (12). Thus, context is not a natural given of a situation but a dialogical construction. The moment after Noeleda explained the injustices she experienced; I was no longer interested in the list of questions that I had but instead open to a dialogue unfolding. Noeleda's appeal to me entailed her recognition of my position of power as the *marenn*

but also as the foreigner who had access to powerful men in the community and the Rara in ways that she did not necessarily have. She also appealed to me within the gendered framework of *marenn* in which she emphasized the plight of women in particular, in Feeling Rara. In many ways the framework of this chapter was her doing.

“It’s the women that give heat:” Gendered Delineations of the Play-Labor Dichotomy

Rara is a yearly parading celebration that includes elements of dance, music, and Vodou. Although Rara can occur during any time of the year, the official Rara season occurs after Ash Wednesday during Lent up until Easter Sunday. Most activities take place during Holy Week. At this time, traversing the streets, Rara groups sing and dance collecting contributions and performing in honor of *Ginen*.

As Rara groups move through the streets, sometimes walking several miles throughout the day, they play to an ever-changing audience as participants drop in and out and resume back to their everyday lives. This constantly shifting audience in tandem with Rara's performative nature allows it to become a vehicle for the disenfranchised to gather, sing songs about life, politics, and moral codes, honor their ancestry and history and have a good time.

The performers play an essential role in Rara. The main performers of Rara groups include *renn* (queens), *wa* (kings), and the *majò jon* (baton major). Each of these performers is tasked with dancing, singing, and assisting the *houngan* (Vodou priest) to perform any rituals that are necessary for the Rara

to play. Other performers in the Rara include the people who play instruments: the *banbou*, *tanbou*, and *konye* give Rara its distinctive sound.

Despite the multitude of roles, Rara is primarily a male-dominated space where men occupy the majority of positions of authority. Maurea E. Landies (2009) argues in *Rara/Gagá*, "The musical role of women is by and large limited to vocal choral response, while men perform as lead singers, drummers and players of *banbou* and other aerophone." Elizabeth McAlister (2002) expands on these limitations, "As queens and chorus members, they are an organized group of singers and dancers who are there not to establish their individual reputations through competition, but rather to sing prayer songs, collect money, and 'bring honor to the Rara' "(90). The limited role for women was the case for *Feeling Rara* and in general for the other Rara groups in Anse-à-Pitres. As of 2018, there were a total of 5 Rara groups in Anse-à-Pitres, and men led all but one. In *Feeling Rara*, the queens' role is to sing and solicit donations by enticing patrons with sensual dances. Whining of the hips is the most common dance move, but other choreographed moves are essential to this solicitation as well.

Outside of being a fan or audience member, the primary role for women in Rara is that of the queen in which they are tasked to create and sustain beauty and give the Rara what the performers refer to as *chalè* which translates to heat. What makes the queens' roles different from other performers is that they are expected to create affective environments of happiness, harmony, and heat but through gendered scripts of feminine beauty. The *chalè* of the queens brings to light a multi-dimensional

understanding of beauty that mirrors Patricia Hill Collins understanding of Black women's beauty. She argues, "From an Afrocentric perspective, women's beauty is not based solely on physical criteria because mind, spirit, and body are not conceptualized as separate, oppositional spheres. Instead all are central in aesthetic assessments of individuals and their creations" (Collins 1991: 89, quoted in LaBennett 2011: 117). The queens' heat is not only a matter of beauty but also affective space they are able to create and sustain.

Overall a Rara is said to have *chalè* when the instruments are in harmony, the dancers are moving well, and the music is creating a feeling of excitement. It is an overall atmosphere created through an array of pieces such as music, movement, and spiritual forces. Julian Henriques (2010) study of dancehall explicates this phenomenon in his theorization of the connection between music and feeling. He argues that repetition, amplitude, and the timbre of sound are all critical techniques that can create affective space. I see Rara utilizing all three of these to create a unique and mobile affective space. Rara groups repeat songs and lyrics for the mobile audience creating a sense of being a part of the group. Drums and dance movements create an intensity that marks the Rara's sonically and the various voices of the Rara, and different instruments and singers create a unique identity for each Rara. Each of these elements contribute to the sonic *chalè* of the Rara.

In tandem with sound, moving bodies also have the ability to create affective space. Repetition, amplitude, and timbre of moving bodies create affect and shift energies. These elements are seen in Rara through the repetition of a marching step, the force of a hip movement or a baton swirl, or

a signature move. As performing bodies attempt to move to repair fissures of history, this affective space is not only creating spaces of pleasure and feeling but also deeply connected to this feeling is a history in motion. A Rara that has a lot of heat is said to create a *bèl feeling* (beautiful feeling). Each movement serves as a site of pleasure and remembering. As a parading tradition, Rara has a constantly shifting audience, and its location within the streets makes this affective space ubiquitous "...for it has no walls, only fluid lines between performers and audiences" (Niahh 2010, 69). Sound and movement work in unison to create an affective space and the more in tune these aspects are with each other, the more heat the Rara is said to carry.

When these elements are missing the group is said to be cold or *frèt*. The significance of hot and cold lie at the foundation of Vodou epistemology. The *lwa* or Haitian Vodou spirits are separated into two branches: *Petwo* and *Rada*, representing the hot and cold sides of Vodou, respectively. *Lwa* often fall within one of these branches based upon their activities and personality traits. *Petwo lwa* are associated with aggressiveness and instability while *Rada lwa* are associated with peace and tranquility²⁷. This framework suggests that in order for a Rara to have *chalè* it must have the *lwa* working in their favor. If a Rara is cold, it is either not in favor with the *lwa*, or it is combatting traps and magic created by other groups to which they will need the *lwas* assistance.

In Feeling Rara, *chalè* was described generally as the ability to create an affective atmosphere yet for the queens of Feeling Rara, *chalè* took on a clear

²⁷ Maurea E. Landies makes the distinction of sweet versus bitter *lwa*. Her labeling points towards the regional variations in the way that *lwa* are understood and separated. She argues in Southern Haiti the distinction is not *Petwo* and *Rada* but instead *Dahomean* and *Petwo*.

gendered delineation. The queens identified that their heat was a special kind of heat that deserved recognition. While each of the queens recognized the importance of other kinds of heat, many agreed that the heat created by the women was essential to the functioning of the Rara. Violette, a queen in Feeling Rara, expressed:

Maybe, if the guys are hitting the drums, are blowing the horns, they don't dance they can never give heat, and the women who are in front as the queens are the ones giving heat. ...It's the queens that are the most important, it's the queens who are dancing, that are giving heat. It is more important. If there aren't any queens, there isn't any Rara.

For Violette, the unique affective atmosphere that the queens were able to create with their movements made their *chalè* that much more important than any other part of the Rara. In fact, all of the queens of Feeling Rara emphasized that the queens *chalè* was unique and irreplaceable. Noeleda, explained how this distinct capacity of the women's *chalè* was not recognized or compensated for appropriately.

It's us that dances and makes money. The money we make in the Rara it's with that money he pays the guys from Belle-Anse...You know what Roro did when we went out with the Rara...he gave us each 100 *goude*²⁸. What can 100 *goude* do for anyone? If you do three days, five days dancing in Roro's rara what can 100 *goude* do for you? When you come here, and your stomach is hurting, and you need to buy medicine what can that money do?

For Noeleda, Feeling Rara did not recognize or compensate the *chalè* that the women performed. Furthermore, Noeleda highlights how her basic everyday needs were not being met. Since women are often given such limited roles in Rara, Noeleda, Violette, and the other queens of Feeling Rara choose to embrace the particular roles and emphasize their contributions.

²⁸ 100 *goude* was approximately \$1.60 at this particular moment in 2016

Noeleda and the queens recognized the patriarchal structures of Rara and sought to address those by expanding the very limitations imposed upon women. Noeleda and other queens reframed their performance as labor by emphasizing their participation as deserving of compensation. This reframing mirrors Robin D.G. Kelley's (1997) analysis that collapses the play-labor binary. Analyzing the representation of black and brown male youth, Kelley argues that the discourse in which leisure is separated from labor does not attend to the ways young people can turn play, pleasure and creative expression into labor.

Oneka LaBennett's (2011) long-term ethnographic research in Brooklyn, New York demonstrates how West Indian girls' everyday play and performance adds a crucial dimension missing in Kelley's (1997) understanding of play-labor. LaBennett's intervention considers inflections of gender by examining how black girls disturb space in gendered and racialized ways through their bodily performance. LaBennett argues that play allows Black girls to co-opt space and assert agency in non-normative ways in the same way it does for young men. Yet, for young black girls this play is not always recognized and valued. By highlighting the importance of black girls' play, LaBennett considers how black girls are critical producers and engagers of black culture.

LaBennett's consideration of the gendered ways that play-labor is operationalized, inspires me to consider how Black Haitian women's bodily performance and play disturbs and co-opts space both inside and outside the play-labor dichotomy, particularly when it comes to *spiritual play* for Haitian

women. Rara is seen as a place in which people can maintain a connection to their past and serve the *lwa*, but for the queens, their play and spiritual practices were intimately connected to their labor.

Steady employment in Anse-à-Pitres is challenging to come by and often reserved for people who speak English or French. The landscape of formal and steady employment in Anse-à-Pitres is dominated by foreign international organizations, and religious charities. Men generally obtain these forms of employment primarily due to women's unequal access to education and language learning²⁹. Women who are able to find stable work in this sector are relegated to cooking and cleaning services. Most other women in Anse-à-Pitres make money through the informal economy, mostly selling small wares in the market or across the border in Pedernales.

More generally, because of the lack of employment opportunities for people in Anse-à-Pitres, performance, and art are one of the primary ways that many people can get money. When available, the central government sends funds to the local government to disperse and celebrate major holidays like Haitian Flag Day (explored more in chapter 2). Rara is often one of the performances that garner money from private and public sponsors alike.

²⁹. During my fieldwork, I taught an English class in Anse-à-Pitres. Although I was not directly affiliated with the organization, the course was offered by the Good Samaritan Church. The course was equally composed of men and women of various ages. As time went on it was clear to me that the men in the course were able to grasp English much faster because they were encouraged to meet strangers who talk English, be forward—a feature that many of the women in my class felt uncomfortable with. Other factors such as home duties also made it so that women in the class were less likely to come as frequently to visit me during to practice their English. Addressing this disparity was difficult for me as a foreigner and also as a woman who was dismissed by men when I pointed out these inequalities.

How this money was dispersed in Feeling Rara was ultimately dependent upon the patriarchal structures of the Rara.

The queens, fully aware of the multiple sources of income, were angry that the Rara was not providing for them economically. Events are often sponsored by state institutions passive voice as a symbolic way to prop the nation. Rara groups are often sponsored by local politicians, who use the mobile and performing bodies of Rara members to relay their political platforms in the form of t-shirts with slogans. Godparents, local business sponsors, and wealthy community members contribute financially by sponsoring or pay the group to perform blessings.

The queens strike sought to establish authority within a male-dominated space in order to address their day to day needs as women. According to Noeleda and many of the other queens, Feeling Rara was a kind of boys' club in which the "guys from Belle-Anse" who mainly compose the percussion section of the Rara, can reap the benefits of playing in the Rara.

Although the queens were able to gain pleasure from participating, they were not able to entirely escape the *mizè* (*misery*) of their everyday lives because they were not being paid. In the previous quote, Noeleda specifically brings up the issues of hunger and health when it comes to her participation in the Rara, noting the discrepancy in how some members can escape *mizè* through Rara.



Figure 15: A woman in Feeling Rara plays the *graj* instrument in Feeling Rara, 2016



Figure 16: One of the Queens looks on smiling as Feeling Rara plays for a house.

Anthropologist Chelsey Kivland (2014) argues that *mizè* (misery) semantically stands in opposition to the Kreyòl use of *feeling*. *Mizè* represents the everyday experiences of disenfranchised people in Haiti who suffer through the effects of poverty. Rara and other performative activities provide an escape through *plezi* (pleasure). These activities are one of the few avenues in which people can gain economic affluence through performance.

Misery was a common theme in many of Feeling Rara's songs. While songs often varied in their subject matter, many songs explored the themes of *mizè* such as hunger, lack of economic opportunity and employment with each emphasizing the role of spirituality in helping alleviate these issues.

Jesus here is my burden, Jesus here is my burden, it is heavy I cannot carry it.
I have no mother to help me carry it
I have no father to help me carry it
It is heavy, I am carrying it alone (4x)

Jezi oooo men chay la, Jezi oooo men chay la lou m pa ka ede m pote l.
M pa gen manman ki pou ede m pote l
M pa gen papa ki pou ede m pote l
Chay la lou se mwenn sel ki pote l (4 fwa)

In this song, the Rara sings about the general burdens of society that become too difficult to carry. With a lack of community and family support, everyday misery becomes challenging to overcome. In another one of Feeling Rara's songs, the group sings about the need to and desire to move beyond everyday misery and the structural inequalities that oppress them

I am leaving father, I can no longer stay, I am going (2x)
Humiliated at home, there are no jobs, I am leaving
Humiliated at home, I cannot work, I am leaving, I can no longer stay.
I am leaving, I cannot keep crossing my arms

We cannot work, we cannot work
Hunger is what pushes me away, I cannot stay, hunger is what pushes
me away, I cannot stay. Nan granbwa that is where I am going to stay,
nan granbwa that is where I am going to stay.

*Mwen deplase papa, mwen pa ka rete anko, mwen prale (2 fwa)
imilyasyon lakay mwen pa ka travay oooo, mwen prale
Imilyasyon mwen kapa travay, m prale, m pa ka rete anko
M prale m paka rete bwa kwaze
Nou pa ka travay, nou pa ka travay
Se granbou ki fe m pa ka rete ooo, se granbou a ki fe m pa ka rete ooo
Nan granbwa nou prale rete ooo, nan granbwa nou prale rete ooo*

In this song, a person calls upon their father to inform them that they can no longer sit in misery and must do something to overcome it. Humiliation, hunger, and lack of work are all cited as social that causes the person to leave to *Granbwa*. *Granbwa* is a *petwo lwa* of the forest, plants, and healing. *Granbwa* and its connection to healing and trees can suggest a return to roots. Thus, the singer invokes a desire to return to their roots in order to escape the burdens of life. Another possible interpretation could reside in *Granbwa's* connection to the cemetery. Before going to a cemetery to raise zombie's, a Rara will perform a series of ceremonial rites to *Granbwa* for protection but also determine what ropes, leaves, and medicines should be used to capture the zombie. Rara and its focus on honoring *Ginen* allow for a return to "roots" before enslavement, displacement, and colonialism while also focusing on protection in the present day.

Within the context of the border region, this song not only takes on a meaning of historical displacement but also contemporary displacement. Anse-à-Pitres and its proximity to the Dominican Republic make searching for cross border economic opportunities essential for many. In fact, every person

that I interviewed in Feeling Rara spoke of time spent working in the Dominican Republic either long term or through short term opportunities that presented themselves in Pedernales and other nearby Dominican localities. All of the queens during that year worked either in the binational market or crossed every day to the Dominican Republic to sell products and make a basic living.

While Feeling Rara generally spoke about displacement and everyday *mizè*, the queens were advocating for recognition of the particular kinds of misery they face as women. In this, they were demanding that their work be explicitly recognized as labor that is deserving of compensation and not just pleasure. It was not just any labor but a play-labor in which they have fun, dance, and serve *Ginen* but also are compensated and able to provide for their families and lives outside of the Rara. Noleda showcases this reality:

All of us who are in the Rara we all have kids...if you go to Belle Anse with us, you do 3 days there with us you have to give us for the time we do for us to leave our kids...like if their clothes are dirty, when they are hungry there are kids who drink milk you have to buy milk to leave the kid...We make the rara beautiful.

Because the queens provided a particular kind of heat to the Rara, they believed their labor was deserving of compensation. The *mizè* they faced as women and providers meant that their hunger and humiliation was unique and needed recognition. When I confronted Roro about the queens' demands and general comments he responded:

It's not the queens only, all the guys too. When people leave, they leave their houses. They say to you; you have to find money to pay the Rara because he tells you he leaves his house on his dime, he depends on himself. Up until now, I am working for Feeling Rara because everything that comes to you have to put a little money for them to go

because the next year you need them to dance Rara again. After Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter we only collected 2838 Haitian dollars which can't even feed the Rara. If it wasn't for the grace of me, *marenn*, and Joel, there wouldn't be a Rara.

The *houngan* and leader of Feeling Rara, Roro, explained the reason for this difference was that the musicians were coming from Belle-Anse (a commune also located in the southern region of Haiti) and because they were not from Anse-à-Pitres, needed more provisions. For Roro, the queens' needs, and demands were not particular to women but to everyone who participated in Feeling Rara. In fact, Rara was not something that one should be compensated for, but instead, people should give money if they would like to participate. Thus, Rara's ability to help people escape from everyday *mizè* fell less in the realm of economic alleviation and more so in spiritual, political, and social forms.

Before my arrival, the queens had already threatened to leave Feeling Rara if Roro didn't make changes and compensate the queens. With my arrival, the queens hoped my liminal status would help them propel their cause so they could continue to serve *Ginen*, have fun, dance, and be queens while also being paid for their roles in the Rara. Thus, they asked me to set up a meeting with them and Roro so they can make their conditions clear and have my backing in doing so.

My varying positions as a foreigner, researcher, and godmother often gave me access to what McAlister (2004) calls the *gwo nèg* or big men in Feeling Rara and within the community. Roro, who makes most of the decisions when it comes to Feeling Rara often claimed his hands were tied

because money was limited in the first place. My various positionalities, but in particular my role as the *marenn* and my closeness to Roro created a situation in which the queens used my proximity to the big men in order to make demands, have their work recognized and compensated, and advance themselves financially. One of the queens, Tata told me:

When the time for meeting for Roro's rara with us all the queens we will be listening to what he has to say and what conditions he will make with us...you are the *marenn* now. It's up to you to give expectations to Roro and talk to him

In an effort to advocate on behalf of the queens, I set up a meeting with the primary decision makers of Feeling Rara which included Roro, the founder and *houngan*, Esther, the secretary, Jean Robert the Vice president, and Mario, the president, and the queens who were able to make it to this meeting. The goal of the meeting was to let the queens air out their issues with my support and also explain the terms of their return to Feeling Rara. Unfortunately, the meeting was canceled last minute by a few of the meeting attendants (including the queens) who were unable to make it. At this point, I was towards the end of my fieldwork and set to teach at Cornell for the Fall semester of 2016. Set to leave in the coming weeks, I was unable to reschedule the meeting, and the following year many of the queens did not return. At this moment I was reminded of Checker, Davis, and Schuller's (2014) provocation that "All of these pieces expose our vulnerabilities and uncertainties; before we are anthropologists, before we are even activists, we are all human. Sometimes, we do not have the ability to make the change that our participants ask of us, much as we would like to do so" (409). Despite my

efforts and constant communication with the women, I was unable to assist them that year in their ultimate goal.

Reclaiming the koko: Beauty, Pleasure, and Erotic sovereignty

The Queens strike from Feeling Rara represented an important turn in which they demanded that their performances be recognized as a legitimate form of labor. Traversing the boundaries of the play-labor dichotomy the queens sought to secure their own economic futures through Rara. In this section, I further explore the underlying tenants to the queens' demand for recognition. The framing of their performance as labor further disjoints the play-labor dichotomy when we take a closer look at their performance. The queens' performances redefine notions of pleasure and beauty. L.H. Stallings (2015) calls this erotic sovereignty by which the moans and screams of anguish of Black women make audible "resistant constructions of self and subjectivity" (60). For Stallings, erotic sovereignty is not based on international law and its relation to the state but instead on the ability for black women to express desire and pleasure outside the confines that restrict them. Expanding on this concept, I explore how women redefine notions of pleasure and beauty and how these ideas are rendered political in Rara. Songs and movement allow women to expand the heteronormative and patriarchal structures of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, in redefining these ideas, Rara allows women to secure their own economic and political futures through performance.

Taking a cue from Dayan (1994) by privileging Vodou epistemologies, I understand the role of the queens within the frame of the *lwa*, Ezili. Ezili refers

to a pantheon of spirits in Vodou more broadly recognized with the Virgin Mary with the most popular ones being Ezili Freda and Ezili Dantor. Ezili Freda is represented by the Catholic saint Our Lady of Sorrows. She is the spirit of love, creativity, and luxury and she is often portrayed as white or light skinned. She has three husbands, Agwe, Damballah, and Ogun Ferray. The saint of the Black Madonna often represents Ezili Dantor. As opposed to Freda, Dantor is a part of the *petwo* branch of *lwa* and is represented as a fierce and strong mother. Lasirene is the other *lwa* often associated with Freda and Dantor. She is mermaid/human who rules over beauty, music, and the sea luring people into the water and imparting them with specialized knowledge³⁰.

Although both Freda and Dantor are put in opposition, they, in fact, represent a pantheon of different aspects of Haitian womanhood. These two Ezili's explore femininity that seems contradictory but in fact points towards the multiplicity of black womanhood. The pantheon Ezili represents femininity, love, pleasure, and maternity. Karen McCarthy Brown (2001) argues Ezili is "the mirror that gives objective reality to what would otherwise remain, as it does in so many cultures, women's silent pain, and unhonored power" (221). This mirror that McCarthy speaks of is a reflection of the variety of ways of being that expands possibilities of everyday Haitian womanhood. Joan Dayan (1994) adds that Ezili, "is not androgynous, for she deliberately encases herself in the trappings of what has been constituted in a social world (especially that of the Frenchified elites) as femininity" (2).

³⁰ See Karen McCarthy Brown (2001) for a more detailed account on the various Ezili's

In the spectrum of Dantor, Freda, and Lasirene, Haitian women can be feminine, sexual, mothers, hot, cold, wives, mistresses, amongst many other qualities. As an explicitly Haitian *lwa*, Vodou expands the colonial definitions of Haitian womanhood. Women's roles in Rara in which they are expected to be nurturing by providing and cooking food while simultaneously being sensual and explicitly sexual is reflective of these expansive possibilities. Many of the queens and women participating in the Rara often were the sole providers for their families and Rara was one source of economic empowerment for them. Within the same spectrum, as sole providers, women who often participated in Rara were doing so as their families and partners were at home. In this sense, the queens are both providers and flirtatious and sexual beings. They exist and outside the traditional domains of domesticity and revel in an embrace of sexuality and beauty.

One essential aspect of this beauty is their dancing and body movements. Women are expected *byen braze* or to know how to wine with hip movements--the most notable being the popular dance *gouyad*. Landies (2009) claims, "In the realm of dance, women are constrained... to the role of bringing *alegria* (Spanish: lightness, happiness) to the performance, and their dance repertoire is limited to variations on sensuous pelvic rotation in dance..." (45). These sensual dances are affective and create feelings that relate back to the broader concept *chalè* (heat).

Feminine movement and performance become an essential part of Rara, and the feeling exudes for both participants and audience. A popular dance of the queens from Feeling Rara, during the public performances, is illustrative

of this (Figure 17 and 18). Encased behind a rope, the first queen glared into my camera as she assertively led the second and third queens in movement. Each of them propped a ceremonial flag onto their pelvic bone and grinded into the pole. The queens' movement embodied both pleasure and power carried through their movement and dance. In this movement, the queens' emphasis on the vagina reinscribes new meaning that falls in line with the complexity of Haitian womanhood as understood in and through Vodou. The pole stood out as a phallic symbol as the queens suggested both penetrating and the penetration.

Beth-Sarah Wright (2004) further explains how a focus on the vagina allows women who are being filmed in Jamaica dancehall to reclaim and redefine their sexual pleasure with new meaning.

A call to focus on or praise one's vagina as an act of healing is not unfounded. Healing in this sense is the conversation of the vagina as a site for work or as a tool to a site for pleasure, power, and a site to be loved...by wining, caressing the vagina in dance and in masturbatory bliss, exposing the vagina to the inquisitive camera lens, allowing it to become public property under her terms, the dancing woman reinscribes herself with new meaning... (49)

The pictures and footage I shoot of the queens during my time with Feeling Rara was reflective of a reclamation of the vagina towards the camera. As a visual anthropologist, my camera was a significant ethnographic tool and was jokingly referred to as a member of Feeling Rara. In the photos below, the queens were performing not only for the shifting audience of the public but also the audiences that would be present viewing the images.

Unsatisfied with performing behind the rope of the Rara, a rope that protects the Rara from magic and traps, the queens slid under the rope and

demanded the two other queens to "*vinn la!*" come here! --as she approached the camera. With the flag pole resting on her pelvis she moved and shifted her hips as she thrust the pole towards the camera. Soon after a member in the Rara approached her and demanded that she and the other queens return behind the rope because they were not supposed to perform past it. In this instance, I consider how the camera as a tool of data collection became a tool that allowed the queens to perform vulgarity and to put their vaginas at the forefront. Moving beyond the rope was demonstrative of not only how the queens were moving beyond physical boundaries but also how they were challenging borders of decorum and respectability by making their vaginas available for consumption.

Noeleda, the second queen of Feeling Rara explains how Queens create heat through dance.

Heat is when we are dancing great...when we are finished, and the clothes are beautiful on us. The first year we went out with Roro's Rara...we put short shorts and shirts. We tied the shirts like this [to show off the belly], and we put tights under. The Rara had a lot of heat when we arrived in Belle Anse...We were happy when we danced somewhere, and they gave Roro's Rara a lot of heat. That's what made them come and ask us to do Rara again..."

For Noeleda, this particular time in Belle-Anse was exemplary of the way Queens created heat through their movement and beauty. The clothes they wore were not beautiful on them but instead were made beautiful by them. Noeleda's words demonstrate the intricate connection between conceptions of beauty and bodily movement as explored in the work of feminist author Andrea Dworkin (1974):

Standards of beauty describe in precise terms the relationship that an individual will have to her own body. They prescribe her mobility, spontaneity, posture, gait, the uses to which she can put her body. They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom. And of course, the relationship between physical freedom and psychological development, intellectual possibility, and creative potential is an umbilical one (113)

Dworkin's focus on how ideas of beauty create bodily restraint can more broadly be applied to look at how women's movement globally are constrained due to patriarchal standards.



Figure 17: The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd queens of Feeling Rara dance for the camera, 2015



Figure 18: The queens prop a flag pole on their pelvises while dancing, 2015

Yet, in the case of Haitian womanhood, beauty is defined in racial, class, and gendered ways. Women in Haiti contend with both the racial and gendered hierarchies that restrict how they can exist and act within the world. Racially, the landscape that defines Haitian womanhood derives from a colonial context that is seen more broadly within African diaspora literature in which women must contend with colonial notions of beauty around hair (Banks 2000; Rooks 1996; Wingfield 2008) body (Lau 2011; Rooks 2004), and skin color (Hunter 2005; Keith 2009). The culmination of these layers is indicative of what Dina Yerima (2017) calls imperial beauty in a postcolonial context in which definitions of beauty are defined by western, white, Christian notions of womanliness.

Hierarchies of race, class, and gender define the particular definition of woman and beauty in Haiti. Exploring the sex tourism industry in the Dominican Republic, Denise Brennan (2004) considers how stereotypes of unsafe sex and HIV / AIDS plague Haitian women sex workers' notions of desirability in the Dominican Republic. These conceptualizations are laden with racial, class, and xenophobic discourses. The notion that Haitian women are carriers of HIV / AIDS posits their desirability and subsequently beauty as infectious and invasive. The connection between Haitian women and AIDS emerged in the 1980s when the Center for Disease Control mentioned Haiti as a prominent location of HIV transmission. Paul Farmer's (1992) research on HIV in Haiti demonstrates that the broader Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic, were also deemed as high-risk countries regarding HIV transmission. Yet, Haiti's discursive connection to HIV became pronounced and enmeshed within racial discourses of the infectious and exotic "other." Vodou came under attack as scientists blamed Vodou as a primary site of transmission that spread to the United States, which many researchers agree was, in fact, the opposite.

Barbara Browning (1998) further explores how African diasporic musical and spiritual practices are often painted as infectious and contagious. She argues that the notion of an infectious rhythm is predicated upon fears and projection of infectious and invading black populations. In the Dominican Republic, the theme of invasion becomes complicated by a historical narrative that paints Haiti as an ever-present invading population. In this regard, Haitian women who also practice Vodou are defined as infectious and

invading which in turn defines their imposed and perceived desirability along the lines of race, class, gender.

Noeleda and other queens' emphasis on beauty and creating beauty exists within a broader field in which society does not consider Black poor working women as beautiful or desirable. Instead, external definitions of beauty are constrained for Haitian women. The queens' emphasis on beauty as a core part of the Rara shows how they reclaim and define their own notions of beauty outside the constraints placed upon their bodies. Noeleda goes on to explain how in fact, her movement was not restrained but enhanced via her understanding of beauty:

The rara can't be beautiful [unless] the queens know how to dance well. You have to move well when you arrive somewhere. The clothes have to be beautiful. You have to be fresh to give the rara heat if there is no queens in the Rara the Rara cannot be beautiful

Movement allowed women to create affective space of chalè which included ideas and notions of beauty, pleasure, and happiness. In creating these affective environments, the queens of Feeling Rara also challenged the restrictions placed upon their mobility but embodying and redefining expansive notions of Haitian womanhood that both drew from and outside of the gendered script they were prescribed.

The gendered chalè of the queens created through their movements to evoke beauty, pleasure, and desire also allows the queens to question and expand the boundaries of sexuality. Rara groups often play for "notable" members of the community who are usually men, but in the case that a Rara is received by a woman the queens' roles remain the same; they dance sensual

dances with patrons and entice them with sexuality and femininity. When I received the Rara at my house, these sensual dances were on display. I was surprised at the public display as all the queens danced around me, grinding their hips in a downward motion and summoning me to whine in a downward motion against their Tata's pelvic thrusts.

In fact, this occurred several times. One time at night, during one of Feeling Rara's street rehearsals we approached a small nightclub. On the dancefloor, a man and a woman repetitively danced to bachata as the Rara marched down the street. With the competing sounds, the owner turned down the bachata music to let the group play uninterrupted. Suddenly the entire environment changed, and the women who were previously sitting down jumped up in excitement and started to *gouye* and dance playfully with each other. The mobile affective space of Rara intruded the small outside nightclub as women gyrated against other women, instead of dancing with men. The Rara enabled women to dance sexually with other women that are not ordinarily acceptable or in which they would be labeled as *madivin*³¹. After Feeling Rara finished performing for the club owner, the club music went back and the women who were dancing with each other sat down as men and women went back to the three-step bachata³².

³¹ Often translated as "lesbian" this word is used to describe homo sexual relationships while *Masisi* is the word used for men. Tinsley (2011) warns against simplistic and western epistemological understanding of the Haitian Kreyol words *Masisi* and *Madivin* as simply a descriptor of non-normative sexuality but instead to embrace the complexity of gender and sexuality as understood through the Vodou.

³² Anse-à-Pitres is a transnational musical space that sonically enacts the cross-border ethos that defines Haiti and the Dominican Republic. It is quite common to hear merengue and bachata in clubs throughout Anse-à-Pitres. This is partly due to the presence of Dominicans in Anse-à-Pitres who visit for entertainment purposes. This is also due in part to the African diaspora roots of merengue and bachata (Pacini Hernandez 2014).

As a mobile affective space, Rara is not only able to shift spaces regarding feeling and pleasure, but it is also able to shift heteronormative borders. Scholars have noted the prevalence of Vodou as a queer space. In Haitian Vodou, different *lwas* can mount (*monte*) people regardless of gender expression. A man will take on the characteristics of a feminine lwa such as *Ezili*. Rara's focus on pleasure and its connection to Vodou allows it to shift spaces and become a momentary mobile queer space.

In Rara dance and songs, sexual organs are popular topics because they dismantle binary ideas of gender and sex. In particular, the vagina takes on a central role. Take for example the song below-- one of Feeling Rara's most popular songs with participants and audience alike:

My big pussy in my ass
Vagabond do not spy on me, let me fuck, let me fuck
My big pussy in my ass
Vagabond do not spy on me, let me fuck, let me fuck
Since I was younger, I have been fucking
Vagabond don't spy on me, let me fuck, let me fuck (4x)

Gwo koko m nan boudam
Vagabon pa veye m kite m taye, kite m taye. (x2)
Depi m piti map taye, Gwo koko m nan boudam
vagabon pa veye m kite m taye, kite m taye. (x4)

Every time Feeling Rara performed this song, the affective environment of the Rara shifted immediately to one of exuberance and pure pleasure. Women and men alike would sing, jump, and dance. Feeling Rara gained a significant number of fans. As the Rara group moves through space, its audience members are welcome to join in the activities and march with the group. While they may not be official members of the group, they play an

essential part in creating heat for the group. The more fans a group has the more heat they can produce.

These vulgar songs are known as *betiz*, a form of speech that highlights joking, sarcasm, or irony. McAlister (2002) suggests that researchers value these songs less for what they say about sex and more for what they reveal about the multiple layers of meaning of gender and sexuality.

The song shows how Haitian Vodou traverses boundaries of conservative configurations of sexual respectability and gender binaries. Stallings (2015) calls this *sacredly profane sexuality* which "ritualizes and makes sacred what is libidinous and blasphemous in Western humanism so as to unseat and criticize the inherent imperialistic aims within its social mores and sexual morality" (10-11). A focus on sex and sexuality allows for colonial power configurations to be satirized and critiqued. These songs have multiple layers of meaning that on the surface are sexual but also point towards power and societal structures.

The song is preaching sexual freedom where the singer is demanding that the vagrant spying on them and policing their sexual activities go away so that they can express their sexual desires without those who disapprove of their activities reporting it to others. The songs suggest two immediate levels of meaning. On one level, the use of the term *vagabon* relays a layer of meaning. In Haiti, a vagabond is usually someone that is unemployed without many prospects and may behave negatively. The songs reference to the vagabond points towards disdain for those who have nothing better to do than gossip or *tripotay*.



Figure 19: The first queen dances while being told to return behind the rope, 2015



Figure 20: One of the queens uses the flag pole to prop herself while she wines downward, 2015

The second layer of meaning is related to an ethos that emphasizes community and “looking out” for one another. The vagabond can be referring to a host of people but in particular, directs our attention towards an emphasis on the importance of community in Haiti in which people look after each other and their neighbors. Concepts such as the *lakou*, which is an extended family compound, demonstrate the prevalence of a community ethos. According to Averill (1997), “the *lakou* is an index of deep family roots and traditions, tied to land and place, and a sense of commitment and community” (139). This strong sense of community is embedded throughout Haitian society. In this song then, the singer is at once preaching sexual freedom while also asking for relief from a constant sense of community and its subsequent surveillance and policing of sexual mores.

The use of the possessive, “my” in the song allows women who are singing the song in public to not only claim their vagina as their own but to vulgarly describe it and demand that they are allowed to use it in the way they see fit. It should also be noted that it was not only women that sang this song but men as well. The song mirrors Judith Butler’s (1990) argument that “gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is *always* a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (25). Men and women singing about their pussy suggests how Rara allows people to express and

perform transgressions that disaggregate biological definitions of sex from the gender binary.

The epistemology at the heart of Haitian Vodou and other African diasporic religions is that the self is intimately connected to what Jaqui M. Alexander (2005) calls the Sacred. The self is not just a single entity but multiple. As a conduit of the Sacred, the self is in conversation with the Vodou *lwa*. If a gede spirit mounts a woman, they take on a variety of qualities that correspond to the spirit namely humor, a gaited walk, and a masculine presence. Similarly, if Ezili Freda mounts a man, he will then take on feminine characteristics. As Roberto Strongman (2008) argues, "The transcorporeality found in the religious tradition of Vodou enables the assumption of cross-gender subjectivities" (17). But it is not just cross-gender that Vodou allows for but also gender fluidity and non-binary gender expressions (Tinsley 2011).

Moreover, the song reveals multiple understandings of sexuality and sexual desire. If we consider the entire lyric "my big pussy in my ass," the song suggests both vaginal and anal sex. What is important to note is that the song does not identify the gender of the actor(s) in the sexual act. The naming of "my pussy" and "my ass" can be mapped on to a variety of sexual organs. For example, a person singing "my pussy" can be referring to a penis. Therefore, the sexual act and the people involved changes depending on the person singing it.

The ambiguity of the song shifts depending on the identities of the singer and creates a landscape of meaning for different genders, sexualities, and the expressions of desire. Marlon M. Bailey (2013) argues that the various

gender categories in Detroit ballroom culture reveal and exploit, "the unstable and fluid nature of socially produced and performed gender categories."

Along this line of inquiry, I argue that the ambiguity of the song in addition to the multiple people of varying gender, sex, and sexuality expressions make categories of gender, sex, and sexuality that much more unstable.

These are just a few interpretations but the song, as a form of *betiz* can suggest a series of metaphors. For example, the story of a person engaged in sexual activity since they were young and asking in a present moment to be allowed to continue sexual activity could be a political critique in which the person is relaying that they used to be able to engage in a specific activity (let's say sell in the market) but are no longer able to do so without critique (let's say because the Haitian or Dominican government's closed the binational market). While these songs have a lot to say about sex and sexuality, they also have a lot to say about the political and economic climate and the meaning of the song shifts based on the singer and the local events that have taken place. Thus, sex and sexuality become avenues by which boundaries of sex, gender and sexuality are traversed, and structures of power are critiqued.

Another one of Feeling Rara's songs demonstrates how the symbol of sexual organs symbolizes broader structures of power. As we were marching down the street during Good Friday, the Rara stopped to rest and then shift into another song. The group perked up as the dust settled around us and everybody began to repeat the line.

Pussy doesn't have feelings
Koko pa gen santiman

One woman in front of me loudly sang as she twisted her body forward and then backward with her hands raised in the air. As a non-native Kreyòl speaker, I was perplexed by the meaning of the song. In my understanding, the song translated to "the pussy doesn't have feelings." It was unclear to me what perspective this statement was coming from. Was it a man claiming the vagina doesn't have a feeling or is it a woman stating that she doesn't feel anything? This interpretation relates to the physical aspect of "feeling" yet *santiman* also allows for an interpretation of the emotional capacities of women's vaginas. Therefore, one can use this term when suggesting that one should not connect sex/desire to making decisions about life--suggesting that women disassociate their feelings of desire from their life choices. Another use of this phrase could suggest that ultimately women have the ability to choose who has access to their sexuality. Since the vagina has no feelings, it ultimately belongs to no one and women are allowed to be sexually active with whomever they choose despite anyone who may claim ownership over them and their bodies. Thus, the vagina could be for everyone and no one simultaneously and it was up to the women to decide who has access to them.

The short and repetitive song allowed meaning to be imbued in the song in a variety of ways, ways that were contextual and dependent on the person. A song can serve as a site of meaning-making. Frances Aparicio (1998) methodologically calls upon researchers to listen to the listeners. The methodology focuses on how the listeners understand and relate to the music they consume and enjoy. McAlister (2002) demonstrates how a seemingly simple lyric, "*Asefi ki jete on petit sèt mwa*" [Asefi who threw away a seven-

month-old baby] on the surface may be referring to a mother who abandoned or aborted a seven-month-old child but in reality, may be talking about the *coup d'état* of Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide. These songs are also known as *chante pwen* or a song that disguises political messages through heavily veiled metaphors. In the case of the song above the meaning has less to do with metaphor and more to do with the ambiguous use of the term "santiman."

The ambiguity and possibility for multiple meanings and perspective are illustrated by this exchange I had with the *hougan* of Feeling Rara, Roro. Immediately after I heard the song, I laughed and asked the man standing right next to me if I heard the lyrics correctly. He laughed and said that my Kreyòl was getting too good and brushed my curiosity for more information aside. Since the Rara was still performing, I decided not to ask anyone else at the moment. The next day, I had a meeting scheduled with Roro and the song was still on my mind, so I asked him his thoughts on the song. I translated all words of the conversation except *santiman* (which means feeling) as a way to not foreclose the possible meanings and to show how the reader can insert multiple interpretations as suggested above or even new meanings:

Elena: Do you remember when we went to the rehearsal, there was a song, "*koko pa gen santiman* [laughs]
Roro: [Laughs] I don't know that song very well
Elena: But everyone sang it
Roro: It's beautiful though
Elena: Everyone liked it
Roro: Only you remember it. Does it not have [santiman] really?
Elena: I can't be the one to tell you that
Roro: I know it has [santiman] it's you that should tell me if it doesn't have [santiman] what [santiman] is for you Elena when they say that the vagina doesn't have [santiman] I'd like to know what is [santiman]

Elena: But it's a guy who said that not women
Roro: Women sang it; it was them that were singing it.
Elena: Yea women sang it but who wrote it? It was a man, right?
Roro: I [laughs] I don't know who wrote it, I think it's a woman who wrote it? I don't know what woman.
Elena: [Laughs] why do you think a woman wrote it. I think it was a guy who wrote it
Roro: I think it's a woman
Elena: Why?
Roro: Because its *koko ki pa gen santiman*...It's women who know if it has [santiman]
Elena: It depends on the perspective [laughs]
Roro: I don't know, I don't know because guys aren't singing that song on women because you need a vagina [koko]!

Roro highlights the ambiguity of the word *santiman* while also pushing back against my belief that this song was from the perspective of a man. Roro insisted that this song was not only written by a woman but that only a woman could provide that point of view. The highlight of this conversation is that the back and forth was a product of the ambiguity of the song itself. We had two different understandings of the song that made each of us argue for our perspectives. Roro pushes me to describe what *santiman* means to me as opposed to explaining his interpretation of the song.

What is more important here is less the meaning of *santiman* and more so that it is the person singing the song that imbues meaning and ultimately determines what the song means for them. The vulgarity of these song highlights the essence of *betiz*, a song that is rife with sexual innuendo yet under further inspection can relay multiple layers of meaning. According to Roro, it was only women who could claim that their vagina had no *santiman* despite the fact he knew it did have *santiman*.

Women's participation in Rara and decision to write and sing this song showcases how women use Rara and its expected vulgarity to traverse socially imposed boundaries of womanness and explicitly decide who has access to their vaginas, what value it has, and what it is capable of. While putting the vagina out for consumption for a public audience may be considered exploitative or objectifying, it is essential to recognize the agency that these women have when participating in Rara to not only decide what song they would like to sing, but also what these songs mean to them and how they choose to interpret and understand these sexually explicit songs. Rara provides an avenue for women to explicitly claim their sexuality in a way they are otherwise unable to in their everyday lives.

These avenues for sexual expression add an aspect of pleasure to explain the queens' participation within the Rara not only concerning sexual and gender expression but also in terms of having fun. Louisverna, another queen in Feeling Rara states, "It's something that you get up and find, it's a distraction you go to...that's what made me take the 7-year engagement because I like it... Violette also speaks of the significance of pleasure: "I love having fun a lot [laugh]. I love it a lot a lot. Maybe that's the reason I did seven years dancing."

Contextualizing the queens' desire for pleasure and fun is significant within Afro-Diasporic literature. Crawford (2004) argues that flesh is a product of the middle passage and that structures of anti-blackness and white supremacy (scars) enclosed flesh and its ability to feel pleasure and tenderness. Rara serves as a site in which people continuously attempt to

remember and honor the past not only through bodily performance but through Vodou. This embodied history becomes a site of pleasure in which flesh, or the performing body, in this case, can feel pleasure and tenderness through remembering. Performances of the black fantastic are often tied to politics that subvert, engage, and defy the gaze that defines black bodies. It's a frame of being that centers pleasure and joy at the center of black political resistance and not counter to it. In this sense, Rara is one of the few places in which women can have fun away from their children and partners and indulge in the pleasures that come with being a Rara queen while also honoring their ancestors and *Ginen*.

This politics that center pleasure is what Chelsey Kivland (2014) calls hedonopolitics. Kivland argues that Rara and other activities that provide pleasure beyond the everyday *mizè* (misery) people experience in Haiti creates a kind of politics that allows men to display their masculinity and gain political power in order to enact local forms of sovereignty and *fè leta* (enact the state).

Rara, as a site of pleasure, gains fans and followers including local members of the state. The mobility and shifting audience of Rara make performing bodies an ideal site for politicians to relay their political messages. While Rara groups may use their platforms to send pointed political messages, politicians can also use this platform for their own reasons. Politicians will often sponsor groups by providing significant funds for them to buy materials necessary to go out. This sponsorship is recognized in a public manner in which group shirts will have the name of the group on the

front and the name of a politician on the back. Business owners also sponsor groups to advertise their business. Because of this close link between politicians and significant members of the community, Rara has the ability to enact local forms of sovereignty by not only providing a space for pleasure outside the confines of everyday *mizè* but also a space for political engagement.

As a masculine space dominated by men, Rara provides a space of dialogue between *gwo nèg* or big men and *ti nèg* (small men)

Although women participate in Raras as queens in the chorus, Rara is dominated by talented and skilled "men-of-words," who compete to enhance their reputations. Reputation is paramount in a political system where charisma and personal ties determine who becomes a powerful local *gwo nèg* (big man) (McAlister 2004, 15)

Although men dominate Rara, centering the pleasure politics of the queens within a male dominated space offers a fruitful discussion of the way women can enact their own forms of sovereignty within pleasure activities. In Rara, pleasure, politics, and power are intricately connected in which men, both *gwo nèg* and *ti nèg* alike can enact the state in different ways. Within these patriarchal spaces, women's roles in Rara are often mirrored by their role in society. The same holds in Rara where women roles are limited by notions of manliness and femininity in which men dominate instruments and women are tasked to bring and sustain beauty.

Both Kivland's and McAlister's focus on Rara as a space enacting masculinity allows further exploration into how Rara as a male dominated activity may allow women to claim these masculine spaces for their own benefits. Despite their limited roles, the establishment of Rara as a masculine

space of power is one that can be utilized to the Queen's advantage in which they use Rara to have access to big men and increase their economic empowerment both inside and outside of the Rara. And in fact, they can use the limited understandings of their roles to their advantage in order to accentuate femininity and the importance it brings to the Rara. Even within the constrictive patriarchal confines that replicate themselves within Rara, women can find avenues to express choreographies of pleasure or a working-class black feminist and queer politics (Rivera-Servera 2016).

Conclusion: Refusing to Perform

In 2016, I arrived in Anse-à-Pitres to participate in the year's Rara festivities. After settling in, I headed to Roro's house to announce my arrival and see what the plans for the Rara were. When I inquired about queens and whether they were returning, Roro shook his head and then quickly grabbed his phone to open his WhatsApp messages. He relayed to me a message from Tata, the first queen of Feeling Rara. In the message, Tata explained that she would like to come back to dance in Feeling Rara, but she was in the Dominican Republic working and couldn't miss a week of work. The only way that she would come back is if she was provided the money to come and return and also money to eat and live while she was in Anse-à-Pitres during Holy Week. She ended the message saying please send this to *marenn*.

Roro slid away his phone and said "*nap jwenn lòt* [we will find others]." While paying for the musicians' trips back and forth from Anse-à-Pitres to Belle Anse was standard for Roro, paying for the first queens' trip back and

forth was something he considered to be outside his monetary means. Tata was not the only queen to refuse to return to Feeling Rara. The second queen and many of the other queens including Violette and Noeleda did not return to Feeling Rara as they had promised if things did not change. Unfortunately, at that point, I was tied up financially. I had already given a lot of monetary support to the Rara in general and could not support Tata's demands.

Roro was able to find other queens to replace the ones who did not return, but fans noted the absence of the former queens and commented that the current queens did not know how to dance and lacked heat. The queens' strike is indicative of the way women in Rara can use their positions to enact their own forms of sovereignty that center around pleasure while also traversing the gendered and sexual boundaries inside and outside the Rara.

While Rara varies by region, one thing is becoming clear, the role of women in Rara is drastically shifting. While the women of Feeling Rara use Rara to economically empower themselves and experience pleasure outside the bounds allowed by society, this is not unique. Women throughout Haiti and its diaspora are beginning to redefine Rara. This includes the recent growth of all female Rara groups such as Rara Fanm, Rara Fanm no limit, and Rara symbi.

Rara's ability to serve as a vehicle and voice for the masses is now shifting to incorporate women. As a highly masculine space, Rara allows women to use their positions to not only gain favor with the "big men" in the community but also to find a means to make money. The strike by the queens of Feeling Rara show how women are now using Rara to enact their own

forms of sovereignty based on pleasure. In enacting these forms of sovereignty, the queens are also expanding and redefining ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality. Similarly, the messages relayed through Rara in dance and *betiz* are also a way that women can express the complexity of their womanhood in all its contradictions and complexities. In Feeling Rara, women understood this complex womanhood through heat and the particular heat they bring to the group as queens. This heat was expressed through song and dance and allowed women to move outside the borders of their own economic, gender, and sexual roles. Without a doubt, women's roles are changing, and the landscapes of gender in Rara are as well not only with the changing times but also the particular context in each Rara.

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