

AFTER GOD IS MUSIC: AFFLICTION, HEALING, AND WARFARE IN HAITIAN
PENTECOSTALISM

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ABSTRACT

Lenny J. Lowe: *After God is Music: Affliction, Healing, and Warfare in Haitian Pentecostalism*
(Under the direction of Todd Ramón Ochoa)

This dissertation explores a version of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in Haiti popularly known as *Lame Selès* (Fr. *L'Armée Celeste*), or “The Heavenly Army.” Within Haiti’s Protestant population more broadly, these independent Pentecostal communities are often viewed with suspicion and accused of being charlatans or practitioners of *Vodou* in a Christian guise on account of their combinatory ritual practices and musical styles. Based on data drawn from fieldwork among some of these communities in Port-de-Paix, Haiti, I argue that these independent Pentecostal communities are an important site of the kind of religious combination that has long characterized religion in Haiti and the Black Atlantic world. Drawing on resources within the “hot” and combative *Petwo* style of *Vodou* and combining it with “spiritual warfare” discourse drawn from global Pentecostal and charismatic Christian culture, these communities use music and divine healing to engage and attack spiritual sources of affliction common among the poor majority in contemporary Haiti, ranging from bodily and mental illness to anxiety and officially sanctioned injustice. In the years following the 2010 earthquake, Haiti’s Protestant population has grown dramatically and continues to grow, leading some to speculate about the disintegration of “traditional” Haitian religious practice. These communities of independent Pentecostals, however, illustrate the vitality

of Haiti's religious culture and its productive combinatory practices. Through their engagement in an explicit spiritual war with the spirits of *Vodou*, independent Pentecostal communities forge a symbiotic relationship with *Vodou* and provide new bodies, spaces and discourses for the spirits to inhabit, even if radically revalued within them.

To *Sè* Claudette and *Sè* Henri, the prophetesses, whose wisdom, kindness, and strength sustain so many and far exceed the words contained herein.

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INTRODUCTION: MINGLING HOLY THINGS

Several decades before the official start of the Haitian revolution in 1791, a one-armed fugitive slave wandered the hills around Limbé, just to the south of present day Cap-Haitien. He is remembered for allegedly waging a careful and covert rebellion using his skills in magic, medicine, and poison against the plantation owners and the livestock of colonial Saint Domingue. Alejo Carpentier's novel, *The Kingdom of this World*, imagines this maroon, named Makandal, as an "*houngan* of the Rada rite, invested with superhuman powers as the result of his possession by the major gods," and Carpentier even grants him the title, "the Lord of Poison."¹ Although more recent research casts doubt upon Makandal's actual responsibility for the deaths of colonists and livestock, historical records confirm that he had in fact acquired a reputation very much like what Carpentier's novel suggests.² Whatever his actual role may have been, his alleged role is clear in the historical record. He was captured and burned at the stake for being a "seducer, poisoner, profaner."³ He was labeled a "seducer" for having stirred the hopes of the enslaved that resistance might be possible. In the eyes of the French Catholic authorities, however, he was labeled a profaner because of his practices of "mingling

¹Alejo Carpentier, translated by Harriet de Onis, *The Kingdom of This World* (New York: Farrar,

²Forthcoming research from John Garrigus, for example, suggests that Makandal may have been credited with naturally occurring epidemic disease. Even still, Makandal's reputation as a skilled magician-healer-poisoner grew and ultimately led to his execution by colonial authorities. Consequently, it also led to his valorization in Haitian history.

³Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) 51.

holy things in the composition and usage of allegedly magical packets.”⁴ These “magical packets”, today known in Haiti as *pakèt kongo* (“Kongo packets”), are a type of magical amulet, and, in fact, Makandal’s name appears to have come from the Kongo word for “amulet” (*makwonda*). Bound together and activated with invocations of various names and powers, such as *Jesus-Christ*, *Allah*, and *Bon Dieu*, these magical bundles were used for good fortune and healing but could also be used for harm. For the French, these mixed sacred objects, designed to activate and augment spiritual power through combination, were considered dangerous, magical, and fundamentally impure profanations.

The Problem of Religious Combination

Practices of combination, like Makandal’s production of “allegedly magical packets,” reveal human fabrication in a domain that the modern West deems to be, by definition, not fabricated. If a practice, object, belief, or any other thing deemed “religion” is revealed to be fabricated, then it is not understood as religion at all, but rather some other thing like sorcery, magic, or art. In contrast, “religion” is imagined to float above culture or to derive from somewhere “out there.” Most importantly, religion is imagined by the West to be fundamentally pure. Makandal’s offense was, then, really a double offense, for in the production and use of his magical bundles he revealed two kinds of combination. On the one hand, *pakèt kongo* required the blending of objects considered sacred (like a crucifix) with others that were not (like dirt and twine). His invocation of Allah, Jesus, and *Bon Dieu* in the creation of these objects, however, revealed a second mixture and a second profanation for the French — one that

⁴Ibid. Moreau de St.-Méry’s account taken from *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’isle Saint-Domingue*, 3 vols. (1976: reprint, Paris, 1958) 1:631.

demonstrated an inadequate appreciation for the exclusive demands of the names he invoked.⁵

As Haiti's contentious history of struggle which often centered on its popular religious practices demonstrates, this kind of combinatory practice continues to upend expectations regarding what is and is not properly "religion." At various times in Haiti's history, certain institutions have waged a war, sometimes subtly and other times less so, against the African-inspired, creolized religious practices of much of Haiti's population. Presently, this war continues among one of Haiti's fastest growing religious populations – charismatic, evangelical Protestants. In Haiti, these Protestants are most often known simply as *konvèti* (converted). While the American denominations to which many *konvèti* communities attach themselves (Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, etc.) may be theologically diverse, in Haiti, those who are *konvèti* comprise a kind of charismatic consensus that positions itself in opposition both to *Vodouizan* and Catholics. In fact, Haiti's *konvèti* rarely distinguish *Vodou* and Catholicism at all. Thus, while many of Haiti's other popular cultural expressions — the *Kreyòl* language and *konpa* music, for example — have in recent decades acquired recognition and honor in public discourse as creative and productive cultural forms, the combinatory quality of popular religious practices remains an intensely contested.

For the state, popular religious practices, the elements of which comprise what is today simply known as *Vodou*, were particularly threatening because of their association with the peasantry and with their potential for rebellion and revolt. For the Catholic Church, these religious practices represented a dangerous threat to the Church's authority

⁵Moreau, 1:631, cited in Dubois.

over “true” religion. Similarly, the Haitian state has often considered popular religious practice as a threat to its own interests and authority.

Protestantism in Haiti, however, has followed a much different course. Beginning with 16th century diatribes against corruption and “worldliness” in the Roman Church, and most explicitly in the era of Victorian science, Protestants have sometimes been powerful voices in the war against religious combination, sometimes even going so far as to try to separate “religion” from the concrete, material world completely.⁶ But, just as often, Protestant Christianities have focused attention, knowingly or not, upon the body, upon objects, upon affect, and upon the material world. As Birgit Meyer suggests, this is perhaps nowhere more explicit than within charismatic and Pentecostal Christianities, which rely heavily upon a form of bodily and affective impact that she names “sensational forms.”⁷ As these varieties of Protestant Christianity have grown in Haiti, many groups among Haiti’s *konvèti* consensus have become powerful voices against combination and “superstition” in the domain of religion. Other groups, though, have become like Makandal. In the eyes of many, they are “seducers” and “profaners,” accused of “mingling holy things.” As a result, these Pentecostal “profaners” find themselves outside the consensus, ostracized and denigrated for the fabrications that their practices reveal.

⁶Peter Pels, “Modern Fear of Matter: Reflections on the Protestantism of Victorian Science,” in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, ed. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) 27-39. For an examination of the inconsistencies of this position, see Webb Keane’s *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁷Birgit Meyer, “Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism’s Sensational Forms,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (September 21, 2010): 741–63.

Intimate Enemies: Introducing Independent Pentecostalism in Haiti

The chapters that follow offer an examination of a version of Pentecostalism called *Lame Selès* (in French *L'Armée Celeste*), or "The Heavenly Army," that thrives in Haiti just under the threshold of visibility and public recognition. It would be an exaggeration to call it an underground movement; these communities do not hide or disguise their practices. Still, this movement within independent Pentecostal communities is sparsely documented in scholarship, and even in Haiti it is quite poorly understood despite the fact that most *konvèti* (converted) Haitians have at one time or another attended a *Lame Selès* service. The movement exists at a juncture between Protestant Christianity and *Vodou*, or more precisely, at the intimate and sometimes violent crossroads where Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity and the militaristic *Petwo* style of *Vodou* converge and battle for cosmological sovereignty. The intimacy of this crossroads is partly based upon shared practices of combative musical rituals, a shared set of cosmological sensibilities, and markedly similar social functions.

These independent Pentecostal communities seek to mark out a domain of sovereignty over the bodies and spaces of the *konvèti*. Though the spirits and powers of *Petwo* figure as an explicit spiritual enemy for *Lame Selès*, these Pentecostal communities also depend upon the spirits not as a source of power, but as an object for the spiritual warfare that they wage alongside *Sentespri* ("the Holy Spirit"), their most powerful spiritual ally. If the spirits have up to now been exiled from more mainstream Protestant churches in Haiti, *Lame Selès* communities open wide the church doors and offer new territory, new bodies, new objects and places for the spirits to inhabit, even if only to be cast out, beaten, and prayed against through the *fòs Sentespri* ("force/power of

the Holy Spirit”).⁸

At the level of local social organization, these independent Pentecostal communities mirror the longstanding function of communities of *serviteurs* (servants) of the *lwa* (the name for the “spirits” in *Vodou*).⁹ Within these communities of *serviteurs*, the *houngan* (priest-healer) and *mambo* (priestess-healer) have often been central to social organization and discipline at the local level of villages and neighborhoods. As ritual specialists, their primary role is as healers capable of addressing physical and mental illnesses as well as social disruptions and tensions. Likewise, *Lame Selès* communities are led either by a prophet or prophetess whose primary role is as healer and social arbiter. As Haiti’s numbers of *konvèti* have continued to increase in recent decades, and even more dramatically since the 2010 earthquake, so have these independent Pentecostal communities increased. For the person who is *konvèti*, these communities provide access to a local ritual community and healers without compromising the person’s status as a *fidèl* (faithful member) in the growing *konvèti* population.

These social and ritual congruencies with *Vodou*, however, have meant that these communities of independent Pentecostals are frequently denigrated by mainstream Protestants, evangelicals, and even other Pentecostals. This has, in effect, positioned these communities in an intermediary cultural and religious space in Haiti — denigrated

⁸Scholars have often noted the adoption of a local cosmology specifically for the purpose of warring against as a feature of global Pentecostal communities. See, for example, Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). For a review of trends in the study of Global Pentecostalism, see Joel Robbins, “The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (January 1, 2004): 117–43.

⁹Although *Vodou* has long been accepted as a name for the complex and varied religious practices in Haiti, many practitioners of *Vodou* still prefer the simple description of their practice as *sevi lwa* (to serve the spirits).

by those who would be their most obvious religious allies and mistaken instead as being their most explicit spiritual enemies. My research among several of these communities in Haiti's Northwest Department suggests that, while *Lame Selès* communities are certainly not practitioners of *Vodou* in a Protestant guise (as many Haitian Protestant critics might claim), these communities are an important cultural space for the preservation of the spirits and the socio-spiritual practices that have long animated Haiti's religious cultures. The spirits and specters of *Petwo* — like *zonbi*, *baka*, *les morts*, *demon*, and many more — are cultivated and kept alive in the afflicted bodies in these communities, though no longer as sovereign spirits but rather subordinated to the sovereignty of *Sentespri*. Those who are afflicted by these and other specters are the primary clients of these healing communities, and the ability of the prophets and prophetesses to contend with these spirits in the community serves as the most important evidence of the power and efficacy of *Sentespri*. Like historical *Vodou* communities and other ritual social organizations like *sosyete sekrè* (secret societies), these Pentecostal communities serve as parallel systems of authority for their members.

The intimacy that exists between these Pentecostal communities and *Vodou*, however, is the intimacy of archenemies. Their moments of contact can be violent and passionate. Like the relationship of affliction and healing itself, *Lame Selès* requires *Vodou* and, in what recent data suggests is an increasingly “evangelical” Haiti, *Lame Selès* is an important site of mixture in which *Vodou* and other cultural traditions of Haiti are revived, but in meaningfully different ways than in *Vodou* communities.

***Lame Selès* as a Global Pentecostalism**

My choice to call these independent churches “Pentecostal” in the first place is

likely to meet with resistance from some researchers of Global Pentecostalism. As with all rapidly expanding movements, growth and subsequent variation and combination necessarily present definitional challenges. Some have sought to correspondingly expand the definition of Pentecostalism to accommodate its growth, its variety and its influence on other Protestant traditions by introducing distinct “waves” within the history and spread of Pentecostalism. Following such a model, these Haitian practitioners would most clearly be situated within the so-called “third wave,” in which the doctrinal rigor and rigid prohibitions that once characterized Pentecostalism have been displaced by a lively engagement with the spirit world. Other researchers have preferred instead to call such groups “neo-Pentecostal” or “Pentecostal-like” communities.¹⁰ These, too, would serve as suitable descriptors. Among these independent communities in Haiti, however, my choice to retain the word “Pentecostal” has been guided by the self-identification of *Lame Selès* communities as *egliz de dye* (Church of God), which is both an official denomination and used as a general name for “Pentecostal” in Haiti. Furthermore, their focus on contact and immediacy with the Holy Spirit, spiritual “gifts” (charismata) like speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy, and their premillennial and apocalyptic perspective are undeniably consistent with the Pentecostal movement as a global body. I have chosen also to add the term “independent” to signal their lack of affiliation with formal Pentecostal denominational structures and institutions. Ultimately, this dissertation is unconcerned about the extent to which these communities would be recognizable as Pentecostals to others. Instead, my aim has been to understand the way

¹⁰Allan Anderson, *An introduction to Pentecostalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Robbins (2004); David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

that Pentecostal and charismatic discourses are being reworked to generate new ritual forms and identities and to produce concrete social and political agents within Haiti's contested religious context.

Historians have long puzzled over the growth and popularity of Pentecostalism, which burst onto America's religious scene in the late 19th and early 20th century. Until relatively recently, scholars have tended to reproduce Robert Mapes Anderson's primary thesis, which was largely based on social deprivation theory. His basic contention was that Pentecostalism appealed primarily to the poor and socially disenfranchised by allowing them to find relief in "otherworldly, symbolic, and psychotherapeutic" ways.¹¹ This thesis has remained dominant in part because it has tremendous explanatory power and is almost certainly right about growth factors within certain Pentecostal populations. R. Laurence Moore's *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* offers a more functionalist model that describes the way that Pentecostalism actually provides resources to address the deprivations of many rather than just a psychotherapeutic respite.¹² At times, in writing this dissertation, I have found Moore's functionalist model well suited to independent Pentecostal communities in Haiti because of the situations of profound poverty, illness, and insecurity that characterize the lives of many of them. In fact, most chapters herein will illustrate this very thing — that these "spiritual" practices perform very concrete social functions.

More recently, though, Grant Wacker has questioned this over-emphasis on the material and social deprivation of Pentecostal communities because it ignores data that

¹¹Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1979) 229.

¹²R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

suggests that early Pentecostals were not as “disinherited” as previously thought, and because such arguments “tend to relegate religious motives to a secondary role.”¹³ He proposes instead that the success and growth of Pentecostalism can be attributed to its ability to “hold two seemingly incompatible impulses in productive tension.”¹⁴ These impulses he describes as the primitive and the pragmatic, or idealism and realism.¹⁵ In other words, Pentecostalism accomplishes what some other earlier forms of Protestantism in U.S. struggled to achieve. Pentecostals pronounced a singular focus on transcendence, but “proved remarkably willing to work within the social and cultural expectations of the age.”¹⁶

The Haitian context, however, is not the U.S. context. Wacker’s thesis is descriptive of a wider and historically older tension between transcendence and immanence that has been addressed and solved in a variety of theological ways. Haitian Pentecostals, I argue, draw on African-inspired cosmologies and cultural resources in ways that resolve, or perhaps ignore, the tension completely. The combative but symbiotic relationship between independent Pentecostal communities and the spirits and rituals of *Vodou* is productive in precisely these ways. The cosmological conditions of Haitian culture simply do not permit an engagement with spiritual reality that is not also necessarily social, economic, and material.

Joel Robbins has sharply criticized the tendency in recent scholarship on global

¹³Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 10.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 10.

¹⁶Ibid., 13.

Pentecostal and charismatic religion to account for Pentecostalism's growth as a function of its cultural malleability and its lack of aversion to syncretism.¹⁷ For Robbins, these analyses often assume an identity between cultural practices without attending to the “cultural framing” of each.¹⁸ For example, they assume that “possession is possession” regardless of its local description. Instead, as Robbins points out, Pentecostals in the global south often accept “local enchanted cosmologies only to attack them.”¹⁹ I have tried to avoid such forms of imprecision and have focused instead on the ways in which cultural practices are reshaped in their new Pentecostal context and how the spirits are revalued, especially through the practice of spiritual warfare.

Spiritual Warfare

In a recent book on the practice of spiritual warfare in the American context, Sean McCloud suggests that although the practice may have developed within the so-called “third wave” movement in American evangelicalism, it owes much to international missionary contexts.²⁰ My research among independent Pentecostal communities has attempted to demonstrate the ways in which charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in contexts like Haiti have indeed been co-creators of spiritual warfare as both a theology and a practice. Indeed, in contrast to other scholars who express surprise and concern over the influence of American “third wave” influence in places like Haiti, I argue that such perspectives on Haiti's history and the character of the spirits is fully in step with

¹⁷Joel Robbins, “The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (January 1, 2004) 117–43.

¹⁸Ibid., 127.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Sean McCloud, *American Possessions: Fighting Demons in the Contemporary United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 3.

Haiti's religious culture.²¹

Improvement

Finally, this dissertation engages with research on the impact of foreign interventionism in the form of NGOs and other development institutions. Tanya Murray Li investigates these impacts at the social and political level as a form of Michel Foucault's sense of "government" or the "conduct of conduct."²² The concept of population improvement in general is one that Tanya Li links historically to colonial and neocolonial projects of increasing productivity, and therefore, necessarily to extraction.²³ Contemporary projects of development, however, often seek to address these exploitative associations by attempting instead to cultivate a "will to improve" within a group of subjects. However, she notes, regardless of this shift of intention, this effort to cultivate a "will to improve" is unable to escape the field of power of "government." Based on her insights, I identify a host of transnational agents in Haiti that generate what I term "discourses of improvement," with which Haiti's poor majority finds itself regularly inundated. Within that context, independent Pentecostal communities offer a skeptical and sometimes critical voice that challenges the sovereignty of that government. That it exercises itself through a spiritual form of warfare is little surprise given Li's suggestion that "violence stands at the limit where government and sovereignty articulate."²⁴

²¹See, for example, Bertin M. Louis, *My Soul is In Haiti: Protestantism in the Haitian Diaspora of the Bahamas*. (New York: NYU Press, 2015).

²²Tanya Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 5.

²³Ibid., 7.

²⁴Li, 10.

Theoretical and Methodological Orientation: Analyzing Spirits

Through the research and writing of this dissertation, I have struggled to restrain my impulse to insert the spirits and the invisible forces that are central to the lives of these independent Pentecostal communities into accessible domains of analysis. For members of these communities, spirits and the Spirit are undeniable aspects of daily life. Spirits are known and experienced intimately by many of my informants, but they are known to me only as traces of discourse, as configurations of objects, as percussive waves of sound rolling out from batteries of drums, or as twitches and movements of bodies.

Joel Robbins suggests that spirits should be understood as “locally meaningful idioms.”²⁵ To the extent that Robbins understands the word “idiom” in its broadest sense and not limited to language alone, I have attempted to analyze the spirits that inhabit these communities in precisely this way. Georges Bataille, in his *Theory of Religion*, imagines the origination of spirits as deriving from the process of objectification that characterizes human thought. “Spirit” for Bataille captures the excess force of things that seems to resist objectification.²⁶ In the context of these independent Pentecostal communities, spirits and their impact on material human life are expressive of the deep conviction that the world is *more than can be perceived*. Throughout the following chapters, spirits arise as an affirmation of the unknowable causes, imperceptible forces, and the complexity of human social life. In that sense, then, I treat the spirits and the Spirit throughout as idioms of excess.

In contrast to theories of social or economic deprivation that often guide research

²⁵Robbins, 129.

²⁶Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992) 30-37.

on Pentecostalism and other supernaturalist traditions, the following chapters suggest that spirits are not delusions of lack. They are, instead, acknowledgements of the excessiveness of the world. Engaging the spirits is not wishful or futile thinking; it is an attempt to take hold, even if only for a moment, of the unseen forces of fate in order to bend them on behalf of the community.

Fieldwork and Method

My fieldwork for this research has occurred at various intervals between June 2013 and December 2015. I first met Claudette and her husband Jean-Pierre, the prophetess and pastor whose community is at the center of this research, in the summer of 2013 while doing preliminary field site research. I spent another period of time with this community in Port-de-Paix, Haiti in the summer of 2014. Finally, I conducted research among Claudette's and other communities during the fall of 2015. Additionally, I lived and worked for a non-profit educational institution in Port-de-Paix for seven years, from 2004 until 2011, which allowed me to enter these periods of formal fieldwork with a deep familiarity with the language, economy and culture of my informants.

In the communities upon which the following chapters focus, I relied primarily upon observations as a participant at weekly healing services and the many hours of formal and informal conversation that took place with leaders of these communities and outsiders to these communities. I directed my attention in particular to the domains in which the spirits and the Spirit were observable to me. These included language (song lyrics, sermons, prophecy, conversation), bodies (sick bodies, healed bodies, dancing bodies), healing objects (herbs, oils, vegetables, toiletries), and sound (drum beats, clapping hands, screams, laughter). These perceptible domains of independent

Pentecostal practice in these communities constitute an archive of spirits and the Spirit from which I have sought to reconstruct a way of inhabiting the world that is known to me only in traces, much as an historian must do with dusty books and faded letters.

Thesis and Organization

Marshaling evidence based on this fieldwork, I argue that, independent Pentecostal communities known as *Lame Selès* represent an important site of religious combination and the propagation of the spirits of *Vodou* in an increasingly Protestant Haiti. By engaging with the spirits, especially those of the *Petwo* style of *Vodou*, in their ritual services, these independent Pentecostal communities revivify the spirits by offering new bodies, new ritual spaces, and new discourses to inhabit. The affinity between independent Pentecostal communities and *Petwo* extends also to the combative musical rituals and the musical styles used by both.

These combative musical rituals, however, are also in step with recent developments within charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity. These communities thereby also find themselves drawing on a transnational discourse and set of practices known as “spiritual warfare” that travels in and out of Haiti with missionaries and Haiti’s *konvèti* diaspora. This apparent double affinity, both with *Vodou* and popular evangelical Christianity, situates these communities precariously between what are perceived as two antagonistic religious cultures. I argue, however, that it is another iteration of combination that has long characterized religious practice in Haiti and the wider Black Atlantic world.

Finally, in ways very much like Haiti’s “secret societies” of *Bizango* and *Chanpwèl*, these communities of independent Pentecostals imagine themselves and are

imagined by others as a parallel power within Haiti. The secrecy and scandal that surround these communities is both the source of their socio-spiritual power and the cause of their denigration by outsiders. The social-spiritual power of these communities and the prophets and prophetesses who lead them stands in direct competition with other ritual specialists, like the *houngan* (priest-healer) and *mambo* (priestess-healer) in *Vodou*. These communities deploy their socio-spiritual to challenge the sovereignty of spirits that cause afflictions ranging from bodily and mental illness to anxiety and insecurity. The cosmological model that these communities employ is one in which matter and spirit are inseparably intertwined, though. The movement of spirits is the movement of bodies, and matter is lively, spirit-filled matter. Therefore, to challenge the sovereignty of the spirits is also to challenge the sovereignty of temporal authorities as well. These communities intervene precisely in situations where temporal authorities fail. Independent Pentecostals in Haiti neither deny modern medical science nor do they reject the authority of the police or judges. However, these communities possess a cosmological vision, which requires an insistence that there is always *more than* what these authorities can perceive. Engaging with the spirits places affliction beyond the reach of temporal sovereignty and within the domain of independent Pentecostal sovereignty – the domain of spirits and the Spirit.

In chapter one, I summarize the history of foreign and domestic interventions into Haiti's religious culture in order to situate *Lame Selès* in the wider history of religious politics in the country. Beginning with the entangled but contentious relationship between *Vodou* and the Catholic Church, I examine the role of popular religions in Haiti and their perceived function as parallel institutions and shadow governments among the poor

majority. I explore the role of the U.S. Marine occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 in igniting a two-way exchange of religious culture between the U.S. and Haiti, and the Catholic Church's response to the problem of *Vodou* and Protestantism. The targeting of *Vodou* and Protestantism in Haiti suggests an affinity between the two as they were practiced and perceived. The appearance of Pentecostalism in Haiti at this same time almost certainly contributed to that affinity. Out of that space of affinity and shared persecution, I argue, independent Pentecostal communities, known by outsiders as *Lame Selès*, emerged and constructed new Pentecostal ritual forms. Chapter 1 also explores the ways that American evangelicals became co-producers of new “spiritual warfare” theology and practice with Haitian Protestants through the transnational pathways of missionary and NGO work in Haiti. A case study provides an example of the direct relationship between American missionaries, the theology of spiritual warfare, and the cultural politics of Haiti, especially after the 2010 earthquake. In contrast to some Haitian evangelical communities who interpret the revolutionary history as the beginning of a spiritual enslavement, communities of Pentecostals offer a surprising reinterpretation of revolutionary history that centers on the powerful, combative *fòs* (“force”) of the Holy Spirit working on behalf of their freedom.

The second half of chapter one introduces the localities and personalities whose stories and insights form the core of this research. Examining the charismatic religious culture that pervades Port-de-Paix and its strong ties to the transnational forces and their discourses of “improvement” and “security” demonstrates the simultaneous geographic isolation and cultural integration that makes the city, like many in Haiti, an intermediary space of culture. Two prophetesses — *Sè* (sister) Claudette and *Sè* Henri — and their

respective communities of divine healing and spiritual warfare are the primary foci of the remaining chapters. Their communities, their practices, their insights, and their cosmological visions illustrate the way these communities engage in spiritual healing and warfare and the importance of combative music to their practice.

Chapter 2 recounts my final conversation with *Sè* Claudette's late husband, Jean-Pierre, which led to a theological riddle. Conversations with Claudette begin to make sense of the riddle, as Claudette places music in a list of ambiguous forces that she considers to have been ordained by God to maintain order in the world. For these predominantly poor communities, music becomes one of their only resources for navigating and engaging with what these communities perceive to be, in many cases, limited and flawed institutions.

The primary musical ritual, and the very center of community life, is the *jeune*. Chapter 2 offers a thick description of the twelve-hour service, which culminates in the arrival of *Sentespri* (the Holy Spirit). This arrival, however, is distinguished from the kinds of "mounting" or possession that are central in *Vodou* ritual. These Pentecostals employ the robust religious and cultural notion of *fòs* to describe the mode by which *Sentespri* manifests in the bodies of the prophets and prophetesses.

Chapter 3 explores the way that these communities understand illness as spiritual affliction and the methods of diagnosing and treating these afflictions. Within the context of modern medical science that characterizes hospitals and clinics, independent Pentecostal communities express skepticism about the doctors' ability to accurately perceive and diagnose the subtleties of these illnesses. Filling a role very similar to the traditional role of the local *houngan* (*Vodou* priest-healer) and *mambo* (priestess-healer),

prophets and prophetesses diagnose these afflictions by naming responsible spirits, and attending to the bodies of the afflicted with herbal medicine and bodily manipulations. The ambivalence and even mistrust that these communities feel toward medical doctors is not resistance to science or modern medicine; rather, it is based upon their conviction that the cosmos is too vast and too filled with spiritual realities for a medical doctor or cutting-edge instrumentation to actually detect with certainty. In this way, these communities attend to the unmet needs of the poor majority. Through the *jeune*, the *fòs Sentespri*, and “traditional” medicines, these communities intervene where the work of the medical community fails.

Similarly, Chapter 4 examines a specific kind of spiritual affliction understood in independent Pentecostal communities as “possession.” In contrast to other forms of affliction, these afflicting spirits are understood to invade and partially control the behavior of the afflicted person. The healing rituals that are used to address such afflictions are sometimes violent and undeniably gendered. Therefore, this chapter examines the use of physical violence within spiritual healing and seeks to contextualize it within Haiti’s longer history of political and sexual violence. Employing insights from Richard Schechner’s writing on ritual and performance, I examine cases of *zombi*-afflicted teenaged girls and the rituals used to “heal” them. These healing rituals, I argue, function at two poles of performance — entertainment and efficacy. As entertainment, these rituals serve to draw crowds and impress the audience. For the afflicted and their families, however, these rituals are efficacious performances. Such healing rituals are also, however, the performance of real violence. The uncomfortable experience I had in sitting through these performances is an aspect of these communities that I leave

unresolved.

Chapter 5 examines the role of these communities in healing instances of social conflict and injustice. I begin with an exploration of Haiti's "secret societies" and their role in Haiti's history as both ritual communities but also alternative systems of local justice. Recounting stories of profound injustice among the afflicted at Claudette's community, I consider the way that independent Pentecostal communities similarly comprise alternative justice systems. The story of one man, corroborated by recent research on corruption within Haiti's local systems of justice, demonstrates the extent to which the formal legal system in Haiti is inadequate to the needs of the poor majority. The healing practices of these communities involve long periods of withdrawal from public life for the afflicted, communal labor, prayer, and patience. Using insights from moral philosophy, I propose a model for understanding the way that spiritual healing works to resolve questions of blame and responsibility in instances of conflict.

Finally, in a conclusion I revisit the themes of improvement, spiritual warfare, and the way that these communities intervene with a cosmological vision insisting on the limited and flawed nature of temporal authority. I then briefly consider the future of these communities in conditions of increasing insecurity and worsening poverty. I offer a vision of independent Haitian Pentecostalism that recalls the social and political power of popular religious practices from Haiti's past.

CHAPTER 1: LAME SELÈS IN HISTORICAL AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

Called By God, or Maybe Not

“Of course, I was born in a Catholic family. I converted when I was a teenager in a place that you probably don’t know – Cité Soleil.” Sè Claudette’s voice strained as she lowered herself into her favorite chair. The last six or twelve inches of the procedure worried me every time as her elbows bent and her body dropped hard onto the seat. The plastic chair was cracked in several places, and its legs shivered under my body weight when I occasionally sat in it during long afternoons. I expected it would break eventually, and I hoped I would not be there to see it happen to Sè Claudette.

“I know Cité Soleil,” I told her. It is one of the most famous slums of Port-au-Prince. Nearly everyone with any experience in Haiti had heard of it.

“You’ve heard of it, but you don’t know it,” she corrected me. She was right. In all the time I had lived in Haiti, and even the time I spent in the capital, I had never been there.

She continued, “I wasn’t born there. I was born right here in Port-de-Paix. My mother had a *lwa* on her head, and my father was supposed to be a *serviteur*, too, but he never did anything with the *lwa*. And, naturally, I received a *lwa*, too. But when I was twelve years old, I went to live with my aunt in Port-au-Prince, and she went to a church in Cité Soleil – it was filled with the Spirit. I went there sometimes with her, but it was a small place and a lot of people didn’t like it. I liked it, though. Their services were *hot*, and I converted. I studied in school to become a nurse, and I also went to culinary school.

Later, I don't remember when, I decided to become a prophetess. After that I moved back to Port-de-Paix. What else do you want to know?"

"You just decided to become a prophetess?" I asked. "You weren't called by God? You didn't have an experience that made you change the path of your life, or anything like that?"

"No, I just decided to do this work. I was good at it. Or, maybe God called me. I don't remember. I'm an old person, you know," she said as she started to stand up. "I think the story about me is finished. Do you want to buy an avocado? *Sè Tanyès* has some." The legs of the chair warped again as she pushed herself to standing.

Despite being a master storyteller in other situations, *Sè Claudette* seemed determined to give me as little information as possible about her own life. I learned, over time, to cherish the smallest details of her sparse accounts. I scribbled some notes: *Born Catholic. Cité Soleil. Spirit-filled church. Nursing. Cooking. Prophetess. Called by God... or maybe not. Sè Claudette* was unique among my friends and acquaintances in Haiti in several respects, but her story was not. Hers is the story of many *konvèti* who were born in the 1940s and 50s. Most were born Catholic in families that served the *lwa*.²⁷ By the late 1950s and 60s, it seems, conversion to charismatic Protestant Christianities became much more common within Haiti's complex religious culture. The story of Protestantism in Haiti, however, is much older than that.

²⁷*Lwa* is the Kreyòl word for the "spirits" in Haitian *Vodou*. Linguists have traced the word to a family of Yoruba words referring to "gods" (*Oluwa*) or "spirits." Kate Ramsey (2011) has suggested that the homologous relationship between *lwa* and the French *loi* (law) should not be dismissed entirely, for indeed the *lwa* are an alternative *loi* in Haiti. Additionally, practitioners rarely identify themselves as practicing *Vodou* or as *Vodouizan*, preferring instead to say simply that they *sèvi lwa* (serve the spirits). See Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 6.

This chapter summarizes two centuries of religion in Haiti in an attempt to place *Lame Selès* communities within Haiti's history of contentious and transnational religious politics. In the second half, the chapter briefly introduces the specific places, communities and characters whose lives and livelihood this study describes and analyzes. The first of these tasks suffers from a lack of reliable data. Even general population data in Haiti is notoriously imprecise. Therefore, the religious makeup of Haiti's population, both now and throughout its history, is also woefully under-documented and often misrepresented. Numerous experts and lay people declare that Haiti is "10% Protestant, 90% Catholic, and 100% *Vodou*." This phrase does suggest the way that *Vodou* oscillates in popular and scholarly literature between being understood as a "culture" and as a "religion." It also suggests the very real importance of *Vodou* to many Haitians as part of their cultural identity. However, the popular phrase is undeniably inaccurate, and it reinforces Western stereotypes of exotic black religiosity and Catholicism's syncretistic nature. More recent data on Haiti indicates that its Protestant population is approaching 30%.²⁸

Catholic-Vodou Relations

The unique religious culture of Haiti was born out of the particulars of plantation slavery on colonial St. Domingue during the apogee of the transatlantic slave trade.

Haitian *Vodou*, specifically, was forged from elements of Spanish and French

Catholicism and the vibrant cosmologies, languages, and cultures of West and Central

²⁸A UN Population Fund census, published in 2006 based on data from 2003, suggested the percentage of Protestants was closer to 20%. The same census noted much smaller percentages of Catholics and *Vodouizan*, as well, suggesting that the data is partly impacted by the fact that respondents were either unwilling to self-identify or unaccustomed to self-identifying based on exclusive or primary religious practices. The CIA World Factbook (cia.gov/worldfactbook) lists 28.5% for Protestants based on 2015 census data.

Africa. What scholars and others have named *Vodou* is, in fact, a rather diverse set of cosmological understandings, spirit cults, and ritual practices that has been an historically important symbol and social institution since the Haitian Revolution. In Haiti, the word *Vodou* has traditionally been used for a “specific mode of drumming and dancing” rather than for a whole set of ritual healing and worship practices.²⁹ Increasingly, and thanks in large part to the insistence of non-Haitian scholars and missionaries, the term *Vodou*, as Desmangles suggests, has been transformed into a “generic” term “referring to a whole assortment of cultural elements.”³⁰ Therefore, today *Vodou* refers to something far more robust than a mode of dance, but also more robust than a set of propositions or cosmological understanding. Rather, *Vodou* encompasses everything from ethics and rituals to artistic expression and folk medicines. For the practitioner, *Vodou* is a way of living life that recognizes that “all phenomena are the manifestations of supernatural, but observable, powers.”³¹ These powers are transcendent and ineffable but simultaneously immanent to the daily material and social realities of human life. It was, and frequently still is, a rural and agricultural ritual tradition that values family, community, and the ancestors, and one that prioritizes engagement with the immanent spiritual powers (the *lwa*) that animate the spaces and lives of practitioners.

Despite the vastness of Haitian cultural experience to which the label of *Vodou* can be applied, census data frequently indicates that only 2% or less of the population self-identifies as *Vodouizan* (practitioners of *Vodou*). This is at least partly due to the fact

²⁹Ramsey, 7.

³⁰Leslie Desmangles, *Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Catholicism in Haiti* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1992) 3.

³¹*Ibid.*, 4.

that it has been common, especially among Haiti's poor majority, to understand themselves as servants of the *lwa* and also necessarily as Catholics. There is no mutual exclusivity from the perspective of *Vodouizan*. This fact can be seen even within the ritual practices of *Vodou*. A traditional ceremony frequently employs a *pret savann* ("bush priest"), who is simply a layperson well educated in the Catholic rites. A Latin benediction is offered at the beginning to ensure successful contact with the realm of the spirits during the ceremony that follows.³² In this and many other ways, Catholicism and *Vodou* have been inseparable in the lives of many Haitians, and servants of the *lwa* are likely to count themselves "Catholic" first and foremost.

Parallel Power, Sorcery, Superstition

This apparent symbiosis, however, has been regularly contested. During Haiti's more than two centuries of independence, forces inside and outside the country have sought to define these ritual practices in various ways: as superstition, as magic, as cultural heritage, and as religion. Within the earliest context of the new Republic, it is no surprise that these ritual practices—practices that were understood to have been a catalyst for the rebellion against the colonists—would also be considered an enemy of the newly formed State. Various *sosyete* ("societies") served as social bodies in which *Vodou* dances and other ritual practices took place. These *sosyete* organized themselves into alternative political and military formations, giving their leaders titles like "*president*" and "*senateur*" or sometimes "kings" and "queens."³³ From the start, then, as Laënnec

³²Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1953) 54.

³³Ardouin Beaubrun, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti*, vol. 8 (Paris: Chez l'Auteur, 1856) 63-64, cited in Ramsey (2011) 52.

Hurbon has argued, these popular religious practices have been continuously penalized in order to manage and contain “uncontrollable parallel powers.”³⁴ Even when not understood as a political threat, these groups and their leaders were considered as impediments to progress. Ramsey writes, “Officially, then, and in the writing of elites, they [*Vodouizan/* societies] were forces of disorder, indecency, and idleness that successive Haitian governments vowed, and to varying degrees acted, to repress.”³⁵

The construction of Haiti’s legal codes during the presidency of Jean-Pierre Boyer, who ruled from 1818-1843, was a significant legal step in the definition and criminalization of *Vodou*. Borrowing heavily from similar French legal codes, Boyer’s 1835 *Code Pénal* prohibited and criminalized a class of practices that it named *sortilèges* (sorcery/divination), which included the making of objects such as “*ouangas, caprelatas, vaudoux, donpèdre, macandals*, and other *sortilèges*.” Here, “*vaudoux*” appears as an object alongside other allegedly ensorcelled objects; it is certainly not classed as a “religion” but rather a variety of sorcery or magic. Ramsey argues that this can only be seen as a category mistake in the law, given that *vaudoux* had been traditionally understood by its practitioners as a moral and ancestral practice grounded in the ancient ideals of *Giné* (Africa).³⁶ It was, from the perspective of practitioners, antithetical to sorcery and magic, and it was a practice rather than an object. This category mistake, though, meant that practitioners likely did not consider themselves to be in violation of any law, and the relatively private dancing and drumming rituals continued with little penalty.

³⁴Laënnec Hurbon, *Le barbare imaginaire* (Port-au-Prince: Éditions Henri Deschamps, 1987) 92.

³⁵Ramsey, 53.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 61.

A more concerted attack on *Vodou* occurred a century later. During the 1930s and 40s, the official church worked in parallel with legal forces to define and battle against these popular religious practices. Motivated by President Vincent Stenio's 1935 changes to the *Code Pénal*, the mostly French clergy of the church sought to flush out the popular practices of *Vodou* that were considered as impurities and "occult" mixtures within official Catholicism in Haiti. The battle was waged in the form of a *campagne anti-superstitieuse*, which primarily served to embolden local state and church officials in the exploitation and harassment of the peasantry through the use of raids (and the bribes that offered protection against the raids).³⁷

Protestantism in Haiti

The campaigns against these popular religious practices also had another target for the Church — Protestantism — a decision that, ironically, lumped together the *bokò* (sorcerers) with the very Protestant population that would grow to see itself as the arch-nemesis of *Vodou*. Protestantism has been a religious option in Haiti since at least the 1820s, though. The earliest migrants left the United States for Haiti with many, often contradictory, visions of what Haiti was and could be. In his *Haytian Papers*, written in 1818, Prince Saunders praised both the monarchy of Henri Christophe and the liturgical pageantry of Catholicism as linked to ancient regal black civilizations in Egypt and Ethiopia. He also laid out a program of social and moral reform.³⁸ It was not long before Saunders became a prominent proponent of black colonization based on the notion that it

³⁷Ramsey, 63.

³⁸Laurie Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010) 117-118.

would be mutually beneficial by joining U.S. blacks to this regal African past and providing social and educational uplift to the race.³⁹ Maffly-Kipp writes of Saunders:

A place of sacred and ancient import, a New World paradise, a society in need of civilizing and educating — these potentially contradictory images of Haiti worked well on the lecture circuit, where Saunders’ eloquent rhetoric and elegant presence swayed some of the most wary listeners. African Americans could embrace the symbols that resonated with their own experiences and desires, imagining either a literal place of escape from the United States or a symbolic triumph for black peoples on the Caribbean island.⁴⁰

Significant migration began under Christophe’s successor, Jean-Pierre Boyer, whose remarkably long rule (1818-1843) led to a period of relative stability in Haiti and a concerted effort by the Haitian government to encourage immigration.⁴¹ Responding to promises of land and employment from Boyer’s government, a wave of migrants arrived in Haiti in the mid-1820s searching for a kind of freedom in the world’s first independent black republic that they could not secure in the United States.

In the case of these emigrants, Saunders’ “potentially contradictory images” were actualized. Predominantly comprised of members of Boston’s recently formed Bethel AME church, they imagined a project of civilizing and educating Haitians that required the Protestant missionization of Haiti. Concerning many of these migrants, Maffly-Kipp notes that, like AME missionary David Walker, they believed that Haiti’s greatest weakness was its Catholic character, because Catholicism was associated for them with monarchy, tyranny, and most dangerously, with *Vodou*.⁴²

³⁹Maffly-Kipp, 118.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2012) 93.

⁴²Maffly-Kipp, 112.

In later cases, these utopian expectations were further strained by the realities of vast cultural and religious difference. Theophilus Gould Steward, for example, arrived in Haiti in 1872 during the monarchical reign of Fabre Geffrard. After only a short time on the island, Steward wrote in his missionary journal that the food was “dirty,” the upper-class elites were “ostentatious....superstitious...and overbearing,” and that Haitian culture had a regrettable lack of modesty and respect for women.⁴³ All of these things he found incompatible with his distinctly Protestant vision of civilization and progress, and Steward returned to America much earlier than he planned.

Despite these early struggles, Protestantism slowly grew in Haiti during its first century of independence. Most notable was the establishment of the Haitian Episcopal Church by James Theodore Holly, who also became its first ordained bishop. Holly lived in Haiti until his death, and the church remains today with a membership of more than 90,000. The popularity of Protestantism in Haiti, however, was an historical slow burn. It was not until after the U.S. occupation of Haiti by the U.S. Marines (1915-1934) that American Protestant missionaries began to focus intensive efforts on the evangelization of the country. The U.S. occupation accomplished more than simply reinstituting forced labor through the *corvée* system, though it did that; and it accomplished more than just opening the country to American military and trade interests, though it also achieved that goal. Importantly for the development of Protestantism, the U.S. occupation was crucial for the proliferation of sensationalized images and stories of “Voodoo,” cannibalism, and zombies. Among these accounts was William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island*, which describes a *Vodou* ritual as follows:

⁴³William Seraile, *Voice of Dissent: Theophilus Gould Steward (1843-1924) and Black America* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991) 51-52.

In the red light of torches which made the moon turn pale, leaping, screaming, writhing black bodies, blood-maddened, god-maddened, drunken, whirled and danced their dark saturnalia, heads thrown weirdly back as if their necks were broken, white teeth and eyeballs gleaming, while couples seizing one another from time to time fled from the circle, as if pursued by furies, into the forest to share and slake their ecstasy.⁴⁴

Stories like these from Seabrook and others were devoured by an American audience eager for fantastical tales. Indeed, as these stories from Haiti began to proliferate, the U.S. was also coming to terms with its own explosion of ecstatic religious practice in the form of Pentecostalism.

Spirit-Filled America

Pentecostalism was born at the end of the 19th century out of groups of premillennialists that Grant Wacker suggests may best be understood as “radical evangelicals.”⁴⁵ Drawing together several undercurrents in American Protestantism — the notion of “new birth,” Methodist-inspired ideas of sanctification through “Holy Ghost baptism,” divine healing, and an anticipation of Jesus’ return — these radical evangelicals turned American religion in a new direction.⁴⁶ Oriented toward experience, toward immediacy, toward the body and health, and toward manifestations of the power of God through the Holy Spirit, these “Pentecostals” introduced America to a new form of charismatic, Spirit-filled religion.

In its earliest iterations, Pentecostalism spread slowly among Midwestern, white evangelicals through the preaching of Charles Parham. When the message of Holy Spirit

⁴⁴William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York: The Literary Guild of America, 1929) 42.

⁴⁵Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 1.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 2-3.

baptism and the practice of glossolalia converged with the revivalist preaching of black evangelist William J. Seymour, the now-famous Azusa Street revival (1906-1911) gave the movement a “conspicuously multi-ethnic face.”⁴⁷ The radical inclusiveness of the movement was predictably short-lived, however, and denominationalism developed along racial and, secondarily, theological lines. Still, the numbers of Pentecostals in the U.S. grew dramatically even in its first decades. By the time of the U.S. occupation of Haiti, Pentecostalism in the U.S. had become a significant new part of the American Christian landscape. Most importantly in the Haitian context is the fact that Pentecostals also quickly sought to carry their message across borders to far corners of the globe.

It is no coincidence that Haiti’s first Pentecostal church was established just as the U.S. occupation came to a close. Missionaries arranged for the official inclusion of a Haitian pastor, Vital Herne, into the Church of God in Christ in 1934. The Church of God of Prophecy followed in the late 1930s, the Assemblies of God in 1957, and the United Pentecostal Church, a so-called “Oneness” denomination, in 1968.⁴⁸ The U.S. occupation had set in motion a period of intense cultural exchange in Haiti that transformed the American perception of Haiti’s religious culture, and it happened at the precise moment when American Spirit-filled missionaries began to bring a new form of Protestant belief and practice to the island nation. It is little wonder, then, that the Catholic Church’s *campagne anti-superstitieuse* in Haiti targeted not just *Vodou* but also Protestantism. Despite having existed in Haiti for more than a century, the fact that the Catholic Church would newly target Protestantism suggests that it had begun to grow at a new pace and

⁴⁷Wacker, 6.

⁴⁸Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 80.

exert a new measure of cultural influence. Though there is no historical data to confirm it, it may also suggest that this new form of Protestantism appeared quite similar to the popular practices of *Vodou*, at least from the perspective of the Catholic elite.

Pentecostalism and Vodou

It would seem that the institutional nature of American Protestantism, including Pentecostalism, surely distinguished it from the family-based ritual practices of *Vodou*. However, the objectification of *Vodou* rituals as *sortilèges* and *superstition* during the first 150 years of Haiti's history had the effect of producing a more routinized and institutionalized structure within *Vodou*. It had become nameable as a "religion," albeit a religion that was understood as naivety, charlatanism, or evidence of a lack of civilization.⁴⁹ It seems likely that the family compound, the *lakou*, was once the most important ritual location, but that by the first half of the 20th century it had been largely displaced by the *hounfort* (*Vodou* temple). Likewise, Ramsey notes that religious specialists like *houngan* (*Vodou* priests) and *mambo* (priestesses) seem to have become central figures only within the 20th century as economic pressures, dispossessions, and forced migrations began to chip away at once-stable family lands and legacies.⁵⁰ Given these likely transformations within *Vodou* and their coincidence with the advent of Haitian Pentecostal communities, and further supported by the fact that the Catholic Church began a campaign targeting both *Vodou* and Protestantism in general, the co-

⁴⁹Karen McCarthy Brown, "Serving the Spirits: The Ritual Economy of Haitian Vodou," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, edited by Donald J. Cosentino, 205 -223 (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995) 205.

⁵⁰Ramsey, 98.

mingling of spirit-filled Christianity and spirit-filled *Vodou* would appear to have a history dating to the 1940s.

Heavenly Armies in Haiti

The emergence of groups of independent Pentecostals, like those known today in Haiti as *Lame Selès*, is less clear, however. This is partly due to the fact that the groups themselves often reject this name and understand themselves as radically independent *Eglises de Dieu* (Churches of God, i.e., Pentecostal). The communities in Port-de-Paix all pride themselves on being churches that *pa gen misyòn* (“do not have a mission”), i.e., have no association with a mission and receive no support from a missionary organization. Historian and sociologist Lewis Ampidu Clormeus has suggested a Pentecostal church in the Delmas neighborhood of Port-au-Prince as ground zero for the *Lame Selès* movement.⁵¹ Though entirely possible, it is difficult to verify this claim in the absence of documentation and given the extent to which most of these groups claim to be *sui generis*.

An informant in Port-de-Paix who studied at a four-year pastor training college in Port-au-Prince claims to have learned in a church history course that the movement began as an indigenous offshoot from the *Armée du Salut* (The Salvation Army). After hours of searching through stacks of his old school notebooks, we were ultimately unable to verify his claims, and the condition of his “archive” gave me little hope that we ever would. Still, it is a compelling suggestion given the similarly militaristic structure of the movement and the fact that the Salvation Army had indeed transformed itself into a Holiness-Pentecostal church when it came to the United States from England. The

⁵¹Personal communication, June 14, 2016.

Salvation Army established its first official congregation in Port-au-Prince in 1950. Frederick Coutts recounts that “soon the doctrines and discipline were being studied in Haiti, and it was not long before Evangelist Guillaume wrote to say that his people ‘were united in accepting with joy the law’ followed by the Army.”⁵² In the new Salvation Army outpost, the “articles of war” were printed in French, the “Army flag” was raised, choruses were practiced in Kreyòl, and “Army badges and symbols” were given out.⁵³ Certainly, these are compelling affinities with the “heavenly armies” of contemporary Haiti.

The military ethos that animates communities of independent Pentecostals, however, can be seen within Haiti’s African-inspired religion long before the introduction of the Salvation Army. This is nowhere more explicit than in the Kongo-inspired *Petwo* style rituals of *Vodou* and in the musical tradition of *Rara*, the “yearly festival in Haiti that, even more than Carnival, belongs to the so-called peasant classes and the urban poor.”⁵⁴ *Rara*, McAlister writes, “is rooted in the Petwo-Kongo-Bizango rites, which are positioned in folk categories as the ‘military,’ ‘hot’ branch of the religious complex.”⁵⁵ The *Petwo* style, from which the *Rara* musical tradition derives, is militaristic in the sense that it is concerned with aggression or self-defense.⁵⁶ Therefore, the military ethos of independent Pentecostal “heavenly armies” has multiple cultural forebears.

⁵²Frederick Coutts, *The History of the Salvation Army: The Weapons of Goodwill, Vol. VII, 1946-1977* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986) 46.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara: Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 3.

⁵⁵McAlister, 88.

⁵⁶Ibid., 88.

There are, however, reasons to affirm a significant historical connection with the Oneness Pentecostal movement in the U.S., and even more so with the post-WWII “Latter Rain” Pentecostal movement. Like both of these movements, the independent Pentecostal communities in Port-de-Paix baptize in “Jesus’ name” only, and the most theologically articulate among them are openly non-Trinitarian. Meetings are centered on the practice of divine healing, independent Pentecostals of this type consider that the power of the Holy Spirit can be passed along from one person to the next through physical touch. Latter Rain Pentecostal revivalist William Branham also frequently employed military imagery and frequently referred to “warriors” and “overcomers” in his preaching.⁵⁷ In the later years of his ministry, Branham focused a great deal of his time and resources on missionary efforts around the world and had established a missionary presence in Haiti as early as 1950. Indeed, so-called “Branhamite” churches are well established in most cities in Haiti. However, these churches exhibit a formality both in terms of ritual practice and institutional hierarchy that independent Pentecostal communities openly reject. So, although traces of Oneness and Latter Rain Pentecostalism are easy to identify, these communities lack any formal relationship to the denominations that represent them within Haiti.

The tendency among the communities that I encountered in my research to identify themselves as “Church(es) of God” offers little help in terms of establishing a historical starting point in Haiti. The name *egliz de dye* (L’Eglise de Dieu), in Port-de-Paix at least, does not indicate any formal relationship to the U.S. denomination. Rather, it functions simply as a name for Pentecostal churches in general. For example, the first

⁵⁷Evidence of this language in his preaching comes from recordings and texts circulating in Haiti. See, for example, William Marion Branham, *Comment l’Ange est venu à moi* (Montreal: Voice of God Recordings, 2006).

Pentecostal church was founded in Port-de-Paix in 1976 in association with the United Pentecostal Church, an American denomination. The name of the church, however, is “Eglise de Dieu de Port-de-Paix.”

The official “Eglise de Dieu” in Port-de-Paix maintains educational standards for its pastors and preachers, participates in wider activities of the denomination in Haiti, and operates with official legal sanction from the *Ministere des Cultes*, which oversees all religious organizations and churches in Haiti. In contrast, the communities of independent Pentecostals have no formal affiliation, often lack governmental sanction, and have no educational standards for pastoral qualification. The prophetesses and prophets that lead these communities often *do* have some formal training in theology, but it is in no way required for leadership. Instead, independent Pentecostal communities form around individuals with significant socio-spiritual prestige, which is a currency that can only be built through the efficacious work of healing and prophecy. In this regard, these communities share much in common with the work of the *houngan* (*Vodou* healer-priest) and *mambo* (*Vodou* healer-priestess). The socio-spiritual prestige of independent Pentecostal prophets and prophetesses, like the *houngan* and *mambo*, is generated within a specific community and based on efficacy in the practice of socio-spiritual healing. This practice involves discernment of spiritual causes of affliction, but it ultimately requires *real* healing in some form, whether through the resolution of social strife, therapeutic remedies for the body, or relief from anxiety or depression through the support of the religious community.

In a 1976 dissertation on Haitian Pentecostalism, the first study in English of its kind, Frederick Conway described small local communities with practices that, based on

description, were nearly identical to those of the communities that I found in Port-de-Paix.⁵⁸ Therefore, one can assume with reasonable certainty that these communities of independent Pentecostals that others call *Lame Selès* were present and visible within Haitian communities by the mid-1970s. In light of the various possible and compelling streams of influence, from Oneness Pentecostalism and the Salvation Army to the socio-spiritual healing work of *oungan* and *mambo* and the militaristic rituals of *Petwo-Bizango*, it does not seem possible to confidently assert a clear historical origin. Instead, these communities should be understood to have developed in the mid-20th century, post-occupation context in which charismatic Christianities entered the Haitian cultural field and developed organically and in parallel with the official Pentecostal denominations.

Lame Selès and Spiritual Warfare

Whatever cultural streams contributed to the development of Haiti's independent Pentecostal communities originally, since the late 1970s these communities have found resources and allies within America's charismatic Christianities and the theological developments that they produced, which have been variously named "spiritual warfare," "strategic-level spiritual warfare," "apostolic renewal," and "third wave" evangelicalism. Sean McCloud has recently examined these "spiritual warfare" practices among American evangelicals, which involve driving out demons from people, territories, and objects, within the framework of late-capitalism. Groups engaged in this kind of spiritual work, he asserts, have gone largely understudied despite their pervasive presence in the U.S. in large part thanks to the loose-knit quality of the movement, being composed of

⁵⁸Frederick Conway, "Pentecostalism in the Context of Haitian Religion and Health Practice," Dissertation, American University, 1978.

certain evangelicals, Pentecostals, and neo-charismatics, but not all of any group.⁵⁹ These theologically diverse Protestants find themselves unofficially unified around the practice of spiritual warfare, shared notions about the territorial work of real demonic spirits in the world, and an apocalyptic and millennialist vision of the world and its imminent judgment. His primary claim is that, rather than representing a modern aberration or signaling an inverse evolutionary step in America's march toward secularism, such supernaturalism is perfectly in step with American Protestant history beginning as early as Puritan supernaturalism. McCloud argues that spiritual warfare practices articulate perennial themes in American religion, which he identifies as "the consumerist, the haunted, and the therapeutic."⁶⁰

In his examination of "spiritual warfare" practices in America, McCloud suggests that although third wave evangelicalism itself may have congealed in the United States, it was produced from resources that are far more geographically diverse. He asserts that the movement "is also deeply involved in and largely dependent upon mission fields outside the United States."⁶¹ It is no coincidence that leaders of the movement, like Fuller Theological Seminary theologian C. Peter Wagner, were also often missionaries with extensive intercultural experiences and a missionary agenda undergirding their theological models. The robustness of the spirit world, the entwinement of spirits and matter, and the ritual engagement with those forces are all very "at home" in many of the cultures of the most popular mission fields. McCloud clarifies that, "[t]he 'dependence'

⁵⁹Sean McCloud, *American Possessions: Fighting Demons in the Contemporary United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 3.

⁶⁰Ibid., 3.

⁶¹McCloud, 8.

suggested here lies in the importance of international missions for fantastical first-person supernatural tales and the development of third wave demonology.”⁶² That is, without the going out of charismatic missionaries into cultural spaces with more generally accepted, lively spirit words — places where spirits are already accepted as having real and potent existence in material and social human life — American charismatic Christians might have lacked the experiential and conceptual resources to develop spiritual warfare as a theology and a practice.

This missionary enterprise began most intensely among Pentecostals near the end of the U.S. occupation, and just like the returning marines and anthropologists of that era, the experiences of missionaries and the stories that they heard while “in the field” helped to fuel and build a renewed interest in exploring America’s lively spirit world. The theological model of spiritual warfare and demonology that crystallized in the writing of C. Peter Wagner and others in the last two decades of the 20th century should be seen as a co-construction of Euro-American charismatics and the majority world cultures that they sought to missionize. The transnational routes of exchange that connect these cultural worlds are never one way. These same routes that first brought the missionaries eventually carried stories back to American charismatic audiences, who then returned again and again as spiritual warrior-missionaries to the center of these cultural spaces. There is, therefore, nothing uniquely “American” about so-called “third wave” theology. Rather, it is a genuinely global religious movement built in the transnational spaces of dialogue and cultural exchange between missionaries, anthropologists, soldiers, and the inhabitants of the “fields” they visited.

⁶²McCloud, 8.

Spiritual Warfare and the Haitian Revolution: A Case Study

The evidence of these exchanges among Haiti's independent Pentecostal communities is quite explicit—from the use of “Jericho marches” to drive out spirits from particular places to the circulation of handbooks of “*Combat spirituel*.” The impact of this transnational exchange was perhaps never clearer than in the months following the earthquake in January 2010. I was living in Port-de-Paix at the time, celebrating my oldest son's first birthday, when the shaking began. While we were far enough from Port-au-Prince to have avoided any real danger, the island is small enough that the crisis quickly found its way north to our city. Within days, busloads of bloody and dusty people arrived. Those who had family in our city were welcomed with joy and relief, but many simply were left to wander the streets and look for support and a place to stay. In the weeks following the earthquake, we followed the American media's coverage and the production of what Erica Caple James has called a “politics of compassion.”⁶³ Images of death, destruction, and poverty motivated a brief surge in charitable giving to missions and NGOs in Haiti. Within that politics of compassion, however, I was startled to hear another narrative that came from the evangelical media personality Pat Robertson. Many were disturbed by the version of history that he recounted as he spoke to his weekday 700 Club audience of more than a million viewers. Though poor on the specifics of Haitian or French history, Robertson was recounting a very popular evangelical version of Haitian revolutionary history that had been under construction for decades by “third wave” charismatics like C. Peter Wagner. The “third wave” narrative of Haiti's 1791 revolution posed an alternative vision of the famous ceremony that occurred at Bwa Kayiman led by

⁶³Erica Caple James, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

a slave named Boukman. For two centuries, in Haiti, this ceremony has been understood to have partly initiated the revolution and also to have marked a clear beginning point for official Haitian *Vodou*, effectively joining Haiti's revolution with its religious practices.⁶⁴ Very little is known about the actual event, however, since sources are scarce and hardly unbiased. According to legend, slaves met one evening around a *mapou* tree in a place called Bwa Kayiman at a meeting organized and led by a male slave named Boukman and a female *mambo*. There, a black pig was sacrificed and a blood oath was sworn. The first uprisings in the long Haitian revolution (1791-1804) started soon after.

In "third wave" telling, however, this moment was the occasion of a literal spiritual contract between slave revolutionaries and Satan and his powers. Having formed a blood pact with Satan, the revolutionaries were given the capacity to overthrow the French. In the process, however, Haitians also handed over their land and their freedom to the powers of Satan. This curse endures, for evangelicals, and is continually renewed through the practice of *Vodou*. The continuing impact of this spiritual contract explains for Robertson and many evangelicals why Haiti continues to suffer. The earthquake, then, is interpreted as just another in a long series of judgments handed down from God upon a spiritually enslaved people.

While Haiti's African-inspired religious traditions have long been understood by Euro-Americans as improper, superstitious, or even as "sorcery," the notion of a literal and binding contract between a geopolitical entity and a spiritual force is historically relatively new. The transnationally constructed discourse of spiritual warfare and so-

⁶⁴Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990). Fick and others have disputed this, pointing to the existence of shared religious practices among slaves that predated the Revolution by several decades. However, the ceremony is still popularly held to mark the start of Haitian *Vodou*.

called “spiritual mapping” developed by Wagner, Caballeros, and others provided a theology for understanding, and theoretically for undoing, global inequities.⁶⁵ However, because it understands these inequities as produced by spiritual oppression, it has tended to ignore historical, social, and material causes. Nonetheless, the version of history that Pat Robertson cited on television almost certainly resonated with American evangelicals and evangelical missionaries all across Haiti and the U.S. What many non-evangelicals and scholars did not expect, however, was that many Haitians evangelicals would also agree with this version of the historical narrative. More than 80 years’ worth of popular and scholarly obsession with exotic visions of Haitian religion had masked the reality of Haiti’s growing Protestant population and its trend toward Pentecostal and charismatic varieties of Christianity. Furthermore, as I have suggested, Haitian charismatics and Pentecostals themselves had a significant hand in the creation of spiritual warfare discourse from the start.

What made the Haitian *konvèti* acceptance of this evangelical notion surprising to some was that it introduced a sense of shame and regret associated with the revolution, which seemed to stand in opposition to Haitian nationalism and the sense of pride that Haitians have worked to maintain across two centuries of history. It was, after all, the first independent black republic in the world, and it was also the only successful large-

⁶⁵Elizabeth McAlister, “From Slave Revolt to a Blood Pact with Satan: The Evangelical Rewriting of Haitian History,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 41(2): 187-215. For a robust description of the primary sources for “spiritual warfare” and “spiritual mapping” in the American context, see McCloud (2015). Specifically, McCloud explores texts including: Rebecca Greenwood, *Authority to Tread: An Intercessor’s Guide To Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Press, 2005), C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders* (Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1988), Ed Murphey, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare* (Nashville; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), and Harold Caballeros, *Victorious Warfare: Discovering Your Rightful Place in God’s Kingdom* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).

scale slave revolt in the history of the West. Haiti's revolution was and still is a potent symbol of protest against the systems and powers that seek to dominate and extract and exploit. But, for Haiti's communities of *konvèti*, it would seem that the revolution had become a stain, or, at least, as Bertin Louis has documented among many of his evangelical Haitian informants, Haiti is understood to have achieved its freedom in "the wrong way."⁶⁶

By relegating the ceremony of *Bwa Kayiman* to the category of "satanic blood pact," the evangelical narration of Haitian revolutionary history transforms the story of liberation into one of enslavement instead, though this time a spiritual enslavement. This has produced an image of Haiti's religious communities divided between the poles of evangelical anti-nationalism and pro-*Vodou* nationalism. In recent fieldwork with a large evangelical church in Port-au-Prince, Elizabeth McAlister has wrestled with this very question. She has described what she names "nationalism from below" at work among the evangelicals in her community.⁶⁷ She suggests that among the evangelical communities she studies, there is a re-narration of Haiti's revolutionary history being constructed in dialogue between Haitian and American evangelicals that recombines elements of each discourse to create a new story of liberation for Haiti. McAlister describes the convergence of five factors that served to concretize this evangelical counter-myth-making: First, there was the political context surrounding President Aristide's effort to enfranchise the majority and the elite's opposition resulting in a coup

⁶⁶Bertin M. Louis, Jr., 2010, "Haiti's pact with the devil? (Some Haitians believe this too)," *The Immanent Frame*. <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2010/02/18/haitis-pact-with-the-devil-some-haitians-believe-this-too/> (accessed May 9, 2017).

⁶⁷McAlister, 192.

d'état. Second, there came a reaction of Haitian and American evangelicals to Aristide's effort to normalize *Vodou* and institute it as Haiti's cultural-religious identity. Third, these events coincided with the bicentennial of the Haitian revolution in 1991 that served to highlight the mythic *Bwa Kayiman* ceremony. At the same time, this was a crucial moment in the emergence of "third-wave" spiritual mapping and spiritual warfare movements in the international context. Finally, all of this occurred during the rise of email communications that allowed evangelicals to circulate the emerging counter-myth.⁶⁸ The counter-myth then began to make some sense of Haitian history for those Haitians who had increasingly come to understand *Vodou* as an evil, oppressive tradition and as an obstacle to progress. McAlister urges us to recognize the anti-colonial and revolutionary impulse still present in this re-narration, though this time it is directed against the spiritual colonization of Haiti by Satan and his demons.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, to accept this counter-myth requires that evangelical Haitians understand their own revolution and liberation as "sin" and "enslavement." McAlister expresses this same tension when she writes, "Within the hemisphere, the movement may be neocolonialist, but within Haiti, it is a vision of nationalism from below."⁷⁰

The communities of independent Pentecostals in the Northwest, however, complicate this picture. The poles of evangelical anti-nationalism and pro-*Vodou* nationalism are but two extreme and often abstract ends of the very diverse and mixed responses that exist within Haiti's communities of independent *konvèti*. One of the very

⁶⁸McAlister, 199.

⁶⁹Ibid., 211.

⁷⁰Ibid.

few documents that circulate among these communities is a pamphlet called “*Combat Spirituel*” authored by a pastor who claims to have been a *bokò* (a sorcerer, or a *Vodou* specialist who works with “both hands,” i.e., for good or for ill in contrast to the benevolent *mambo* or *houngan*). It describes in detail how to correctly identify the afflicting spirit that may appear in a congregant, what times of year it is most likely to appear, and what physical and social symptoms might manifest. For example, eight different versions of the *lwa* *Erzuli* (“*Ezili*” in this text) are described. “*Ezili* *Freda* is a red woman with blue eyes,” the pamphlet states, “who walks with the demons *St. James Major* and *St. James Minor*. She causes women to lie with women and men to lie with men.”⁷¹ In another instance, the pamphlet describes *Ezili Danto* as one who “attacks you to make you love another person’s wife, makes you lie with many men, makes you jealous even if you have a wife.”⁷² In this way, the pamphlet interprets many common social realities of Haitian life as spiritual afflictions related to specific spirits of the *Vodou* pantheon.

At the end of the pamphlet, the author includes a brief “epilogue or conclusion” entitled: “Does the Blood of the Pig Give Liberty?” The text provides an explicit example of the unique intermediary position that these communities of independent Pentecostals are presently constructing, which finds them with feet in both the broader consensus of *konvèti* and also affirming a unique nationalist vision. In response to Pat Robertson’s more popular interpretation, the text suggests that the power of the Holy Spirit, a notion that is expressed in these communities with the word *fòs*, should be applied retroactively

⁷¹Translation is the author’s own.

⁷²Translation is the author’s own.

onto Haiti's historical narrative. The following selected lines reinterpret the revolutionary victory as necessarily the work of God:

The same God who was not able to see the people suffer in slavery in Egypt is the same God who was not able to see the people of Kiskeya or Saint-Domingue suffer in slavery under the white colonists. Many great intellectuals (religious, engineers, agronomists) make the Haitian people believe it is the blood of a pig that gives independence. Lies! Lies! Lies!

What made Boukman and Makandal not put confidence in the colonists who served God badly because they mistreated the people?

To whom did Boukman address the prayer when he said: 'God who made the sun, moon, the stars, etc.? Boukman did not call Lenglesou or Grand Batala or Agwe! No!

The Lwa and the Saints do not have the power to make the slaves find weapons to fight against Count LeClerc and Rochambeau, etc.

Vodou does not have the power to send yellow fever to put all the colonists in the hospital while all the [black] people were still standing.

The blood of a pig does not have power to make Capois LaMort resist Rochambeau's bullets.

The blood of a pig does not have power to make Rochambeau declare that France had lost the battle.

Let us give glory to God for this deliverance.

In contrast to Pat Robertson's narration of Haiti's revolutionary history, and in contrast even to the vision of "nationalism from below" described by McAlister, here the successes and the deliverance of the revolution remain intact. The revolution is not sinful and not a thing for which to repent. Instead, it is the success of the revolution itself that suggests to the author that it must have been accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In their present lives, independent Pentecostals have become convinced that the *fòs Sentespri* (the force/power of the Holy Spirit) is the most significant and efficacious force in the cosmos. Therefore, if such apparently miraculous things were accomplished, then it cannot have been through the power of *Vodou*, but rather through the power of God. The power of *Sentespri*, as evidenced in their social relations and healing

experiences in independent Pentecostal communities, is the most powerful force that exists, and spiritual warriors cast that perspective backwards on Haiti's revolutionary history to produce a vision of "nationalism from below" that claims the victories of the revolution rather than rejecting them as a sinful blood pact or as a cause for shame.

The complex history of religion in Haiti has culminated, for independent Pentecostals, in a new vision of sacred Haitian history. Rather than rooting that history in the power of the spirits of *Gine*, however, that history is necessarily rooted in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way, these independent Pentecostals position themselves precariously between the transnational discourse of American "third wave" evangelicalism and *Vodou* nationalism. Pentecostal spiritual warriors are marking out a territory of spiritual sovereignty and operating from within an intermediary position, what Hurbon calls Pentecostalism's "virtual world," in which they can encounter and draw resources from these transnational forces while confronting and challenging their more pernicious effects.⁷³

Prophetess, Healer, and Magician: Introducing the Field

The region of Haiti where my research has focused appears to be the least likely to experience the impact of global and transnational forces. The Northwest Department, for which Port-de-Paix serves as the seat of departmental governance, is one of the most geographically and culturally isolated sections of Haiti. Though it may no longer appear so, it was once a beautiful coastal city protected by mountains to its south and the island of La Tortue about 5 miles to its north. I have more than once been in Port-de-Paix in the midst of a passing hurricane, and though the meteorological radar may indicate a direct

⁷³Laënnec Hurbon, "Pentecostalism and Transnationalization in the Caribbean," in *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, eds. Andre Corten and Ruth Marshall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 134.

hit, the impact on Port-de-Paix is always relatively benign. Whales sometimes pass through between the city and La Tortue, and, with increasing frequency, so do Carnival Cruise liners. But the narrow passage is most often dotted with small craft sailboats and fishing boats. Repurposed water jugs and other plastic bottles are scattered on the surface of the water connected to fishing lines and lobster pots beneath.

One drawback to this geographical protection has been an accompanying social and cultural isolation from the more cosmopolitan centers of Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haitien. Today, one is likely to find a large number of Haitians from Port-de-Paix and its surrounding areas living in the U.S., since it has long served as a popular place from which to set sail under the cover of night to Miami, Nassau, or nearer desirable destinations. Still, Port-de-Paix has a reputation in Haiti for its filth, its poverty, and the backwardness of its people. Having first learned to speak *Kreyòl* in Port-de-Paix, I soon learned that few Haitians speak in quite the same way as Port-de-Paix folks. Rather than preferring liaisons like “*l’achte*” (a reduction from *li achte*, “he/she buys”), the people of Port-de-Paix are likely to prefer to keep vowels in place and abandon the consonants instead. For example, the normal *li vini* (“he/she comes”) in the dialect of Port-de-Paix is quite often simply *i vini*. It is a country dialect that I quite prefer.

Though the region has remained somewhat isolated from certain cultural trends in Haiti, its remoteness and poverty have also made it a prime site for missionary and NGO activity. There are countless Christian missions ranging from small feeding programs to large-scale private schools, a USAID headquarters, the departmental headquarters of MINUSTAH, Compassion International offices, CARE, UNICEF, and many more. In this way, Haiti’s Northwest has become more connected to American missionaries and

aid workers than to Haitians living 100 miles south in the capital of Port-au-Prince.

Physical and Cultural Geography

The city formally begins at its western edge with the *Trois Rivière*, a wide muddy river that empties itself into the Caribbean, driving away fish with its sediment, sewage, and soap residues gathered from deep in Haiti's central mountain villages. On its southern edge, Port-de-Paix gives way to spotty mountainside farms whose inhabitants port their goods from tiered mountain plots as far away as La Croix, Bassin-Bleu, and even Gros-Morne. Its eastern edge has experienced the most dramatic sprawl in past decades. What was once a swampy area and a frequent stopover for migrating flamingoes has turned into a maze of partially finished cinder-block homes. These neighborhoods have begun to span the gap that existed between Port-de-Paix and the smaller coastal town of La Pointe. The road from Port-de-Paix toward La Pointe, though pockmarked by rain and overly large trucks driving too fast and too often, remains a beautiful short drive because of the way that the road hugs the coastline. Especially if one makes the trip in the cooling evening on the back of a moped-taxi that can skillfully evade every dip and pothole, it is a magical ride. A couple of sunken ships abut the retaining wall that keeps the waves off of the road, and small traditional *lakou* (yards/courtyards) are lined with cacti fences protecting carefully swept earth and small concrete homes.

Since the earthquake in 2010, the population of Port-de-Paix has grown dramatically, though it does not compare to the spike in the weeks and months immediately following the quake. When I first moved to the city in 2004, it was said to have been home to about 90,000 or so (noting that population data is famously inaccurate in Haiti). With some certainty from firsthand experience, I can attest to an increase of at

least 20,000 to that number immediately following the earthquake as the homeless and afraid fled to family living “out in the country.” Some were simply going to any city that was far away from Port-au-Prince and found themselves in a chronically underemployed and already overpopulated city. The increase was visible. The streets were fuller. Rents went up in some places, but mostly, people were just more crowded and poorer. For a time, almost everyone had someone extra living with them — an extra mouth to feed, to be sure, but also an extra set of hands for the laundry and for carrying water.

Like Haiti more generally, Port-de-Paix has an incredibly wealthy minority. In the seven years that I lived there prior, I constantly heard about all the money that was hidden in Port-de-Paix. I suppose it does have some large houses here and there, but they were rarely finished and even more rarely occupied by anyone besides missionaries or MINUSTAH (the acronym for the UN stabilization force in Haiti). Most of the money in Port-de-Paix flows to people in other places — Port-au-Prince, Miami, New York, or even Montreal. If there is money in Port-de-Paix, it could be produced by the illegal trafficking of drugs or any manner of political corruption. La Tortue, and in some ways still is, a pirate island, and it is the ideal place for illicit things. Of course, I’ve never seen anything of the sort, but these are the things people *say*. The more likely and obvious way that Port-de-Paix hides its money is in its land. The poor majority in Port-de-Paix are either squatters or, more often, renters. Even those who own their homes usually rent the land that their home is built upon, and whoever owned all that flamingo covered swamp is presently a millionaire.

Most of Port-de-Paix’s regularly employed population is engaged in one of three possible careers: business, education, or church-work. There is a saying in Port-de-Paix

that there are only three ways to make money: “*lotto, lekol, avek legliz*” — the lotto, school, and church. But the true working class is still a relative minority. A large portion of Haiti’s young men are employed as *chauffeurs*, which is to say, moped-taxi drivers. Others may tell you that they are masons or wood workers, but that kind of work is occasional at best.

In a certain sense, women are the real working class in Port-de-Paix. In addition to the very time-consuming daily work of keeping a house, keeping children fed, and keeping clothes washed, most women also are the primary managers of their family’s money. Some work domestic jobs as maids or kitchen workers for missionaries or NGOs, but most all of them also sell at the market. Women sell clothes, shoes, bananas, mangoes, avocados, or keep a little table of sundry items on the street. This is the nature of daily economy for most in Port-de-Paix, and women are its primary participants.

Just as Port-de-Paix is said to hide some real wealth, I have also been told many times that the city and its surrounding communities are a *Vodou* hub and that one of the most powerful *bokò* in the country lives somewhere between Port-de-Paix and St. Louis du Nord, just past La Pointe. Yet the casual observer would really only note one particular set of rituals and traditions at work in Port-de-Paix — evangelical Christianity. However, “evangelical” only fits here if it can be expanded to include more than just what American historians would call “evangelicalism.” Port-de-Paix is more accurately the product of its French-Catholic past and the intense missionization of Haiti by countless varieties of Protestants over the past two-centuries. The most successful of those Protestant missions in Port-de-Paix have been the more evangelical and charismatic American denominations, without a doubt, but even more mainline Protestant

denominations manifest locally as very evangelical in character. Just as in most cities, Port-de-Paix has several Catholic communities, a nearby convent, Baptist churches, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, a handful of generically "Christian" Churches, and Methodist churches. Yet, the most numerous type of Christian community in Port-de-Paix has to be the Pentecostal variety, most often identified locally as *Egliz de Dieu*. In fact, almost all of the above varieties can be expected to look — at least some of the time — like Pentecostals. An easier and less technical way to describe the general religious character of Port-de-Paix would be simply to call it relentlessly *charismatic*. It is true that Haiti is far from a predominantly Protestant nation. However, the impact of Protestantism, even among those who do not formally identify as such, is often wildly underestimated. On most nights, the streets are not just filled with dominoes players and food vendors, but also sharply dressed women, children, teenagers, and the occasional man headed to a Bible study, a youth meeting, a prayer vigil, or choir practice. For many of my longtime friends in Port-de-Paix, their church is often a home away from home, and going to church is a near-daily ritual.

In contrast to the contentious relationships of some Protestant denominations in the U.S., Haitian Protestants are rarely exclusive. The interdenominational disputes that have at times sharply divided American Protestants are a trivial thing for most Haitians. Of course, doctrinal debates are by no means irrelevant or absent from Haitian Protestantism, but such debates are rarely a source of enduring exclusivism. The average church-goer might attend a Sunday morning service at a Baptist church, a youth meeting in mid-afternoon at a Church of God, and participate in a church choir practice at a "Christian Church" near their home. In part, this is almost certainly because the various

names of the churches do not reflect meaningful differences in practice or teaching in many cases. Haitian Protestant churches do not bear the same burden of American Protestant history that produced the denominations — they simply bear their names. But, this is also reflective of a certain relationship to ritual and spiritual power in Haiti. The recognized presence of spiritual power in one community or one set of rituals does not exclude the possibility of power in another assembly or another ritual. The multiple-nature of the *lwa* and the saints has long accustomed Haitians to the need to resist exclusivity. Spiritual power is considered by many to be the preeminent social resource, and it should be invoked and employed wherever it can be found. Indeed, in times of need, a Haitian Protestant will seek out the most powerful set of practices she can find, even if it means eschewing the pastor's warnings. This is crucial to understanding the work of the small, independent Pentecostal houses of healing known to others as *Lame Selès*. The first of these independent Pentecostal communities that I ever encountered in Haiti was a church community that called itself *La Famille Reconnaissance en Vers Jesus Christ* led by an aging prophetess named Claudette.

La Famille: A House in Decline

“*Bonjou, blan mwen!*” *Sè* Claudette finds it funny to call me “her white person.” She consistently greets me this way, and always with a startlingly loud laugh afterward. But, in fact, for several years at least, I was hers. The fact that I chose to begin my research with *Sè* Claudette was mostly chance, but she seemed to take it very personally and, in time, she became very possessive of my time and interest. To be fair, I did my best to make her feel special. When I first arrived, I told her that I had “heard about her power.” Of course, that was true, but I was as skeptical of her power as I would be of

Benny Hinn. Over time, there is no denying that I came to care deeply about her, and she also cares deeply about me. I am her “*blan*” after all. As far as her power is concerned, I am convinced that she has some, though what I mean by “power” has changed.

She was born in 1945 as Marie Precieuse Joseph — but not really. It seems that her sister was Marie Precieuse and died several years before she was born. Rather than go to the trouble and expense of acquiring new official documents for *Sè Claudette*, her parents simply used her sister's birth certificate for her. Thus, she has gone through her life, officially, as Marie Precieuse Joseph. But no one knows this name, and no one uses this name. She is Claudette. To her most intimate circle, she is simply *Sè Clau*.⁷⁴

Her sandals are too short for her swollen feet, and she shuffles with her heels dragging the ground. The lines on her face suggest that the tired expression she typically carries has been her facial configuration for a long time. There is a smile lurking in *Sè Clau*, but you have to work for it. If you can provoke it, you get the rare chance to glimpse the beauty that she definitely was 20 or 30 years ago, and her silver-capped teeth sparkle with mischief. She's admirably round these days, and she seems genuinely exhausted. Despite her fatigue, *Sè Clau* has no tolerance for laziness in prayer, singing, or dancing. She carries herself with the seriousness that she feels her role as prophetess requires — I have seen it in other prophetesses as well. If you are sleeping when you should be praying, she will strike you with a stick across the back. If you are sitting when you should be standing, she'll slap the back of your head. And, if you arrive later than you said you would, she will have you drop to your knees to ask for pardon (if you are her “*blan*” at least). She wears long skirts and plain white blouses as older Haitian

⁷⁴*Sè* (in French *sœur*), or “sister,” is used to refer to women in many *konvèti* communities, and *frè* to refer to men.

women often do. For services, she ties a blue or brown sash around a stark white dress and wears her headscarf. She has two wiry and curly hairs that protrude from her chin.

Sè Clau's community of divine healing meets in the small neighborhood of Ripidis. The neighborhood sits on the eastern side of a hill, just underneath the headquarters of MINUSTAH in the Northwest Department. In fact, I frequently had to convince my taxi drivers that I was not going to MINUSTAH, for they could imagine no other reason a “*blan*” would go to Ripidis. To arrive at Sè Clau's church, one must walk off of the main road and across about 500 yards of footpath. The footpath winds in and out of Rubix cube cinder block constructions, through a tunnel in the side of the hill, into and back out of someone's private yard, and then up broken concrete stairs that lead you right to her door. The erosion from the side of the hill is held in place by Sè Clau's church. When it rains, the roof of the building filters the largest pieces of trash out of the run-off, and years of this has made a veritable fortress of trash across the western edge of the roof. From the side windows and the back door, you can look out onto the valley below, which was once a swamp but is now a maze of unfinished cinderblock walls and half-poured foundations. Urban sprawl.

Hers is one of the oldest communities of *Lame Selès* in Port-de-Paix. She has a faithful group of women who assist her with the domestic tasks of the community — cooking, cleaning, and gathering water and supplies for the making of medicines. These women are known within *La Famille* as “*danm misyonè*” or “missionary ladies.” This is also true in other *Lame Selès* communities and even in other Protestant churches. These women are often but not always widows. Many of the married women are all but widows, being separated from husbands by an ocean or a long line of mistresses, and the church

community is an important and often primary occupation for them. Her community also has a pastor named Wisner. Up until just a few weeks before my arrival, Sè Clau's husband, Jean-Pierre, was officially the pastor, but his ill health had prevented him from doing much of the actual work of "pastor." Even before he died, Wisner had begun to take over the duties of pastor. Wisner's eight-year-old daughter, Naika, stayed much of the day with Sè Clau and was something of an errand girl. Wisner was also an important prophet-healer in the church. His transformation from pastor to prophet, though, was marked during the services only by his behavior and his wardrobe change. During "*jeune*," he often led dancing and, when the *fòs* of the Holy Spirit descended, he would take off his dress shirt, his socks, and his shoes, and he put on a brown robe and a rope belt, which was the typical clothing of the prophets in Sè Clau's community. In his robe, Wisner could speak in tongues and diagnose and heal afflictions in the congregation with a touch or a word.

There were also other, lesser prophets in Sè Clau's community. Jonley and Dorvil were both important leaders in the church, though they were quite differently talented. Dorvil is a master drummer, and he maintains the main rhythm during the drumming-singing-dancing portions of the service in a group of three to five other drummers. He does this by pounding two wooden sticks on the side of the "*manman*" drum during services. The result is an uncannily consistent *clackety-clackety-clack* upon which the other drummers build elaborate polyrhythms. Importantly, Dorvil controls the tempo and "heat" (or intensity) of the music. He is, therefore, necessarily also a spiritual authority in the church, for the presence of the Spirit hinges on music in these communities.

Jonley is a handsome younger man and an incredible dancer. He frequently leads

the community into the most intense periods of the service by directing the singing through call and response and leading the dancers around the inside of the encircled congregation. Just as the gathered worshipers echo in response to his strained baritone voice, the other dancers follow him with their eyes and try to mirror his movements. Like many young prophets, though, Jonley has a reputation for being flirtatious with young women who come to the services for healing or advice. He has a very young wife and recently welcomed his first child, a little girl. But, more than once, jealous lovers and their angry boyfriends have arrived during the service to confront Jonley with accusations. *Sè Clau* is tired of defending him.

On most days, though, *Sè Clau*'s house of healing is a social hub. People come and go, borrowing money or food, offering to wash or iron clothes, or just coming by to chat. Sitting with *Sè Claudette* each afternoon was, for me, an education in the social life of Haiti's poor majority. *Sè Clau* knows everyone, and everyone knows her, though not everyone is a client. In fact, the people who know her most intimately often skipped out on weekly services (Tuesday and Thursday) and preferred to visit on the in-between days. I was never quite sure why this was true except that familiarity inevitably destroyed some of the magic and mystique of the prophetess for these people. There was also a group of perennially afflicted clients in need of healing who seemed to appear for every service. These were not, however, *Sè Claudette*'s closest friends, and they maintained a more formal relationship with her.

Piscine de la Délivrance: A House on the Rise

The community of *La Famille* and *Sè Claudette* are central to my understanding of these communities, and my experiences with that community remain the primary focus

throughout the remaining chapters. However, *La Famille* is just one of several dozen similar communities in and around Port-de-Paix. About halfway through my research, I became acquainted with another community of divine healing whose leader was known to all as Sè Henri.⁷⁵ Her community began in a downtown neighborhood called La Coupe, but had recently moved up to the top of the mountain that sits above the city's only hospital. This mountain is appropriately known as "Mount Hospital." A century-old road of cobblestone leads up from the hospital at such a steep grade that only the newest taxis would make the attempt. More often than I wished, I had to walk it with all the school children that made the daily trek. It was only a twenty-minute walk, but there was no retreat from the sun and the hot, dusty winds only increased with elevation. At the top of the hill, I could look down upon the entire city. To the far west limit of the city, I could see tiny figures crouched along the water doing laundry or washing mopeds in the brown waters of Trois Rivières. I could also see as far to the east as the neighborhood of Chalet, where I was staying during my time in Haiti. The eastern limit of the city was blocked from view by a series of hills that rose up, each with a name. The first and largest was Morne Au Pere. On the backside of that rise was Sè Clau's place in Ripidis, which gave way to a steep valley. On the far side of that valley was Myriam, and then the road led out of the city. Looking to the north, I could almost make out both ends of the long island of La Tortue. The westernmost end of the island, which is a paradise of white sand and crystal water called La Point Ouest, is nearest to Port-de-Paix, and it is relatively easy to see. But, the eastern point is nearly 15 miles away and very difficult to make out with any clarity.

⁷⁵Sè Henri followed the more conventional formulation of having her husband's first name become her public identity (just as in, Madame Henri, or "Henri's Wife").

Sè Henri's community is in the process of building a concrete meeting hall. Their current, but very large, tin shelter sits inside the foundation and partially finished walls of the new building. The shelter is about 20 feet away from a nice, two-story home where *Sè Henri* lives with several children for whom she has taken responsibility. Her own biological children are in the Dominican Republic, one daughter studying nursing and the other law. But, each day, *Sè Henri* sends about 4 school-age children off to school, cares for a group of mentally ill adults who work primarily as domestic labor during the week, and conducts healing services each week for hundreds of clients. *Sè Henri* preaches most Sundays and, in stark contrast to *Sè Clau*, she takes credit for everything that I see on her property. "All of this," she told me when we met as she waved her hand around her in a dramatic 360-degree turn, "I did all of this." I tried the same flattery that had worked so well with *Sè Clau*, and I told her that I had heard about her power and wanted to see it for myself. "I am very powerful," she said. "God loves me a lot because I do good things for people."

Like *Sè Clau* when I met her, *Sè Henri's* husband, Henri, is ill. According to her, he suffered a heart attack and has never quite recovered. So when she made the move to the top of the mountain, he did not follow her. Instead, he chose to maintain their house at the bottom of the mountain, where several of her other relatives also live. She reminds me, though, that it is she who cares for them all. Several times, I met Henri when he was strong enough to ride a taxi up the hill for a Sunday service. Like *Sè Clau's* late husband Jean-Pierre, Henri is a very gentle, humble, and warm man. He had very little to say about his wife or her work. He is proud of her — that much is clear. He also seems very happy that she's been able to support him for so long with her work.

These two independent Pentecostal communities and the remarkable women that lead them offer opposing images of the possibilities and organization of independent Pentecostal communities. According to many inside and outside the church, *Sè Clau's La Famille* church is “*gate*” (“rotting/decomposing”). *Sè Henri's*, by contrast, is exploding with new resources evidenced by the construction of a new meeting space and the expansion of existing services to the community. It is not entirely clear what accounts for the differences between these two independent Pentecostal communities, which share so much in common and are separated by mere miles. These prophetesses and their respective communities stand at two ends of a spectrum of independent Pentecostal organization. Or, perhaps, they mark two different stages in the life cycle of these communities. Whatever these differences indicate, these two communities provide a broad view of the social and economic capacities of such communities.

These two communities were brought together in my research by a third character — Horace, “the snake,” as *Sè Claudette* often called him. He was a former prophet-deacon at *La Famille* whom I had met years prior. He had recently become not just a defector but also a vocal detractor of *Sè Claudette's* community. His lack of loyalty to her community meant that he had become connected to many other similar communities in the area, and he became my guide into the surprisingly vast network of independent Pentecostal communities. Everywhere that we went, he imagined himself as an esteemed guest. He seemed to know everyone, and it seem that everyone knew his name. In each case, however, I discovered that his reputation as a snake was not limited to *Sè Claudette's* opinion. Horace had few friends.

Economy in Independent Pentecostal Communities

It is not entirely clear how either *Sè Claudette* or *Sè Henri* generate income. Certainly, *Sè Henri*'s community is much larger than *Sè Claudette*'s, and it follows that she likely receives far more in gifts and donations from her clients. Also, *Sè Claudette*'s community, which is often as large as 70 people, rarely gives more than 50 or 100 *gourdes*. That is about 1 or 2 U.S. dollars per service. *Sè Henri* has a much more savvy and overt approach to generating income, and it is one that would be at home within the American tradition of "prosperity" preaching, or as it is sometimes called, the "Health and Wealth" gospel.⁷⁶ At each formal service, *Sè Henri*'s young male prophets and *danm misyonè* pass out "faith envelopes" to every person in the crowd, which often exceeds 200 people. Handwritten on each envelope is a message: "Give what you have to give, and wait for God!" Each week, several individuals stand to recount the ways that "*gras Bondye*," or "the grace of God," came into their lives because they put money in the envelope. Sometimes, the "*gras Bondye*" appears as money (frequently remittances from family in Miami), or in the form of healing from disease (the diseases are often non-specific and subtle like a "constant headache" or "feeling heavy"), or even in the form of a vision or a dream. But, in this way, *Sè Henri* ensures support for her expansive ministry. The constant sharing of stories about "*gras Bondye*" helps to cultivate a culture of "faithful waiting" and attentiveness to any positive experiences that might count as a response from God.

In contrast, *Sè Claudette* prides herself on the fact that her services are free and that she never asks for money. "If the people give, it's only because they want to give,"

⁷⁶See Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) for a recent historical analysis of the various cultural streams that have constructed the contemporary "Prosperity Gospel" movement.

she often said. There are exceptions to that principle, however. More than once, on the days that *Sè Clau* had no service, people whom I had seen at the service the previous days would show up with money that was “owed” to her. She would explain that they owed her for some other thing, a personal favor or borrowed money. But, more than once, the client would tell me in private that she was paying for the special “medicines” that *Sè Claudette* prepared and administered during the service.

Socially speaking, *Sè Claudette* is exceedingly rich; she has forged deep connections and trusting relationships with so many people in the community that she rarely wants for much of anything in her day-to-day life. Still, *Sè Claudette*’s material poverty is not in question. Like most women, she is engaged in small commerce every spare moment: preparing and selling food, dividing bulk quantities into small quantities for individual sale, making one or two *gourdes* (two to four cents U.S.) per sack of corn meal or laundry soap. More significantly, the recent death of her husband, Pastor Jean-Pierre, has left her with outstanding debts in the thousands of U.S. dollars, and no amount of small commerce will make up that difference.

Propriety, Musical Virtuosity, and Socio-Spiritual Prestige

Although *Sé Clau*’s and *Sè Henri*’s strategies for generating income through their respective prophetic ministries stand in obvious contrast, it is not the most crucial element in the success or failure of their communities. Within the various communities of independent Pentecostals, the virtuosity of their drummers and dancers, the “hotness” and intensity of their music, and the respectability of the male prophets are the most central qualities for the evaluation of a successful and prestigious spiritual “army.”

Sè Claudette is said to have once been among the most powerful healers in the

Port-de-Paix area — a claim that most now reserve for *Sè Henri*. *Sè Claudette*'s socio-spiritual prestige is waning, and there are many factors in its decline. Jean-Pierre's multi-year illness surely did not help to bolster the confidence of her community, but the community has suffered more greatly from dissension within *Sè Claudette*'s team of dancer-prophets and drummers. *Sè Claudette* paired herself with a series of questionable characters. For five years, she had organized her healing services around a virtuosic dancer-prophet named Sonny. I met Sonny on my very first visit to *Sè Claudette*'s place in 2013. He came over to me, prayed for me, and claimed to have healed a pain in my legs — a pain that I was unaware I had. With *Sè Claudette* standing only feet away from us, he leaned in and told me in a whisper, "Now, you give me something for this blessing." I knew that *Sè Claudette* would not like that, given her insistence on offering free services, but I did not tell her until two years later. It was then that I learned that Sonny had caused far bigger problems in the community than charging for his services. He had fathered four children with three women whom he had healed during services. His promiscuity led to fights among the women, but more importantly, as word spread it resulted in a significant loss of rapport in the wider community. She sent him away and replaced him with none other than Horace, "the snake," whose disloyalty and propensity for slander only further injured *Sè Claudette*'s reputation as a spiritual authority. Most recently, Jonley and Pastor Wisner had taken over this position, but Jonley too was accruing plenty of allegations of impropriety even during my fieldwork, and Wisner left his wife for another woman just before coming to *La Famille*.

Dorvil, the drummer whom everyone called "*Blan*" because of his light complexion, had a longstanding relationship with *Sè Claudette*. With Jonley, however,

Dorvil had an equally longstanding and very public rivalry. The frequently tried to wrest control of the *jeune* from one another. Dorvil would refuse to play along with Jonley's singing, which Dorvil claimed sounded like a cat. Jonley would walk out of the *jeune* because Dorvil's rhythms were inconsistent. Back and forth they would go, and the impact on Claudette's community was apparent. During the last three months of my fieldwork alone, *La Famille* had decreased in size by more than 20% on average, and more than three times services were canceled or cut short for lack of attendance.

Sè Claudette's drummers, even sometimes including Dorvil, had begun to work primarily at other communities, like the small but thriving community under the direction of Pastor Modeste just down the hill from *La Famille*. I had even seen a few of them drumming at *Sè* Henri's from time to time. With the exodus of her most talented drummers, the music at *La Famille* became disorganized and decreasingly *cho* ("hot"). Without "hot" music at the services, fewer people attended, and among those who did attend, fewer people experienced the *fòs Sentespri* (the power of the Holy Spirit).

By comparison, *Sè* Henri's community was like a professional musical production. The dancers and drummers operated with what seemed like a single mind. If the prophetess wanted to speak during the music, the drums would screech to a halt. Jacki, one of *Sè* Henri's lead dancer-prophets, told me that at *La Piscine* the prophets make sure never to dance with young women and always watch for impropriety even in the crowd of visitors. If this was indeed a mandate, it was consistently violated at the services I attended. Still, there was self-consciousness among the dancer-prophets at *La Piscine* regarding public perception and reputation. *Sè* Henri, herself, told me that she despised young dancer-prophets who were too "*chanèl'*" ("flirtatious").

The dancers and drummers at *La Piscine* were not just well synchronized but were also among the most skilled that I saw at any community. The virtuosity and discipline of these dancers and drummers produced four-hour musical sets of near perfection. Crowds came from within Port-de-Paix to hear them, but people also came from as far out as Gros Morne, at least a two hour journey. The intensity of the music waxed and waned with the coming and going of the *fòs Sentespri*, and people were overcome by shaking, crying, and tongues-speaking ten and twenty at a time. Maintaining propriety among her prophets and cultivating musical virtuosity in her community, *Sè Henri* ensured that her socio-spiritual prestige increased just like her income.

The centrality of music in these communities, however, is not limited to the pragmatic purposes of drawing and keeping a crowd. The following chapter explores the way that music figures centrally in the cosmic reconfigurations of independent Pentecostals as they construct a sovereign spiritual domain and seek to respond to the pressures and impacts of an increasingly transnational social, political, and economic environment.

CHAPTER 2: MUSIC AND FÒS IN INDEPENDENT PENTECOSTAL COMMUNITIES

Music in the Black Atlantic

Music and dance are the most central ritual practice of Haiti's independent Pentecostal communities, just as they have been central to African ritual practice and African-inspired religious traditions in the Atlantic world for centuries. In his seminal treatment of slave religion, Albert Raboteau suggested that "[s]o essential are music and dance to West African religious expression that it is no exaggeration to call them 'danced religions.'"⁷⁷ An examination of black Atlantic religious history might lead one to add to this that these are "sung religions" and "drummed religions" as well. In an analysis of three ritual traditions in the black Atlantic, Yvonne Daniel assigns to music and dance the task of "fastening of the human world to a spiritual world."⁷⁸ She describes music and dance as a form of embodied knowledge, or "dancing wisdom," which serves to "embody memory and perseverance and, in the end, inspire and support survival."⁷⁹

The history of Haiti and other cultures of the Black Atlantic world suggest other important reasons that music has remained central within these cultures. For example, music has often been the only voice of the otherwise silenced slave, and it is a form of

⁷⁷Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 15.

⁷⁸Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005) 2.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 5.

social energy that Peter Bailey claims has the power to “appropriate, reconfigure, or transgress boundaries.”⁸⁰ Indeed, through processes of appropriation, reconfiguration, and transgression, the music of the Black Atlantic world has from the start distinguished itself from European music. It eschews melody and compositional *telos* in favor of cyclical structures and polyrhythms.⁸¹ Rhythm and the perceived “natural capacity” for rhythm among black Atlantic communities have then emerged from the colonial history of the circum-Caribbean as markers of blackness and, almost as often, have been adopted as symbols of black cultural identity in contrast to European whiteness. Benitez-Rojo reminds us that the repetition of these rhythms and the cyclical variations on a theme that they explore are more than just stylistic preference; these rhythms also give expression to the inherent repetition of the pre-industrial, machine-like system of the Caribbean that he simply names “The Plantation.”⁸²

The music of the black Atlantic also demands attention to its most concrete level, wherein bodies are made to collide not just with other bodies, but also with spirits and ancestors. Maya Deren, for example, made much of the power of the drum to mediate possession by the *lwa* (spirits) in her study of Haitian Vodou. In her telling, it is the drum, or more precisely, the reverberation of the pounding bass drum called “*manman*” (mama) that passes through the swept-dirt floor, grabs ahold of her left foot, and sends her into a

⁸⁰ Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 34.

⁸¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 72 -75.

⁸² Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island : The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 33-72.

state that she describes as a “white darkness.”⁸³

To explore the music of the black Atlantic is, then, to find an entry into dance, possession, healing, and therefore also *the spirits* and *the Spirit*. In the case of Haitian *Vodou*, as Deren’s account confirms, music has most often been understood as a medium for the *lwa* whereby the music encourages certain bodily movements and states of mind that lend themselves to the surrender of subjectivity or to the performance of a particular spirit personality. In the study of mainstream Protestant Christianity, however, ritual musical practice has been assigned to the periphery in favor of questions concerning interiority, framed around the primacy of belief and intention. With the continued growth of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianities across the globe, contexts like those of Haiti and the black Atlantic more generally demand attention to a long-ignored set of embodied practices and material objects that animate these Christian traditions. Communities of independent Pentecostals like *La Famille* and *La Piscine* in Port-de-Paix confirm this necessary reprioritization of scholarly attention.

Music is not only central to the ritual practice of these communities, though. Their music is also one of the most conspicuous facets of their religious identity, and it is largely responsible for their denigration by other Haitian Protestants, even those who are *konvèti*. Haitians and foreign visitors alike frequently misidentify the music that pours out of their assemblies during *jeune* rituals as being “*Vodou*” music, and it has partly led to the characterization of these independent Pentecostal communities as being crypto-*Vodouizan*.

The fact that independent Pentecostals are accused of being secret *Vodouizan* is

⁸³Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New Paltz, NY: McPherson, 1983) 247-262.

ironic given the way these communities explicitly position themselves against *Katolik* (Catholic) Christians in Haiti, whom they and other Haitian Protestants consider to be, in fact, secret *Vodouizan*. The reasons for this charge against Haitian Catholicism, of course, are rooted in the ways that Haitian Catholicism and Haitian Vodou have never been exclusive, even if distinct.⁸⁴ For Haiti's "heavenly armies," however, the accusation of crypto-*Vodou* primarily concerns their style of music and dance, as well as their healing methods. A local pastor at a mainstream Baptist church in Port-de-Paix expressed his concerns to me regarding their use of material objects and the way their dancing and healing practices encourage bodily contact between church members:

We have services sometimes that are "hot" like this. But, when we dance, we dance in place, in front of our seats. And, sometimes people are healed, but never by using leaves or by touching. If the Holy Spirit is healing someone, then why do they need to be touched?

For this pastor, the bodily contact and use of objects are not just a problem of disorder; rather, these practices are linked to a fundamentally wrong perception of how the Holy Spirit engages with the world. Despite his disapproval from his current position as pastor, he could not deny the appeal of these communities. He concluded:

When Haitians hear the drums, they feel at ease; they find themselves in this. They feel comfortable. When they go to a service at other churches, they have a tendency to sleep. They don't feel part of what's going on.

His expression of ambivalence toward the practices of these communities, especially their music, and his simultaneous concern over a proper understanding of the Holy Spirit suggest a unique relationship between music and spirit among these communities that places them precariously in between several cultural worlds at once.

⁸⁴Leslie Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods : Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

Pastor Jean-Pierre and *Les Après Dieu*

I first learned about the place of music in the cosmological hierarchy from one of the least musically talented of all my informants — Pastor Jean-Pierre. I met Jean-Pierre, Sè Claudette's late husband and pastor of *La Famille* church, in the summer of 2013. He was already quite ill at the time. He sat most of the time on a plastic lawn chair at the front of the church. His living space was, technically, the stage area of the small church. It was elevated and surrounded by concrete pillars that made a kind of barrier between it and the rest of the church. To get onto the stage, one had to climb the two concrete steps on the side by the back door that looked out onto the southern mountains. Jean-Pierre's plastic chair was right beside the stairs, making it impossible to join him there without an awkward climb over his legs. Nonetheless, he invited me to sit with him every time I visited that summer, and, every time, I climbed over his swollen ankles to sit with him. We sat there underneath a hanging banner that read "*Bannière Guérison Divine*" (Banner of Divine Healing), one crippled and one skeptical.

I did not know at the time what was making Jean-Pierre so sick. He was mostly immobile, but not paralyzed. He could stand up and take a few steps. From time to time, he would even walk down off the stage and do what he called his "*sport*," which looked like his own version of Tai-Chi or yoga. He could also get up and down from the mattress that he and Sè Claudette slept on in the church. A few years ago, Jean-Pierre and Sé Claudette took almost all the items from their house, which was about 100 yards down the hill, and turned the stage of the church into their bedroom. Piles of clothes were scattered across the back of the stage, and Sè Claudette was constantly trying to remember which piles were clean and which needed washing. What had been a table for

Sunday communion became *Sè Claudette*'s vanity. A broken piece of a large mirror was propped up against the wall, and toiletries, plastic cups, tooth brushes, and hair products covered its surface. The large mattress itself was covered by two mosquito nets suspended from nails in the ceiling. I often put my chair in the only empty space I could find, directly in front of Jean-Pierre. He kept a plastic bottle on the concrete floor beside his chair in which to urinate. *Sè Claudette* berated him about that bottle and even more bitterly each time she had to mop up a spill. It smelled like a hospital — and, in more ways than one, it was.

Jean-Pierre died just a few weeks before I arrived for my longest period of research in the fall of 2015. I suspect that he died of stroke, given *Sè Claudette*'s description of his final week in the hospital. But she is convinced that he died from a malevolent spiritual attack. It was quite a blow for a community of divine healing to see their pastor immobilized for years and never healed. Was it his lack of faith? Or did *Sè Claudette* lack the healing power that so many others claimed she had? *Sè Claudette* never wanted to talk about it, and it was hard for me to ask her such sensitive questions. Members of the community had opinions, though. Horace, a former prophet at *La Famille* church whom *Sè Claudette* called *Sèpan* (“serpent”), told me, “The pastor died because he was fat and he ate too much!” He laughed as he told me. I suggested to him that perhaps it was some afflicting spirit, as *Sè Claudette* believed. “Yes,” he answered, “two of them — bread and pork!” His biting words are one reason why *Sè Claudette* calls him the snake.

A few people believed, as *Sè Claudette* did, that there was ill will afoot in the community, but no one would say more. Back in 2013, *Sè Claudette* had suggested that it

was Jean-Pierre's family causing his sickness — an act of jealousy. Now that he had passed away, however, *Sè Claudette's* view had changed. She several times intimated that there were “men” in the assembly that wanted to take the church from her and Jean-Pierre. She would not identify them by name, and she rarely said more than that. I once asked her if she was afraid that these men would come after her next. “I'm not afraid of anything,” she answered. “Only the dead frighten me.”

“The dead?” I asked.

“Yes. Since Jean-Pierre died, the dead have been trying to scare me. They are out there, on the path to the front door of the church. That's why I only come in through the back,” she said.

In fact, she never even walked near the front of the church these days. She kept the front door closed and locked even during the day, and all the windows were covered with sheets and boards. The heat was stifling some days, but she said it was necessary because spirits can enter from any direction.

The last conversation that I had with Jean-Pierre has stayed with me, and not just because he is now among the dead himself. Rather, it was this final conversation that offered me insight into a complex cosmological hierarchy that joined God, the Holy Spirit, and music in ways that I could not otherwise have perceived. It was a hot afternoon, but that summer the windows and doors were all still opened, and the ocean breeze made it pleasant. Jean-Pierre sat listening to a sermon on a battery-operated radio. The radio pastor spent most of his time describing the problems that “worldly wives” create for their “godly husbands.” Jean-Pierre was amused, laughing and offering up an “amen!” at every chance. Then the signal faded and went to static. *Sè Claudette* was gone

to the market, and it was the first time in many days that I had been alone with the pastor. At the time, I was in the process of applying for research funding, so I told him that I was “trying to convince some important people” to give me more money to come back and do more research with his community. I wanted to know, from his perspective, the most important thing that I should tell them about his community. I sensed that it was a bad question as soon as it left my lips. But, he came back with an answer almost immediately, and I had no time for revision. He answered, “A sound system; a Fender sound system with big speakers.”

Obviously, my poorly articulated question was understood to be an invitation to ask for a gift. It was the sort of thing that a missionary probably would ask and probably had asked. But, that was not *my* question. Still, the answer was so unexpected that I had to pursue it.

“Of all the things you think you need, why would you want a sound system? You don’t have electricity here,” I said. “And, you already make really loud music. Everyone in Ripidis can hear it.” The neighborhood of Ripidis was positioned on the side of a steep hill. The sound rolled down easily from the church, and I was not exaggerating when I said that everyone could hear it.

“Sometimes we do have electricity,” he answered. He was staring out the back door and smiling, though I could see nothing out there. “And, we need more people to hear the music. If more people hear the music, then more people will have contact with God.”

I asked, “What does the music have to do with God, Pastor?”

“After God *is* music,” he said.

I was struck by the unusual semantics. In fact, I wondered if I had heard him correctly. I thought immediately of Christian theology, which speaks of the Spirit as proceeding *from* the Father, and I wondered if this was some trinity in which music was identical to the Spirit. I also remembered that one of the old names for the *lwa* in Haitian *Vodou* was *Les Après Dieu* or “those who come after God.” Was he drawing on the specificities of orthodox Christian theology, or was this a *Vodou*-inspired idiom?

Jean-Pierre continued after a brief pause: “Music heats up the assembly, and it draws people into contact with God in the Spirit. When everyone hears, they will dance and the Spirit will descend in their midst. And, when they dance, they feel that they are alive, and then...they shine. If they all can hear the music, they all can shine.”

It was a beautiful statement, but I did not really understand what he meant. Like so many aspects of the community, I sensed a vibrant cosmological awareness that pointed me as easily to *Vodou* as to Christian theology. Of course, Christian symbolism is a constituent part of Haitian *Vodou*, and this kind of polyvalence is the genius of *Vodou* that puzzles scholars far more than anyone in Haiti. Still, I wanted to know what he meant. Given the central place of music in the ritual practice of this community, I suspected that music itself would be assigned an important spiritual and cosmological dimension. Was the power assigned to music located in the material of the drums, in the rhythms that rippled out in percussive waves from them, or in the more abstract concept of “music” itself? For Jean-Pierre, there was no point to my further questions. He only responded to my request for clarification with a restatement of what was to him a fact: “*Aprè dye se mizik.*” After God is music.

When *Sè Claudette* returned, I tried to ask her for clarification, but she was

unwilling to talk with me about anything that Jean-Pierre might have said. “He’s crazy,” she said. “If you want to understand something, talk to me.” That, of course, was exactly what I was trying to do, but it wasn’t until two years later, in the fall of 2015, that I was able to get any insight on this peculiar phrase. *Sè* Claudette and I sat reminiscing about Jean-Pierre, his silver capped teeth and his unflagging joy. I said to her: “I remember that he once told me, ‘After God is music.’ What do you think that means?”

“Right,” she responded as if I were now the crazy one. “In this world there are many things that come after God — music, the police, doctors, and judges.”

This was much more than a trinity. *Sè* Claudette continued:

“God is the only one with power in this life. But, there must be order in our world, so God gives power to things that come after him. The things that are *après dye* are the things that carry the power of God in this world. We don’t have doctors or police or judges here in our church. We have music.”

Music Among *Les Après Dieu*

Music is highly valued in *Sè* Claudette’s community because of its relationship to the authority and power of God. But music shares these traits with a set of distinctly global forces. The legacy of plantation slavery in colonial St. Domingue and Haiti’s tumultuous two hundred year history of struggle against authorities both foreign and domestic have resulted in a general distrust of authority. Furthermore, because of their entanglements with foreign power, the police, judges, and medical doctors are all forms of power in Haiti that come under constant scrutiny and are largely viewed with suspicion by Haiti’s poor majority.

Despite their vast knowledge and training, medical doctors often fail to discern

the subtleties of “affliction” in Haiti, and doctors often try to treat with pills things that some feel can only be treated with wisdom and tradition. In Port-de-Paix, for example, the majority of practicing physicians at the local hospital are from Cuba and, because they rarely stay more than a couple of years, doctors often do not speak the language of their patients. Likewise, from the perspective of Haiti’s poor, municipal judges regularly make judgments in favor of the wealthy and the powerful, and seem only to capitulate to existing power. For these communities, judges are the custodians of the status quo. Finally, there is the police force, which many Haitians in Port-de-Paix consider little more than a subdivision of the UN taskforce in Haiti. Indeed, MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) has assumed control over and the authority to train Haiti’s police force for more than a decade now. Furthermore, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot once pointed out, the Haitian army has “never fought anyone except Haitians themselves.”⁸⁵ None of these powers that are *aprè dye* are anything like unambiguous forces of good for members of *Sè Claudette*’s community.

Music, however, stands among these more ambiguous forces as the unique possession of the people. Music is intimate. It is one of the *aprè dye* that will not betray them and that cannot be appropriated by international interests, greed, or temporal authority. Of all the *aprè dye* — the bearers of the power and authority of God — *Sè Claudette*’s community organizes itself around music and music’s ability to respond with *fòs* (force/power) to the injustices, the dangers, and the afflictions of the people, especially in the moments and social spaces where judges, police, and doctors have failed. Songs and dances of justice are there when judges are unjust. Combative music is

⁸⁵Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990) 160.

there when the police do nothing. Healing choruses are there when the doctors fail to heal. Regardless of the intent or interest of the individuals involved in these domains, all of these forces exist within the field of power that Michel Foucault called “government,” or the calculated attempt to shape human conduct.⁸⁶ As such, these forces are experienced as claims to sovereignty in conditions of profound material and social inequality.

Communities of independent Pentecostals, though, are engaged through combative music and spiritual warfare in a parallel process of government, making counter-claims of sovereignty in all of these domains.

These independent Pentecostal communities, therefore, share more than a superficial or stylistic affinity with *Vodou*. Such communities also occupy a cultural and political role similar to that of historical *Vodou*. As previously noted, “*danses de vodou*” were suppressed by Haitian authorities as early as Christophe’s 1805 rule in the Northwest. Historically, the threat of *Vodou* was specifically a threat to state sovereignty, and the State has therefore always attempted, as Hurbon notes, “to deliver the country from uncontrollable parallel powers.”⁸⁷ By all accounts, the state’s concern was not necessarily unfounded. The *sosyete sekrè* (secret societies) of *Vodou* have long established their own laws and sought their own forms of justice. In instances of foreign or state intervention into the lives of the common people, *Vodou* has been a source of protest, insisting upon a different set of values and laws. In the context of growing charismatic Protestant culture in Haiti, communities of independent Pentecostals are a similar “parallel power” and a shadow government. Through their combative musical

⁸⁶Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁸⁷Laënnec Hurbon, *Le barbare imaginaire* (Port-au-Prince: Éditions Henri Deschamps, 1987) 92.

practices, communities respond to foreign and state interventionism. Independent Pentecostals in Haiti insist upon a different set of values, a different form of justice and order and healing, and they construct it from resources new and old, local and global.

The Ritual Center: *Jeune*

The combative musical ritual of these communities is nowhere more explicit than in the ritual center of the community's life — the *jeune*. The *jeune* is a weekly or semi-weekly event, its astounding consistency of structure and practice making these otherwise fiercely independent communities legible as a movement. The word *jeune* itself literally refers to “a fast,” but in these communities and even in other more mainstream communities of *konvèti* the word most often simply refers to a prayer meeting or an extended meeting for praise and music. Among independent Pentecostal healing communities, however, these meetings have a different intensity and a unique set of practices that distinguish them from others among Haiti's *konvèti*. On Sunday mornings, Sè Henri's or Sè Claudette's communities are, as both often claimed, “simple church of God” congregations. But, in the *jeune* services, Sè Claudette and Sè Henri transform from church overseers into prophetesses and healers. Deacons and preachers become Spirit-drummers and Spirit-dancers. The congregation of the faithful transforms into a crowd of sweaty, dancing, and singing bodies — some spirit-afflicted and others Spirit-filled. During a *jeune*, prophecy is preferred to scripture and healing *fòs* preferred to eloquence or piety. The congregations become, as their disputed name implies, an army in an intense spiritual battle for sovereignty in Haiti's lively world of spiritual *fòs*. Through the practice of spiritual warfare, these communities mark out new limits and subject the *lwa* of *Vodou* to the laws of *konvèti* ideals and values.

Jeune services do not have an appointed day, and, to my own benefit, the services in the communities in the area of Port-de-Paix were scheduled at different times throughout the week, allowing me to visit and compare many different communities in just a few days. *Jeune* services do, however, have an appointed time. The services begin approximately at sunrise and finish near sunset, with enough time on each end for people to safely travel to and from the meeting. For most of the year, then, the services last between 9 and 11 hours.

The Morning Hours: Charting a Spiritual Geography

In most cases, the *jeune* is underway by around 6am, although only the most “faithful” or those without school-aged children are able to attend. For others, the morning hours are overly filled with the daily chores of cooking, gathering water, and pressing school uniforms. The earliest attendees at the *jeune* are mostly women and very young children. In fact, though the number of teens and men increases as the hours pass, these services tend to remain predominantly comprised of women. The *fidèl* (faithful/members) arrive with blankets, towels, or empty rice sacks to sit and lie upon during the long and slow hours of the morning. These faithful women also usually bring enough water for the day in the form of small *sache dlo* (small baggies of water sold by street vendors) or in repurposed jugs and jars. Despite it being named a “fast,” the women usually also bring snacks for the children. Formal dress is not required, and is even discouraged, as it would interfere with activities later in the day during the more movement-intensive times of the service.

From the earliest hours, the *jeune* is a music-filled ritual. On my first visit, I arrived too early and dressed too formally and was greeted by the curious stares of little

children as their parents softly hummed old hymns with closed eyes. The stillness of the hymns and the heat of the room made focus a real struggle. *Sè Clau*, however, walked around with a stick to poke at the sleepy, and she often rang a bell to gather everyone's attention when it was time to move on to a new song. During the first few hours, we sang our way through more than 10 songs taken from the Haitian evangelical songbook called *Chants D'Esperances*. In between, attendees would take orders from *Sè Clau* to read a verse of scripture from the Psalms or to lead a prayer.

At around 9am, *Sè Claudette* rang the bell loudly. More people had come in during the first few hours, and the room was beginning to become quite crowded. Everyone stood up from their blankets and mats and turned to face northward. *Sè Claudette* led them in swaying back and forth, lightly humming a familiar hymn. At the end, the people began praying in a cacophony. The room was filled with "*Mèsi, Jezi!*" (Thank you, Jesus!) and "*Gras!*" (Grace!). The bell rang loudly again, and *Sè Claudette* turned to the east and began marching in place. The people followed, quickly filling the room with the sound of dusty bare feet slapping the concrete. The intensity of the music began to build as the people echoed back in response to the words of *Sè Claudette's* harsh and nasal singing voice.

<i>Mwen pa gen anyen! (echo)</i>	I don't have anything!
<i>Mwen pa gen lajan! (echo)</i>	I don't have money!
<i>Mwen pa gen zanmi! (echo)</i>	I don't have friends!
<i>Mwen pa gen Marassa! (echo)</i>	I don't have Marassa (the Divine Twins)!
<i>Mwen pa gen lamò! (echo)</i>	I don't have the dead!
<i>Mwen gen Jezi sèl! (echo)</i>	I only have Jesus!

When finished, *Sè Claudette's* marching became stomping and the people followed as she encouraged them to "stomp on Satan." *Sè Claudette* again rang the bell and turned a

quarter turn to face the south, toward the tall mountains that cut the city off from the rest of Haiti. This time, *Sè Claudette* led them in a different call and response, though still in cadence with the rhythm of marching feet.

Mwen bouke! M pa ka sipote. (echo) I'm tired! I can't support [it].
Vant mwen banm dyare! (echo) My stomach gives me diarrhea!
Tèt mwen banm doulè! (echo) My head gives me pain!
M bezwen chèf mwen! (echo) I need my chief/boss!

This time, *Sè Claudette* told the people: “*Frape kò w! Frape kò w!*” (Hit your body! Hit your body!). Everyone began at their ankles, slapping their calves, then their thighs, then their stomachs, arms, and finally the backs of their necks.

Finally, the bell rang and *Sè Claudette* faced west, which meant staring directly at the dark and damp wall that abutted the hillside. “*Balanse men ou!*” she told the people, and everyone raised their hands and began to swing them back and forth above their heads. The marching had now become more like stomping, and the quiet of the earliest hours of *jeune* was becoming more like that of a restless crowd before a concert. The people did not wait for instruction to pray or sing. Voices competed for my attention, swelling to a shout in one place and then another. Shouts of “*Letenèl!*” (The Eternal One!) and “*Jezi!*” (Jesus!) moved across the room like a contagion. *Sè Claudette* led the people in an energetic and impassioned song, “I See What You’ve Done for Me,” and quickly rang the bell to bring everyone to attention. Everyone reclaimed their places upon their mats and blankets, and I followed, though always five seconds behind.

Throughout these first hours of the *jeune*, *Sè Claudette* was a conductor. Music saturated the room, and she directed the attention and the energy of the people through the words of songs, through the rhythm of her feet, and with embodied ritual practices

like swinging the arms or slapping the skin. During *Sè Claudette's jeune* service, music is the primary language of instruction, and as the service grows and more people join, the music becomes a collective language. Some of the embodied practices, like facing the cardinal directions and “stomping” on Satan, lay out a spiritual geography for these communities, and participants begin to map out their surrounding spiritual terrain. *Satan is below and beneath. The spirits swirl all about. This building and my body are the targets. The frontline is right here.* Other practices seem primarily aimed at generating *fòs* in the participants. As the crowd stomps its feet on the cool concrete and slap hands against bodies, the people prepare themselves for the physical expenditure of dancing and singing that is to come. In the context of Haitian dance, to *balanse* (swing/balance) the hands is less a gesture of praise and worship and more a method for generating bodily energy and for “heating” up the ritual space. The same is true of the practice of *frape kò*, which evokes the Chinese tradition of slapping the limbs to encourage the movement of *chi*. These worshippers use music and their bodies to prepare for an intense ritual exercise that will demand focus, incredible physical exertion, and surrender to the rhythms of the drums. Lyrics, scriptures, and prayers that narrate the host of afflictions and anxieties that accompany daily life for Haiti’s poor majority punctuate the substrate of music and rhythm in the early hours of the *jeune*. Participants announce their weakness, their illness, and their discomfort. People cry out to *Jezi* as chief and only friend in a vibrant and crowded spiritual cosmos.

This ritual warm-up culminates in the delivery of a brief sermon and period of *revelasyon* at about midday. *Revelasyon* is a time in the *jeune* for people to share stories from the mundane to the miraculous, which narrate their suffering and God’s provision. It

is a moment in the service that is typically dominated by only one or two of the faithful, and it is the only moment in the service devoid of music. It is also the most poorly attended time of the entire daylong service. Participants slip in and out during *revelasyon* to make phone calls or to break their fast with a quick snack from a street vendor. Occasionally, a participant will share a dream or a vision and explicitly ask for interpretation. At *Sè Claudette*'s, this happened rarely, and *Sè Claudette* usually delegated the interpretation of dreams or visions to Jean-Pierre or, now, to Wisner or Jonley. The instances of explicit prophetic interpretation occurred much more frequently in other communities, especially at *Sè Henri*'s and at the relatively small community of Pastor *Modeste*. Interpretations are relatively uniform despite the varied nature of the dreams and visions, usually centering on one of two possible "meanings": the dream or vision either appeared as a warning about a possible spiritual attack from a specific source or it implied a promise from God for material prosperity or bodily healing. In both cases, the advice is the same — the person should "increase" their "faith" by spending more time at church or more time in prayer.

The Afternoon Hours: Making War

Though music is a constant accompaniment to the quiet and contemplative activities of the earliest hours of the *jeune*, the second half of the service more explicitly deploys music to provoke and invoke the spiritual world and to bring the community into intimate and even violent contact with these spiritual forces. After the brief lull of the sermon and *revelasyon*, there is a shift in energy and attitude that is marked by the introduction of the drums.

The drums of these independent Pentecostal communities would be familiar to most Haitians. Indeed, there is a tradition in Haiti called *toubadou* (from the word “troubadour”) of wandering musicians who play “traditional” music with handmade acoustic instruments. Some of my informants have described the music in this way. The style of the music, however, is markedly different from *toubadou*, which tends toward slower tempos and waltz-like rhythms. More frequently, the music of the communities of independent Pentecostals throughout Port-de-Paix is described as “*Vodou*.” Even amongst many Haitians, there is an assumed relationship between fast tempos and polyrhythmic structures and *Vodou*, such that the music of these Pentecostals is one of the primary reasons these communities are denigrated by other *konvèti* and looked upon with suspicion.

The music of Haitian *Vodou* employs three drums, all of which have been “baptized” in preparation for their ritual use. The drums of Haitian *Vodou* can vary in materials, construction, shape, and especially in style of play based on the *nachon* (nation) of *lwa* that are being invoked and celebrated. The two most distinct styles are the *Rada batterie* and the *Petwo batterie*, associated respectively with the *Rada nachon* and the *Petwo nachon* in *Vodou*. *Rada lwa* are associated with *Gine* (Guinea, or “Africa” in general) — the regal, even-tempered *lwa* of Africa — while *Petwo lwa* are described as *Kreyòl* in origin, though scholars have noted the strong influence of Kongo religion within *Petwo*.⁸⁸ Both *Rada* and *Petwo* drums resemble congas, being somewhat tall and conical, tapering sharply at the base of the drums. Construction materials differ, however,

⁸⁸Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 87. See also Deren, 61-62 and Appendix B, who pursued her informants’ descriptions of *Petwo* as “*Kreyòl*” and sought to establish connections between *Petwo* and Taino ritual practices and slavery.

with *Rada* drums being traditionally constructed with hardwoods and having cowhide stretched between wooded pegs at the top of the drum. *Petwo* drums, in contrast, are frequently made with softwoods and use goatskin fastened with rope for the drumhead. While *Rada* drums are played with a stick, *Petwo* drums are typically played by hand. Rhythmically, *Rada* rhythms are more melodious and built upon a triple meter, but *Petwo* is intensely percussive built upon a simple duple meter, accented by constantly shifting polyrhythms. Although *Petwo* only technically requires two drums, both *Rada* and *Petwo* frequently use a set of three drums. For *Rada*, these three are the *manman* (the biggest), the *segon* (the middle size), and the *boula* or *petit*.⁸⁹ In *Petwo*, the *ti-baka* and the *gwo-baka* are frequently supplemented with the sharp crack of a third *kata* drum.⁹⁰

The drums and drumming style of independent Pentecostal communities, though often misidentified as generically “*Vodou*,” are distinct from both *Rada* and *Petwo* styles. Still, traces of each drumming style are easy to identify. The only notable difference is the actual shape of the drums. Whereas *Rada* and *Petwo* both utilize conga-like drums known in Haiti as *tambo/tambour*, all of the communities of independent Pentecostals that I visited used three to four sizes of cylindrical-shaped drums, and community members refer to them exclusively as *simbal* (cymbal) rather than *tambo/tambou*. Dorvil, the drum-leader at *La Famille*, identified this as a crucial distinction, in particular because the Bible mentions the use of “cymbals” (translated in the Kreyòl *Bib la* as *simbal*). The Bible does not, though, mention the use of *tambo* in worship to God. While

⁸⁹Deren, 235.

⁹⁰Descriptions of the various shapes, styles, and materials of the drums come primarily from fieldwork. I have compared and supplemented this data with the thorough documentation of Harold Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and Melville Herskovitz, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975).

a cymbal in other cultural contexts refers to a different object altogether, this is not just a strategic renaming to achieve consistency with the biblical text. Indeed, in Haiti, this cylindrical style of drum (resembling a typical bass/ “kick” drum or snare drum) goes by this name even outside Pentecostal communities. Like the *Rada* drums, though, independent Pentecostal communities use a set of three *simbal*, which are referred to similarly as *manman* (the biggest), *segon* (the middle), and *kès* (the smallest). Like *Petwo* drums, though, these three *simbal* are constructed with soft woods and goatskins that are stretched and secured with rope.

This is where the affinity with *Rada* ends. Rhythmically, independent Pentecostal drumming has much more in common with *Petwo* than it does *Rada*. Even when congregants are singing a familiar hymn or Protestant praise chorus along with the drums, the rhythm is built upon a simple duple meter like *Petwo*. The effect of the duple meter is that, however melodious the original song, in the context of a *jeune*, it becomes intensely percussive, pounding and droning in contrast to the waltz-like rhythms of *Rada* and traditional Christian hymnody. The *manman* establishes the duple meter and the tempo while the *segon* and the *kès* alternate polyrhythmic layers that break through the drone to give the songs distinct “cycles.”

The Pentecostal *batterie* of drums begins to speak at around 2pm on most *jeune* days. The first sounds are whispers and outbursts as drummers arrive and test out the tightness of the goatskins and the sound of various sticks. Often, the drummers are dissatisfied with the available sticks and will head outside to look for their own tree branches to fashion to their personal specifications. Singing begins even while the drummers inspect and adjust their instruments. The younger male prophets arrange the

congregation into a circle around the center of the room, making sure that no one capable of participation is sitting or lying down. *Kanpe! Kanpe!* (Stand up! Stand up!), the prophets shout while moving around the center of the circle. *Sè Claudette* and *Sè Henri* both dislike disorder in their services, and both march around the outside of the circle pushing and pulling people into position in the circle while the prophets begin to lead the people *a capella*. All the while, the drummers are working out their own organization and rarely seem to agree concerning which drummer will play which drum. Quite often, arguments will result in the loss of a drummer. Fortunately, there is no shortage of talented and capable drummers in these communities and in the neighborhoods that surround them. A suitable replacement is usually easy to secure.

In contrast to the general congregation at the *jeune*, the drummers are exclusively male and usually young, either in their late teenage years or early 20s. The standards for their conduct in a service and their attendance at other church functions are an exception to the rule. Though *Sè Claudette* and *Sè Henri* have no tolerance for disrespect or disorder from most attendees, drummers stand outside all of these social expectations. These young men regularly disrupt services, simply dropping out of a song to take a phone call, getting distracted by a conversation, or even making fun of the speech and movements of the Spirit-filled or afflicted. Drummers are never chastised for their disruptions and are permitted to come and go as the young men please. As a consequence, the drumming portion of a *jeune* sometimes stutters to a start after as much as an hour of false starts and adjustments.

This affinity between independent Pentecostal drumming and *Petwo* drumming is fitting in several ways. Although, *Petwo* is often associated with malevolence and magic,

for many practitioners, the opposition of *Rada* and *Petwo* is not necessarily a moral opposition. Rather, it is the opposition of styles. If *Rada lwa* are generally thought of as regal protectors, the *Petwo lwa* are *pi rèd* (“harder”), meaning that these *lwa* are more aggressive, more temperamental, and more pragmatic.⁹¹ “Petro [*Petwo*],” Deren writes, “...is not evil; it is the rage against the vile fate which the African suffered, the brutality of his displacement and his enslavement. It is the violence that rose out of that rage, to protest against it.”⁹² This sense of protest and pragmatism expressed in the rites and music of *Petwo* is present in the intensely percussive and aggressive music of independent Pentecostals, and it is exemplified in the second half of the *jeune* ritual.

In the first half of the *jeune*, lyrics and melodies are drawn from a traditionally Protestant body of hymns in *Chants D’Esperances*, the Protestant songbook. After the break, however, as the slower triple meter music becomes increasingly *cho* (hot) and the drums pound out polyrhythms in *Petwo*-inspired duple meter, the unique lyrics and arrangements of these communities take center stage.

Lyricaly, the content of independent Pentecostal songs has much in common with the *pwen* (point) songs of *Petwo*-inspired *Rara*. Although there is a broader usage of the concept of *pwen* in Haitian culture, McAlister suggests that in Haitian religion, “*pwen* objects are aggressive forms of communication whose force depends on the capacity of the owner to direct his or her will onto a situation.”⁹³ These “objects” can be sent or

⁹¹Deren, 61.

⁹²Ibid., 62.

⁹³ McAlister, 167. See also Karen Richman, *Migration and Vodou* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005) for a discussion of *pwen* in a reverse transnational context, which finds charismatic and Pentecostal Christian migrants seeking to protect themselves against *Vodou pwen*.

placed through singing. Sung *pwen* involve speaking in metaphor and innuendo with the intention of not just communicating knowledge, but also enacting (spiritual) power.⁹⁴

In the case of aggressive Pentecostal music, *pwen* songs are sometimes drawn from scripture and rather straightforward in content:

<i>Papa, papa m.</i>	Father, my Father.
<i>Atake moun ki pa vle we m yo.</i>	Attack those who hate me.
<i>Goumin ak moun kap fe m lage yo.</i>	Fight with those who make war with me.

More often, however, the lyrical content of the songs is more like traditional *pwen* and less direct and clear, especially when compared with traditional Christian hymns. The most popular song at *La Piscine*, Sè Henri's community, was one of the most puzzling that I encountered. The song often lasts 30 minutes or more, repeating the same words literally hundreds of times. For weeks, I struggled with my own translation of the song because I could not understand its sense. Though she could not tell me what it meant, Sè Henri confirmed that I was hearing the words correctly:

<i>Zanj yo se malè,</i>	The angels are misfortune.
<i>Zanj yo se malè.</i>	The angels are misfortune.
<i>Papa'm bay mwen don.</i>	My father gives me gifts.
<i>Li pa prete, prete l.</i>	He does not lend.
<i>Oh! Se malè, Zanj yo se male.</i>	Oh! Misfortune, the angels are misfortune.

In the case of this last song, the precise meaning of the lyrics evaded most of my informants. Frè Jacki, the deacon and prophet at *La Piscine*, could only tell me that the song is about God's judgment. I asked, "Why does the song say that the angels are misfortune? I thought that angels were good?"

"They are good *for us*," he said. "But, they are a really dangerous thing for the bad people. When the angels come, they come for judgment. It is a warning to our enemies."

⁹⁴McAlister, 167.

Jacki continued, “But, the angels are dangerous for us, too. You can’t touch them, and you don’t want them to touch you, either. Don’t you know the story of Jacob, who wrestled with an angel and walked away injured? When the angels come down, it’s never for good things.”

This unique perspective on the potential violence and aggression of angels is in step with the sense of spiritual aggression that these communities cultivate through their music. Through it, these communities choose sides in what is seen as an inevitable spiritual war. It is these communities who have a gift from God, the gift of protection from harm, perhaps, or maybe the gifts (in Greek *charismata*, from which the description “charismatic” is derived) of the Holy Spirit, like healing and speaking in tongues. In the sense that they are directed at enemies, however, the songs of the second part of the *jeune* service act as a kind of *konvèti pwen*, deploying special knowledge, status, and power into a hostile spiritual environment.

The entrance of the drums into the ritual of the *jeune* also marks a shift in the congregation’s embodiment of the music. Whereas the earliest hours involved sitting, standing, and at its most lively moments, waving arms or stomping feet, the second half of the ritual requires a bodily response of participants that exhausts even the youngest and fittest among them. The prophet-dancers, like Jonley at *La Famille* and Jacki at *La Piscine*, begin by taking off their shoes and rolling up the legs of their pants. These young men frequently also remove their dress shirts. The prophets begin in the center of the circle, sometimes alone, but often with a few selected co-dancers. The movement of their bodies and the sounds of their voices serve as a mirror for those in the circle who try to match their dancing and singing.

Throughout, there is a silent communication between the dancer-prophets and the drummers. At the best moments, like at *La Piscine*, it is impossible to tell who is following whom; the drumming and dancing grow and intensify in remarkable unity, each responding instantaneously to the other. At the worst moments, like at *La Famille*, dancers may refuse to dance to the rhythms either because of their inconsistency or lack of artistry. More than once, I witnessed a total disintegration of the *jeune* that began as an argument between dancers and drummers at *La Famille*. As my fieldwork wore on, the coherence of *Sè Claudette*'s community seemed increasingly tenuous and relationships strained during *jeune* services. Still, in most cases, the energy of the music and the embodied responses of the gathered people smoothed over such conflicts and pushed the service forward.

For three to four hours, the music continues this way. At first, the rhythms and dances are relatively simple, and even the youngest attendees participate, though usually on the fringes and for their own pleasure. But for those who stand in the tightly policed circle, the dances become quickly complex and physically demanding. Jonley, for example, has two primary movements that he uses throughout these drumming sessions. In the first, he leans forward with his arms hanging close to the ground and his feet spread apart. He pulls his arms and shoulders back in an alternating motion that turns and twists his torso with the music. It is a simple but physically demanding movement. His second movement, which is the signature dance of these communities and the dance for which they are known to outsiders, involves spinning counter-clockwise while standing in place or while slowly moving around the circle. Like the whirling dervishes, or in a nearer context, like *Chanpwèl* secret societies in Haiti, this particular dance movement is

designed to generate *fòs* (force/strength) in the dancer.

Climax: The Arrival of *Sentespri*

In these communities, *fòs* is not understood as coming from within the body of the dancer, however. It is, rather, the *fòs Sentespri* (the power of the Holy Spirit) manifesting in the dancer, and it is the highest aim of the congregation and the very purpose for the *jeune* itself.

The signs of *fòs* mark the arrival of *Sentespri*, and *fòs* can manifest in a variety of ways and in any number of people. The person who receives the *fòs Sentespri* is often but not always one of the prophets. He or she is likely to begin to stumble and “lose the beat.” This rarely happens before at least an hour of dancing has passed, but the manifestation is highly dependent upon how “hot” the *jeune* has been and the participation of the crowd. When *fòs Sentespri* begins to manifest, it initiates a sudden attentiveness among all in attendance, including the prophets, prophetesses, and *danm misyone* in preparation for the healing work that must begin.

The person filled with the *fòs Sentespri* temporarily possesses the power of tongues which permits him or her to communicate direct messages from God to the people, the power of prophecy allowing him or her to foretell events and interpret dreams, and the power of healing permitting him or her to drive out bad spirits and heal diseases. In the most desirable circumstances, several people would be filled with *fòs Sentespri* at the same time and more people could be tended during the *jeune*.

To this end, the first person to receive the *fòs Sentespri* often transmits it to others through touch or by blowing into the person’s face. Frequently, the Spirit-filled person will pursue an unwilling participant and try to fill them with the *fòs Sentespri* as well.

The effort often fails and is attributed to the unwilling person's lack of faith. However, when it does work and the other party begins to shake and shudder or speak in tongues, the irresistibility of *fòs Sentespri* is confirmed, and the prestige of the community is augmented.

Frequently, there will be a brief suspension of drumming, singing, and dancing to allow for the transmission of divine messages through glossolalia or prophecy. However, this pause cannot last long, for the "heat" of the *jeune* depends upon the movement of bodies, the pounding of the drums, and the consonance of singing voices.

Most healing work takes place within the dance circle. The Spirit-filled make their way to the afflicted in the room one by one. Healing can involve covering the afflicted with the *banyè gerison divin* ("banner of divine healing") and praying over her body, jumping over her body, or reading scripture over her body. Prophets and prophetesses often lie directly on top of the body of the afflicted or rub holy oil or sweat across the areas of pain.

At *La Famille*, internal medicines are prepared solely by *Sè Claudette*, who passes them out in small paper cups, prepared and dosed specifically for each afflicted individual. Driving out bad spirits is usually left to the prophet-dancers or anyone else who manifests the *fòs Sentespri*. *Sè Claudette* calls upon both her education in nursing and in culinary school to examine the bodies of the physically ill and prepare teas and other medicines.

Sè Claudette does not claim to receive *fòs Sentespri* nor does she show signs of *fòs Sentespri*. At *La Piscine* and every other community that I encountered, however, the prophet or prophetess was always at the center of all manifestations of *fòs*. *Sè Henri* and

Sè Ketya, in particular, did not allow any healing without their immediate presence or oversight. In both of their communities, the prophet-dancers and *danm misyone* functioned more like security guards, making sure that the afflicted did not flee the service and that no one endangered any others in the dance circle.

The music continues throughout the remaining time of the *jeune*, and the afflicted continue to receive healing, prophecy, and prayer. However, the overt manifestation of *fòs Sentespri* fades with time, and it is impossible to tell exactly when a person's healing power has gone from them. Instead, the music and dance eventually becomes festive and celebratory rather than ritual and sacred. The unmarried teens and young adults begin to exchange dance moves, laughing and playing. The drummers transition into an experimental phase and sometimes change places to try their hands at a different-sized drum. Meanwhile, though, the afflicted will line up to talk with the prophetess or one of the prophets to ensure that their needs are met. By the time the service closes with prayer, most people have left to make their way home on the dark and dusty paths.

The Theology and Politics of *Fòs Sentespri*

In the broader context of Haitian life, *fòs* is a very flexible word, which evokes everything from the social strength of a group of people to the health and vitality of a physical body. In the specific context of *Vodou* ritual, however, the word has a somewhat more precise sense, referring simultaneously to the power of the *lwa*, to the strength required by the devotee to embody the spirit, and to the spiritual strength derived from serving the spirits.⁹⁵ For the dancers in *jeune*, the word *fòs* almost certainly evokes all of these ritual valences but adds another layer of significance by linking them all to the

⁹⁵Mimerose Beaubrun, *Nan Dòm: An Initiate's Journey into Vodou* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2013) 154.

common *konvèti* phrase “*fòs Sentespri*” (the power of the Holy Spirit).

The usage of *fòs* in these communities offers a glimpse into the way that their combative musical rituals are undergirded by a careful and nuanced pneumatology. The continued existence of these musically combative communities depends upon the members’ experience of the Holy Spirit as *fòs* (force) that can overcome the malevolent powers that afflict the community. This requires that sick people are actually healed, poor people actually improve their financial circumstances, and justice is meted out. At the same time, within the context of global charismatic Christianity, the power of the Holy Spirit must be carefully distanced from the socio-spiritual warfare practices of *Vodou* in order to quell accusations from the powerful mainstream evangelical communities that these communities are little more than *Vodouizan* in a *konvèti* disguise.

In instances of social, spiritual, or bodily affliction, Haitians have frequently employed the services of the *houngan* and *mambo*. Through consultation with the *lwa* or the ancestors, the source of affliction can be discerned and a ritual solution prescribed. Because independent Pentecostal communities claim to accomplish the same kinds of healing, the Holy Spirit must be demonstrably better at inducing concrete resolutions than the *lwa*. This is why these communities speak of the experience of the *fòs* of the Holy Spirit rather than the experience of the Holy Spirit itself. It is a subtle but crucial theological choice. Because these communities are already accused of being *Vodouizan* by other Haitian Protestants on account of their music, dance, and healing practices, this seemingly insignificant word choice effectively distances their ritual practices from the most central moment in *Vodou* ritual — spirit possession.

Spirit possession is described in Haitian *Vodou* as an experience of being

“mounted” or “ridden” by one of the *lwa*. In *Vodou*, the devotee is the steed and the spirit the rider, and though scholars may choose other analytical models and prefer more nuanced precision regarding the actual psychological process, *Vodouizan*, themselves, often describe the experience as subjective displacement. Maya Deren recounts the words of one informant who said, “To understand that the self must leave if the loa is to enter, is to understand that one cannot be man and god at once.”⁹⁶ For the audience of fellow *Vodouizan*, the possessed devotee becomes the material manifestation of the *lwa* in observable ways — personality, behavior, capricious preferences, style, temperament, etc. But independent Pentecostals cannot imagine talking about the experience of the Holy Spirit — i.e., speaking in tongues, dancing, or prophesying — in terms of possession. There is no personality or behavior to perform. The Holy Spirit is not capricious, not familiar enough to demonstrate a style, and it has no temperament. Instead, the convulsing and shaking of the devotee of the Holy Spirit finally settles into a different, more language-based, and more properly “Protestant” performance — the performance of inspired speech through prophecy or glossolalia.

The use of the word *fòs*, then, permits a discourse about ecstatic experiences of the Holy Spirit while distinguishing these experiences from the experience of being “mounted” and also distinguishing *Sentespri* (the Holy Spirit) from other kinds of spirits. I once asked Sè Claudette’s close friend and fellow prophetess, Tanyès, what it felt like to be “possessed” or “mounted” by the Holy Spirit. At this, she immediately protested:

“No! *Sentespri* does not come into your head or your body the way that bad spirits do. *Sentespri* is too big and too holy. What comes into you is the *fòs Sentespri*.”

⁹⁶Deren, 249.

In addition to carefully protecting themselves from further accusations and dissociation from the charismatic Christian consensus in Haiti, these communities also speak of the *fòs Sentespri* as evidentiary. For *Sè Claudette* and her community, the Holy Spirit is not like the *spirits*, to be sure. But the Holy Spirit is not just of a different order; it is of a different magnitude and efficacy. Therefore, the word *fòs* also points to the efficacious strength or power of the Holy Spirit to contend with and overcome all other spirits. Indeed, nearly all the regular members of *Sè Claudette*'s community claim to have been healed, delivered, lifted, or otherwise saved by the *fòs Sentespri* that manifests in the dancer-prophets and prophetesses when the music is played.

There are many, of course, who will never go back to sing or dance in *Sè Claudette*'s or *Sè Henri*'s community because of their lack of healing, deliverance, liftedness, or salvation. One woman, a mother of five, described visiting *Sè Claudette*'s church for several weeks when her oldest daughter was ill as a young child. Her daughter was experiencing intestinal problems that the doctors seemed unable to resolve, but as someone who is *konvèti*, she was unwilling to visit the *mambo* as her neighbors recommended. She attended *Sè Claudette*'s Spirit-filled healing services for several weeks and followed *Sè Claudette*'s instructions to read the Bible, pray for long periods of time, and to burn alcohol-soaked cotton balls in the little girl's navel. She danced and sang at every service, and the prophet-dancers blew the Spirit onto her and onto her daughter. Still, she saw no change in the girl's condition. The woman said bluntly, "After that, I never went back, and I never will."

Still, both those who claim healing or deliverance and those who do not share a single evaluative standard which centers on efficacy: if a *fòs* is perceived to have

successfully changed a situation, a situation which is understood to be caused by an *other* spirit, then the efficacious spirit is confirmed to be the superior spirit and, therefore, warrants devotion. This, of course, seems both logical and unremarkable. But bearing in mind this simple evaluative principle illuminates the precarious theological and cultural-political terrain that *L'Armee Celeste* communities occupy. It is what Laënnec Hurbon has described as an “intermediary” position or a “virtual world” from which these communities can “confront the challenge of a transnationalized world that they know only through its illusions and devastating effects.”⁹⁷ From this virtual world, independent Pentecostal communities engage in a transnational conversation regarding the religious character of Haiti, the impact of global evangelicalism and international NGOs, and the discourses of health, civilization, and improvement that characterize them. These communities carefully reconfigure through music, dance, and healing what it means to be Haitian and *konvèti*, engaging in a war with *Vodou* to assert and defend a space of spiritual sovereignty within the robust and dangerous spirit worlds of Haitian *Vodou*. Simultaneously, this spiritual war constructs a new kind of Haitian nationalism in the face of relentless interventionism by global forces of “improvement.” Their combative musical rituals are central to this work precisely because these rituals materialize the *fòs Sentespri* that both permits their war and also validates it in the face of inferior spiritual powers.

⁹⁷Laënnec Hurbon, “Pentecostalism and Transnationalism in the Caribbean,” in Andre Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 134.

CHAPTER 3: DOCTORS: HEALTH AND HEALING IN THE HEAVENLY ARMY

The Head of a Beast

I thought it looked like a liver abnormality or possibly a tumor. The young man whose symptoms were under analysis was about 25 years old. He did not act sick, and when I spoke with him, he said he did not have any significant pains to complain about. But he looked nine months pregnant. He had trouble eating, and rolling over was impossible. He was basically confined to the blanket and pillow spread out across Sè Claudette's cracked cement floor. Fortunately, he had his friends and his mother there with him. They were able to go out and buy food a couple of times per day. Water was free at Sè Claudette's house of healing, though it had to be carried from the public spigot at the end of the footpath at least once per day.

Sè Claudette was upset with me that afternoon because when she came back from shopping she found me squatting on the floor talking with the young man. If she suspected I was trying to get him to go to the hospital, she was right. Sè Claudette claims to be uninterested in making money, but only interested in the health of her clients. My actions, I reasoned, were consistent with her priorities. And, technically speaking, Sè Claudette's services *are* completely free. So, I was not stealing business. But after more time with Sè Claudette and her community, I understood what exactly I *was stealing* — I was stealing her socio-spiritual prestige.

Sè Claudette was never terribly angry with me, though, and neither was she in this instance. Most likely, she doubted that I had any real power or wisdom to impart. In that regard, I was lousy competition. However, her frustration did lead us to a discussion of what I can only describe as our very different health views. I had no problems with the idea that Sè Claudette's community understood many illnesses as "unnatural" — i.e., having an origin outside the sometimes-stable laws of "nature." But I did have a hard time watching people with possibly dangerous and potentially curable ailments just lie on the floor, having prayers and Bible verses spoken over their bodies, drinking herbal teas and tinctures. That, to me, was irresponsible, and I told Sè Claudette how I felt. Sè Claudette, to her credit, was gracious with me on this point. She did not, however, feel much need to consider my perspective.

"He has a dog's head in his belly. I think it is a dog's head. That's what I see. It is some kind of head of a beast," she said.

"If there's a beast's head in there, then let's go and get an x-ray for him at the hospital! What if it's not a dog's head?" I asked.

"You will not see it with an x-ray!" She seemed incredulous. To have been with her and talked with her every day for months now, she appeared alarmed that I was so confused. "You do not talk to the sick people unless I give you permission," was her final response. She left me feeling rather scolded.

This had happened before. In fact, a version of that conversation had happened several times before. Each time, I was aware that I should probably avoid that kind of meddling, and certainly I should have been keeping my judgments to myself. On the other hand, Sè Claudette felt like a friend, or maybe a little bit more like family, since she

frustrated me so often, and I had trouble not expressing it. Furthermore, I cannot deny that arguing with her was one of the most productive modes of conversation. The things she said were never easy for me to understand, but she was more direct when she had been provoked. I often reassured myself that my discomfort with the spiritual healing practices of *Sè Claudette*'s community in these cases would also be the perspective of many others confronted with this kind of healing movement and the ethical quandaries it occasioned. When I laid out my reasoning, I imagined I was confronting her with the very voice of modern science. We know things about the body! We have tools that allow us to test, see, and confirm causes. Most importantly, we have used that knowledge and those tools to develop cures.

Sè Claudette's response and reaction to all of that knowledge, though, was never to deny its existence, but only to affirm that there is *more than I can see*. The world of spirits was vibrant, even frenetic, at *La Famille*. Her clients did not come to *Sè Claudette* because they disbelieved science, and they did not come because of some moral or ideological problem with modern scientific medicine. Rather, people came to her because they believe the doctors and the tools of modern medicine cannot see everything.

I would learn later that day that the young man with the dog's head in his belly had started at the hospital almost four weeks earlier. The doctors, many of whom were Spanish-speakers from Cuba, ran tests and told the family that "*todo es normal*." The young man knew enough Spanish from school to know what that meant. "*Sa vle di, 'tout bagay nomàl,*" he told me, "Everything is normal." But it was *his* body, and he knew that everything was *not* normal. The cause, therefore, could only be unnatural, and there were specialists for that, too. His father's family wanted him to see a *mambo* (a *Vodou*

priestess-healer). His mother, a fairly recent *konvèti*, told him that he could not do that because it would surely make things worse. Invoking the power of the *lwa* and the ancestors — all “bad spirits” from her perspective — was a guarantee of more and worse problems. So the boy and his mother traveled about 30 minutes to see *Sè Clau* and to spend some time at *La Famille*.

Transnational Medicine in Haiti

Hospitals and clinics in Haiti are often intensely transnational social spaces, even in out-of-the-way places like Port-de-Paix. Doctors are frequently on loan from other governments like Cuba, or they are on “mission” from places like the U.S. Nurses are frequently the mediators and translators for their patients. Hospitals and clinics are also powerful forums for the dissemination of discourses of improvement, what Li describes as the aim of contemporary development projects aimed at cultivating the “will to improve” among an “other” population.⁹⁸ UNICEF and USAID posters warning about the dangers of unprotected sex and poor sanitation are standard wall décor. The typical patient at the hospital in a place like Port-de-Paix, however, is frequently undereducated about the entire genre of health and “improvement” that animates the transnational medical space. As a consequence, the “authority” of doctors, which *Sè Claudette* had identified as an important member of the community’s *les après Dieu* because of the power of healing that they carry, is understood quite variously by Haitians depending upon their socio-economic status, where they were born in Haiti, and their position of power in the encounter (patient, family of patient, nurse, clinician, etc.). Yet, on the reverse side of the encounter for the doctors, the knowledge expressed by many of Haiti’s

⁹⁸Tanya Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

poor is generally understood as fantasy or superstition, or, by more culturally attuned clinicians and doctors, as “idioms of stress.”⁹⁹ It seems little wonder that many among the communities of independent Pentecostals that I observed expressed profound ambivalence regarding the authority and efficacy of contemporary medicine.

“White Doctors Don’t Believe Us”

One of the most explicit expressions of this ambivalence came during my first adventure with Horace, the snake. This is what *Sè Claudette* called him. Horace was really interested in showing me communities that were, in his words, “more lively and powerful” than *Sè Claudette*’s. *Sè Claudette* claims that he was forced to leave her community because he had been overly “*chanèl*” (fresh, sexually flirtatious) with many of the young female clients that came to her *jeune* services. Horace claimed that he left her church because it was in complete disorder, having no principles. “The prophets are all unmarried,” he said, “and they had no respect for young women in the church.” He was married, but it was difficult for me not to see this as an admission of his own guilt.

One Sunday Horace called me early in the morning to invite me to the church of “a very powerful prophet named Modeste.” Since Sundays were not one of the days that *Sè Claudette*’s church held healing services, I felt free to visit somewhere else. I agreed to meet Horace at the top of the hill.

Horace was waiting for me, wearing his Sunday best. He was a thin man, about six feet tall. His cheeks were sunken, and his belt was fastened tightly above his hipbones. I did not remember him being so thin when I had met him years earlier.

Perhaps he was ill or had fallen on hard times. More likely, I simply had not noticed the

⁹⁹Pierre Minn, “Components of a Moral Economy: Interest, Credit, and Debt in Haiti’s Transnational Health Care System: Components of a Moral Economy,” *American Anthropologist* 118, no. 1 (March 2016) 45.

first time. He was standing beside a small roadside sundry shop, wiping the sweat from his shaved head with a handkerchief. We walked for about 15 minutes together. The neighborhood that we were walking through was nearer to downtown than many of the places I usually visited. Though in disrepair, the houses were mostly finished, indicating their older age. The houses were also more closely packed together, and we passed through a maze of alleyways. Finally, we came out from under the concrete canopy into a banana field. We were in a low-lying valley that I recognized suddenly as being directly down the hill from *Sè Claudette's* place. The church we were visiting came into view, and it was quite small. There was a concrete wall built around the small building, and I was told it would one day become the exterior wall of the church. But, for now, it created a courtyard area around the concrete building, which served to contain the people that could not fit into the existing space of only 300 square feet. It was a small community in comparison to *Se Claudette's* and *Se Henri's*. What Pastor Modeste's community lacked in numbers, however, it more than made up for in energy. Even on a Sunday, the church was buzzing with anticipation and energy. There was rarely a word spoken by from the pulpit that was not echoed by a refrain of "amen"s.

As Horace's guest that morning, I was given a seat directly in front of the table that served as a pulpit. I sang and clapped to songs that I recognized from other churches. When the time for the sermon came, Horace stood up and took his place behind the pulpit. I was surprised because Horace had not mentioned that he would be preaching. I was also concerned, because Horace seemed intent on drawing attention to my presence at the church, and he was making it very difficult for me to be the fly on the wall that I hoped to be. My fears were confirmed as Horace spent the first several minutes of his

message thanking me and praising me for things that I had neither done nor had any intention of doing. He suggested to the congregation that I had plans to “work with” the church, which almost certainly gave the wrong impression.

My discomfort subsided once Horace finally opened his *Bib la* (the *Kreyòl* Bible). He read, in its entirety, Lamentations chapter 5. Having finished, the congregation said “amen” together, and Horace began to pray for inspiration. He prayed that the force of the Holy Spirit would enter the room and enter into him so that he could understand the words he had read.

He began to re-read the chapter, starting with the first six verses. He paused after each verse, looking around the congregation, either giving the text a moment to sink in or perhaps waiting for inspiration:

*Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us;
Look, and behold our reproach!
Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens,
And our houses to foreigners.
We have become orphans and waifs,
Our mothers are like widows.
We pay for the water we drink,
And our wood comes at a price.
They pursue at our heels;
We labor and have no rest.
We have given our hand to the Egyptians
And the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.*

He told the people “Haiti is no longer for Haitians,” and “We have to pay for everything, even our water!” These lines from Horace seemed to express some sense that Haiti is overrun with foreign powers and that the situation is connected to economic conditions at the local level. Of course, he was right; these problems at the local level are expressions of inequalities at the global level. The presence of foreigners in missionary and humanitarian aid organizations is undeniably intertwined with the poverty of Haiti’s

majority, though in ways that are more complicated than most Haitians, missionaries, or aid workers themselves are able to perceive. Foreign aid money goes many places — to constructing churches, to public health campaigns, to supporting missionary and aid worker salaries, to paying Haitian homeowners living in Miami or New York exorbitant rental rates to house those workers and missionaries — but the money rarely reaches Haiti's poor. The things that do reach Haiti's poor, like food and medicine, flood into local markets, thereby destroying the possibility of any real local economic growth. The list is long, and Horace was identifying the experience of these transnational impacts as a foreign occupation.

He became excited as he read verse 10: *“Our skin is hot as an oven, because of the fever of famine.”* Horace laughed. He leaned over the pulpit in laughter, and no one seemed to be privy to his joke. Like a good showman, though, Horace just kept laughing and laughing until a few people joined in his laughter. Finally raising his head from the pulpit, he yelled out at the congregation: “The white doctors! Oy! The white doctors!” The congregation began to murmur and “amen” in approval. Horace continued: “The white doctors don't believe us. You tell them you are hungry, and they give you medicine! You eat medicine, but you still have fever! It's in God's book, right here. Famine causes fever. White doctors don't understand.”

With those words, the congregation was in an uproar. Horace was forced to wait a long time for the voices to die down before he could start again. His bony frame was drenched with sweat, and he once again pulled his handkerchief out of his back pocket to clean his face and wipe his shaved head. He looked at me from the front of the church to see if I understood what had happened. Or perhaps he wanted to make sure I noticed the

way he could work the crowd. I had become lost in my own thoughts, though, once again confronted with our radically different health views. Was I like those doctors who do not believe what their patients say?

“Amen, *Frère* Leonard?” Horace asked from the pulpit.

“Amen,” I said.

Transnational Medicine in Contexts of Inequality

The discourse about health and doctors in communities of independent Pentecostals that I encountered was consistently negative. Horace’s comments from the pulpit are but an explicit example of an active conversation among such communities about the inability of foreign doctors to understand and believe Haitian contextual knowledge and to effectively treat Haitian afflictions.

What accounts for the widespread nature of this experience of being unheard, misunderstood, misdiagnosed, or generally not aided by foreign doctors among Haiti’s poor? Almost certainly, this experience is partly produced by the collision of two disparate economic worlds that occurs in hospitals and clinics. In a broader study of Haiti’s transnational health system, Pierre Minn has suggested that “morality and economics [...] are particularly inextricable in settings of marked inequality of resources.”¹⁰⁰ Minn recounts the varied ways in which Haitian clinicians speculate about the “interest” of foreign medical professionals. He writes:

The Haitian health workers I interviewed named a host of morally suspect interests that drew foreigners to their country: to be seen doing good, to experience rare and dramatic pathologies, to benefit from tax credits from their own governments, or to try out experimental medical procedures on Haitian patients.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Minn, 86.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 82-83.

Given the low level of familiarity with the international aid culture and with medical services professionals that most poor Haitians have relative to Haitian clinicians, surely this speculation about selfish or even pernicious interests forms a part of this discourse of suspicion about “white doctors” among communities of independent Pentecostals.

Like the young man with the dog’s head in his belly, though, many of my informants came to healing services after having first visited a clinic or a hospital for investigation and testing by a doctor. These particular individuals had invariably received the results of one or another specific lab test and had been told “everything is normal.” Of course, having normal results on a single test suggests to a medical professional the necessity for further or different testing. My informants, however, lacked the familiarity with the practice of laboratory testing to be able to draw this conclusion. Therefore, with a lack of adequate communication on the part of the medical services professional, my informants leave health facilities in the same physical condition in which they arrived. It is, then, a short step to concluding that there must be something wrong in the “spiritual” realm, or what these Pentecostals refer to as “unnatural” illness.

Affliction, Healing, and Efficacy

While it is relatively easy to understand the ambivalence with which these communities of Pentecostals engage with Haiti’s transnational medical system and how negative lab results lead quickly to the presumption of “unnatural” illnesses, it is less clear how prophets and prophetesses in communities of independent Pentecostals actually produce the various kinds of healing that are necessary to sustain their communities. The ebb and flow of affliction and healing are the basis of the spiritual economy, which, in the case of *Sè Claudette*’s community, generates socio-spiritual prestige, and in *Sè Henri*’s

community manages to generate both prestige and actual legal tender. The process of healing depends upon and begins with the flow of *fòs* that these communities are able to induce in the musical ritual of the *jeune*. It is *fòs* of the Holy Spirit that enables diagnosis and healing. Healing can involve treatments that range from prayer alone to the application of a variety of material “medicines” and intense bodily manipulations.

The varied approach to healing in these communities, of course, opens onto a vast field of possible mechanisms of efficacy. To be sure, herbal medicines can be quite effective as curative or ameliorative agents. David Werner’s internationally published *Where There is No Doctor: A Village Health Care Handbook* contains a wide range of effective herbal remedies for illnesses common in the majority world, from diarrhea and upset stomach to fever and malnutrition. Upon scrutiny, the version of this text localized for Haiti confirms that there is significant overlap between Werner’s scientific assessment of the efficacy of indigenous herbs and what many Haitians would call *remèd-fey* (leaf medicine).¹⁰² There can also be little doubt that the aches and pains that are associated with many of these unnatural illnesses may be effectively treated with the use of massage and body-realignment that communities frequently employ in the *jeune* healing rituals.

Still, a greater portion of the clients who visit Pentecostal healing communities have already visited a clinic or hospital where such simple physical ailments as aches, pain, and exhaustion could also be quickly diagnosed and helped by modern pharmacological approaches. Therefore, the efficacy of Pentecostal healers in such cases

¹⁰²David Werner, *Kote Ki Pa Gen Doktè* (Hesperian Health Guides, 1991). The quality and usefulness of Werner’s work has come under increasing scrutiny since allegations of sexual impropriety. However, the content of the text has remained well respected by medical doctors and missionaries in underserved areas of Haiti.

of mundane and uncomplicated illness can only account for a portion of the socio-spiritual prestige of these communities. Certainly, committed regular members of these communities may forgo visits to a conventional doctor or clinic once the healing power of the prophet or prophetess is established. But understanding the experience of healing for the number of patients with more complicated conditions — conditions that might be elsewhere attributed to mental illness like anxiety and depression, but also more dangerous and confounding problems involving viscera, like cancers — requires a more careful investigation into the social and religious context of Pentecostal healing in Haiti.

Health Seeking Among Independent Pentecostals

The function of Pentecostal prophets and prophetesses aligns significantly with the role of the *houngan* or *mambo*. Indeed, the *houngan* and *mambo* explicitly compete with Pentecostal healers for clientele, and the competition is based not just on the alleged spiritual source of the healing power. It is sometimes the case that an individual or family will consider their status as *konvèti* important enough to disallow a visit to a *houngan* or *mambo*. However, prophets and prophetesses frequently also scold clients for having visited the *houngan* or *mambo* prior to visiting the Pentecostal healing community, which confirms that many *do* go to these other healers first. This lack of “faith” and “prayer” can have dire consequences, according to the prophets and prophetesses. From the perspective of the Pentecostal healer, to visit the *mambo* or *houngan* is not just disloyalty but is also a dangerous act that opens them and their families to worse spiritual affliction by inviting *movèz espri* into the healing process.

Spirits aside, prophets and prophetesses and their *Vodou* counterparts are functionally nearly identical. Maya Deren identifies the “*houngan*’s major role” (and,

presumably, the *mambo*'s) as being essentially “medical.”¹⁰³ The process of healing follows a very logical path, according to Deren, from self-care to herbal medicines administered by an herbal specialist to the final stage of investigating the potential of supernatural origin. In the contemporary context, medical service providers have made a significant effort to replace the first two steps — self-care and herbal treatments — with a visit to a clinic. But, in the relatively common event that illness or discomfort continues, clients re-enter the sequence that Deren described more than sixty years ago.

Deren also described in the mid-20th century Haitian distrust for medical professionals and their contextual competency that mirrors Horace's comments from the pulpit that Sunday morning at Pastor Modeste's church. The *houngan*, Deren suggests, “knows (as unfortunately many of the health planners do not) that the primary need of the Haitian peasant [...] is more and better food.”¹⁰⁴ Hunger is the cause of serious affliction that doctors in Haiti seem to forget, at least in the experience of these Pentecostals. However, Deren also suggests that the resistance of Haiti's poor is not primarily to medicines but to the doctor herself as a total stranger. She writes:

The Haitians prefer their *houngan* because they trust him. And they trust him not only for religious reasons, but as a human being whom they have known all their lives, whom they have observed under all sorts of conditions, whose personality and character is hence familiar and predictable. They know the percentage of success and failure in his cures. Above all, he lives in their community and is subject to their control: to their approving patronage or the censure of their withdrawal.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New Paltz: McPherson, 1983) 161.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Deren's insight suggests the importance of relationship to understanding the health-seeking practices of Haiti's poor. Above all, the insertion of the aspect of "relationship" points to the bi-directionality of these social exchanges. Relationship affords the patient a measure of control because effective treatment is not only in the best interest of the patient but also necessary to the healer's maintenance of socio-spiritual prestige in the wider community. From the perspective of the Haitian Pentecostal, the foreign doctor has no particular investment in getting results and suffers no consequences for failure.

If Deren's analysis offers some insight into the health-seeking behaviors of Haiti's poor majority, it also obscures some very important socio-cultural changes that complicate this picture. Deren wrote about Haiti's religious culture as if Haitian *Vodou* was not just the dominant religion in Haiti but, in fact, the only one. This was not true in the middle of the 20th century in Haiti, but it would be wildly inaccurate today. Paul Brodwin argues for understanding the impact of religious pluralism in Haiti as directly related to pluralism in health-seeking behavior.¹⁰⁶ Competing discourses and ideas about affliction and "healing power" are therefore embedded in competing moral and religious discourses. He writes, "Through their responses to illness, people simultaneously proclaim their moral worth and defend themselves against other people's moral condemnations."¹⁰⁷ Most significant for the purposes of understanding affliction and healing in communities of independent Pentecostals is Brodwin's suggestion that religious affiliation is formed not on the basis of acceptance or rejection of a cosmological vision or abstract theological propositions but rather through the process of

¹⁰⁶Paul Brodwin, *Medicine and Morality in Haiti : The Contest for Healing Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 18.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

seeking healing and moral worth.¹⁰⁸ In other words, experiences of successful healing *and* a perception of increasing moral worth motivate religious conversion or at least affiliation.

This concern for successful healing as an evaluative principle is consistent with the way that members of these communities described their experiences with healing in their respective Pentecostal communities and also the way that prophets and prophetesses commend their own communities and denounce the *houngan* and *mambo*. To be a committed member of a community of Pentecostal healing is to stake a social claim about the most efficacious spiritual power in Haiti, but it is also a means of protecting against moral denigration from others in an increasingly charismatic Protestant context. Haiti's religious pluralism is powerfully inflected by global evangelical discourses that understand spirits and ancestors as fundamentally demonic powers requiring resistance and even spiritual aggression. Therefore, engaging with the spirits and ancestors has become increasingly morally suspect in the lives of many Haitians, and it is understood to actively produce health insecurity.

Becoming *Konvèti* Among the Spirits

As clients measure their options for healing in a religiously and medically pluralistic environment, my research in Haiti's Northwest Department suggests that the prophets and prophetesses of these independent Pentecostal communities of divine healing provide an opportunity for healing that is consistent with Haitian health-seeking values. When initial attempts at diagnosis or healing fail, Haiti's poor majority will seek a healing specialist that is a member of their own community over a doctor; and, in an increasingly charismatic-evangelical context, anyone who is *konvèti* or whose social

¹⁰⁸Brodwin, 18.

relations are *konvèti* will likely consider a Pentecostal prophet or prophetess to be a superior choice for asserting their own moral standing within the community.

However, becoming *konvèti* can come at a steep price in Haiti, too. The Haitian spiritual cosmos is brimming with entities ranging from the esteemed *lwa* and ancestors to more marginal spiritual beings like *baka* and *zonbi*. When a person becomes *konvèti*, that robust world of spirits transforms into a world filled with potential spirit affliction. The start of the formal healing portion of every *jeune* at *La Famille* involves leading the entire gathering in a chant and song toward the four cardinal directions. The participants always begin by facing west. After engaging in an ad hoc call and response with the leader, a song is sung. Then, everyone “stomps on the devil,” pounding their bare feet against the cool concrete. The process is repeated facing south, then east, then finally north. Initially, I imagined that each of these directions might have a particular focus. For example, I hypothesized that facing East might be done in order to ward off spirits from *Ginen* (Africa). *Sè Claudette*, however, suggested no such significance.

“What is *that* direction?” I asked.

“That’s downtown,” she said. “You don’t know that?”

“Why do you sing in each of these directions?” I tried a different question.

“Bad spirits can come from all directions, and we have to pray to block them and to protect the church. It gives us the protection to deal with the spirits that are already here. We don’t want more coming in,” *Sè Claudette* suggested.

For the person who is *konvèti*, the vibrant and social world of spirits that once had the potential both to harm *and heal* becomes uniformly threatening. This sense of being surrounded by innumerable spiritual threats produces in leaders like *Sè Claudette* and *Sè*

Henri an incredible sensitivity to the potential “unnatural” causes of seemingly mundane problems. *Sè Claudette*’s sensitivity at times seems to verge on paranoia — a genuine asset in her line of work. But this sensitivity is not limited to her work with clients and afflicted members of her community. *Sè Claudette*, herself, lives in that world and has seemed increasingly disturbed by it since Jean-Pierre’s passing. On the days when I stayed with her until later in the evening, *Sè Claudette* would, without fail, change into an all-red dress with a red bandanna wrapped around her gray hair. She said that she wears it for Jean-Pierre and to keep *lemò* (*les morts*, “the dead”) away from her. In *Sè Claudette*’s converted cosmos, the dead and all the other spiritual threats are repelled by the color red because it is the color of Jesus’ blood. It is also the case, she suggested, that it was Jean-Pierre’s favorite color. So, now that he has passed, *Sè Claudette* sleeps every night in red. But, according to her, she does very little actual sleeping.

The “dead” had begun to give her increasing problems. They appear to her in the church sometimes, but they are especially numerous on the footpaths around the church. “You see them for just a moment, but when you look again they are gone,” she told me. “It is like seeing them but you feel like you are asleep, like you cannot see them.” When I asked *Sè Claudette* why the dead were giving her problems, she said that she did not know, but it only added to her sense that there were people in her life that wanted to cause her harm. Perhaps, as she had suggested in earlier years, it was Jean-Pierre’s jealous family. Or perhaps, as she had begun to intimate, it was coming from the purported cabal of men in the church who wanted to take over. In any case, *Sè Claudette* claimed that it did not bother her. Her extreme caution coming and going and her total

wardrobe change every night, however, suggest that to some degree, it most certainly does.

Just as threats increase once a person has become *konvèti*, so also their number of spiritual allies shrinks dramatically. Once the *lwa* and the ancestors are understood to be unequivocally malevolent, the *konvèti* individual is left alone in a dangerous spiritual environment. *Frè Jonley*, *Sè Claudette*'s primary song leader, and *Frè Jacki*, *Sè Henri*'s song leader, frequently led their respective communities in antiphonal prayers describing a deep sense of being orphaned and alone within Haiti's spirit world. These prayers take a variety of forms, but the following short, repeated phrase was the most common in both communities: "*Senye, pa gen pesonn*" (Lord, I don't have anyone).

While this explicit proclamation of being "alone" appears very focused on the individual apart from the community or even in opposition to the community, it functions in the opposite way in practice. This claim primarily indicates faithfulness to God through its denunciation of all other sources of power. To "not have anyone" in a robust spirit world like the one that these independent Pentecostals perceive is really a rejection of all other spiritual help. It is not the case that the *lwa* and the ancestors have rejected them, but rather that these Pentecostals have rejected the *lwa*. Secondly, ritual proclamations like these lead to a greater sense of vulnerability that requires increased reliance on the other *konvèti*, the prophets, and the prophetesses. The conversion of the cosmos that occurs turns all of the spiritual resources of *Vodou* into unreliable and potentially dangerous sources of power, thus producing a radical reevaluation of the *Vodou* community itself.

This was demonstrated to me in several ways. Firstly, recent *konvèti* frequently described *Vodou* as a markedly anti-social tradition and contrasted it with their new community of *konvèti*. Despite the fact that *Vodou* has been central to local community formation and organization, local economic stability, community and individual health, and has been integral to the counter-plantation system built around the local and familial *lakou* (courtyards),¹⁰⁹ those who are now *konvèti* focused instead on the role of *Vodou* in perpetuating violence and mistrust in communities and its role in establishing pernicious social hierarchies. Second, in the public discourse of these Pentecostal communities, the most frequent foil for the *fidèl* (the faithful person) was the *bokò* (the practitioner who works with both hands) and to a lesser extent the *mason* (Freemason). Occasionally, a client would mention having visited a *mambo* (*Vodou* healer-priestess), but the *houngan* was conspicuously entirely absent from all public discourse. I asked brother *Frè* Jacki why no one ever spoke about the *houngan*, and his response confirmed my suspicion: “*Houngan* and *bokò* are the same thing.”

Referring to scholars whom I consider authoritative on the topic, I protested. “The *houngan* and the *mambo* are primarily healers,” I said. “The difference is simply male and female. But the *bokò* is different from both. He works on the periphery and for money.”

Frè Jacki, who is eminently sincere and humble, replied, “Ok. Maybe. That is not true here. Here there is *bokò* and there is *mambo* — male and female. They try to heal, but it only gets worse.”

¹⁰⁹Laurent Dubois, *Haiti : The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2012).

Frè Jacki's comments suggest that the absence of *houngan* from public discourse about *Vodou* is not a strategic oversight, but is rather indicative of a widespread change of attitude about what *Vodou* is and what *Vodou* leaders do. To be sure, the presence of the *bokò* is very real throughout Haitian communities. The *bokò*, however, has never had an unambiguous social position in Haiti precisely for his acknowledged ability to both heal and harm. But the *houngan* has often been considered one of the most important and highly respected community leaders. Writing about 1940s Haiti, Deren claims that the "strong' *houngan* enjoys a quality and degree of respect which the Haitian extends to no one else."¹¹⁰ She describes the *houngan* as a community father, as a Solomon-esque figure, and as the most highly respected healer of the community. To be sure, the ensuing decades have challenged the centrality of that role and introduced many competing figures. That the *houngan* and *mambo* are considered indistinguishable from the *bokò*, however, indicates that the reputation of *Vodou* as a social institution has declined markedly as the influence of American missionaries and global evangelical ideology has extended and the numbers of *konvèti* have increased.

The American evangelical vision of Haitian *Vodou* depends not just upon a demonization of the *lwa* and the ancestors but also upon the characterization of its leaders as villainous. To become *konvèti* is considered a flight from imminent spiritual danger by these Pentecostals. Ironically, however, this radical conversion itself generates a new situation of precariousness by removing all the spiritual allies that *Vodou* offers and by defaming the religious leaders who once were central to local communities.

¹¹⁰Deren, 158.

Afflicting Spirits in the Heavenly Army

As my research was coming to a close in late November, *Sè Claudette* asked me why I had chosen to leave right as things were becoming more active in the spiritual world. She described to me the months of November through March as the *sayson dafliksyon* (Fr. *saison d'affliction*, Eng. “season of affliction”). When I asked her why this particular season was especially active with afflicting spirits, *Sè Claudette* was armed with answers.

“If you stay, you will see,” she said. “Everyone becomes sick a lot during this time. And it is the time when the *movèz espri* [bad spirits] start to come a lot. Even the big ones, like *marassa* and *lwa zaka*. They come and you can even see them walking around sometimes, but that is why people become so sick and have so many problems.”

It is surely no coincidence that November through March, even in Haiti, is the most intense season for colds and influenza viruses, which, without widespread sanitation, quality nutrition, or medical care, can be experienced as a significant epidemic illness. But, perhaps more significantly, these months also host a convergence of some of Haiti’s most important holidays, both official and popular, centering on Catholic liturgy, *Vodou* feast days, and national history. If these three kinds of holidays are taken together, November to March is, indeed, an excessively festive period of time.

Fig. 1

<u>Date</u>	<u>Catholic</u>	<u>Vodou</u>	<u>National/Public</u>
November 1	All Saints’ Day	<i>Fèt Gede</i>	
November 2	All Souls’ Day	<i>Fèt Gede</i>	
November 18			Battle of Vertierres
November 25		<i>Manje Yam</i>	
December 5			Discovery Day
December 10		<i>Ganga Bois</i>	

December 12, 13, 14		<i>Fèt Agwe</i>	
January 1			Haitian Independence
January 2, 3, 4		<i>Kase Gato</i>	Ancestor's Day
January 6	Epiphany	<i>Le Wa (Les Rois)</i>	
February	Lent Begins	<i>Rara Begins</i>	Carnivale
February 25		<i>Manje tet dlo</i>	
March 16		<i>Loko Davi</i>	
March 19		<i>Loko Attisou</i>	
March 20		<i>Legba Zaou</i>	

This convergence of ritual and holiday for these independent Pentecostals is marked throughout by appeals to afflicting spirits. As the chart shows (Fig. 1), Catholic feast days are uniformly also *Vodou* feast days, though *Vodou* feast days far outnumber them. Additionally, even official national holidays generally refer back to the Haitian revolution, the ancestors, and the *lwa*. The increase in seasonal illness that coincides with this convergence of special days only serves to confirm for these healing communities the proliferation of bad spirits and their afflictions.

Despite this preoccupation with *Vodou* and the *lwa*, the majority of afflicting spirits that made appearances at *jeune* services across all the communities in my research were not actually *lwa*. Among the most common were *nanm*, *zonbi*, *baka*, *dyab rasiàl*, and *lemò*. With few exceptions, regardless of the physical manifestations of illness, one of these afflicting spirits, or occasionally several of these, was to blame. *Sè* Claudette described *nanm* as a very common but very *subtle* affliction. Although the word simply refers to something like a “soul,” *Sè* Claudette described them as the souls of children that have died. *Nanm* are not particularly difficult to confront, because they are not terribly powerful or intimidating. However, *nanm* can be difficult to cure simply because, like living children, they are so persistent. Most often, *Sè* Claudette says, a person afflicted by *nanm* will experience heaviness in their head and body and jumping or

fluttering in their chest. In my interviews with the spiritually afflicted, *nanm* were most frequently associated with what a doctor might call *malaise* or depression.

The second most common of the afflicting spirits in these communities around Port-de-Paix was the *zonbi*. There is, of course, much to clarify about the term *zonbi* in Haiti, and I will note from the outset that this particular *zonbi* is of the spiritual kind, which has been called in Haiti and by some researchers *zonbi astral*.¹¹¹ Indeed, this seems to be the primary or most frequent sense in which the term is used.

The *zonbi astral* is said to be the spirit of one who is recently dead. These spirits are captured by *bokò* and put to work doing their bidding or even sold for protection or good luck. Among independent Pentecostals, *zonbis* seem primarily to afflict young women in their teenaged years. Affliction from a *zonbi* takes the form of a possession, and several informants used the word — *posede* — to describe it. In contrast to the *nanm*, a *zonbi* can come and go, can be one or many, and can even lie dormant until provoked. But once provoked, *zonbi* does not necessarily cause bodily pain or illness, but rather temporarily takes over the body of the afflicted. Those afflicted by *zonbi* yell and scream at the sound of the community's music and often act in flirtatious ways towards others or make explicit gestures. Those afflicted by *zonbi* are disrespectful and disruptive in public settings, and they can even become violent.

For these reasons, *zonbi* require much more *fòs* and confidence on the part of the prophet or prophetess. *Sè* Claudette tells me that *zonbi* are relatively easy to chase away, but that it often requires violence against the afflicted body. One also must be prepared for the *zonbi* to attempt an escape with the body of the afflicted. In these cases, the

¹¹¹For example, Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara: Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 102-111.

afflicted person requires restraint in order to convince the *zonbi* to leave the body behind. This violence often includes the use of materials like citron and garlic baths, the use of aloe in the mouth to induce vomiting in the afflicted body, and spraying “Hombre” (a men’s deodorant spray found in most markets) into the eyes, nose, ears, and mouth of the afflicted. These efforts combined with prayer and the *fòs* contained in the *non Jezi* (the name of Jesus) are enough to drive the *zonbi* away.

To the casual observer, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the *zonbi* and the *baka*. *Sè Henri* and *Frè Jacki*, however, described an important distinction. While both the *zonbi* and *baka* can manifest as disruptiveness, disrespect, and screaming or crying, the *baka* is a more serious affliction requiring greater effort from the healing community. A *baka*, according to *Sè Henri*, causes a much more persistent disturbance to the afflicted person. The affliction does not seem to come and go or lie dormant. Instead, a person can be driven to babbling and speaking gibberish or walking around like someone who is *fou* (a fool, “crazy”). Both *zonbi* and *baka* are dangerous in that they are capable of killing the afflicted person through either illness or, more often, self-injury. Furthermore, the methods for driving the afflicting spirit out are the same. However, once a *baka* has been identified, the prophet or prophetess must be prepared to work very patiently and persistently to drive the spirit away. Fortunately, *baka* seem to be a far less common affliction than *zonbi*.

There are many other possible afflicting spirits, though some do not appear all that frequently in *jeune* services. *Dyab rasiàl* is an afflicting spirit that is inherited in a family line. It is dangerous and particularly difficult to war against. However, its afflictions are only directed at one particular family and usually with cause. *Sè Henri*

described a man in her community whose blindness and strange behavior she attributed to one of these spirits. His grandfather had been a great *serviteur* of the *lwa*, but when his mother became *konvèti*, the spirits became angry. According to *Sè Henri*, the family's faith and their conversion was even questionable. The fact that this man was born blind and continues to show signs of spiritual affliction confirmed for *Sè Henri* that as a whole family, their faith was "*fèb*" (weak) and they "*manke priyè*" (were lacking in prayer).

The *lwa ginen* (the African *lwa*) are considered the most dangerous of spiritual afflictions, but they are incredibly rare to find in a healing service, according to *Sè Claudette*. The *lwa* only "mount their horses" (i.e., "possess" those who serve them), and those who serve them are unlikely to come to a church service. If the *lwa* do come in, though, *Sè Claudette* says they love to dance. "They will dance and dance to the drums, but when the name of Jesus is spoken and when the force of the Holy Spirit comes, the person will fall down and roll in the dirt," she said. In such a case, though, *Sè Claudette* says it would be very easily discovered because the *lwa* self-identify when asked. According to *Sè Claudette*, the *lwa* are very "prideful" and do not like to be mistaken for anyone else. Indeed, the one instance of affliction by *lwa* that I witnessed confirmed this. A woman rolling around in the dust of *Sè Henri*'s floor was restrained by five of the *danm misyone*. *Sè Henri* stood with her imposing frame directly over the woman and demanded: "Tell us who you are!" The woman replied in a delicate voice, "I am *Erzuli*." The revelation seemed to cause a stir among the other clients and dancers, and everyone began to crowd around her. *Sè Henri* eventually had the woman taken out of the service and sent her home to increase her faith and her prayer. When I asked why she did not try to heal her, *Sè Henri* told me that "first she must be converted."

The event at Sè Henri's was decidedly less violent than most other cases of affliction and healing, and the *lwa* seems to have gotten off easily. But this only seemed to be the case because they are some of the most powerful of the spirits in the Pentecostal cosmos, and because the *lwa* become quite dangerous when angry. "This is why," Sè Claudette said, "a person must be fast and certain in conversion." An angry *lwa* without the protection of the Holy Spirit would be a terrible enemy.

Among the three prophetess-healers that I interviewed, Sè Clau, Sè Henri, and Sè Ketya, there was a surprising consonance in the list of known afflicting spirits and the description of their effects on the afflicted person. Sè Claudette had more specific names of *lwa* that she felt were important to know about, however. She described *Simbi* as coming out of the water on occasion and appearing in the street to roll around in mud with a huge body, black and red. *Zaka* and *Kouzin Zaka*, she said, are the overseers of the season of affliction. They appear first on All Saints Day either as two in one or as two dressed all in white. These *lwa* are recognizable by their habit of rubbing hot peppers and tobacco in their eyes. Sè Claudette was also the only one of the prophetesses to talk about *moun invisib* (invisible people) and *lemò* (the dead). Neither of these categories of spirits were a particular problem in her healing community. Instead, they were giving her trouble in her personal life. *Lemò* kept appearing and disappearing, making her feel very anxious. "I am sitting here with you, but my head is out in the street walking around," she often told me.

In general, *nanm*, *zonbi*, and *baka* were by far the most common of the afflicting spirits that appeared in these three communities. *Nanm* were generally treated with prayer, laying on of hands, covering the afflicted person with a "healing banner," or

massaging the person with holy oil. *Zonbi* and *baka* were more often treated with garlic and citron baths, aloe, wine, *pafin* (perfume/deodorant spray), and frequently very violent bodily manipulations, restraint, or even beatings. All three of these kinds of spirits respond to prayer and the name of Jesus. In fact, I was told that all bad spirits respond to these two things, and they should therefore be considered the primary approach to treating any affliction.

The Social Power of Discernment

Despite their vast knowledge of the specificities of afflicting spirits, the prophets and prophetesses of these communities are much more highly valued for their ability to discern the underlying social causes of affliction than the afflicting spirit itself. Knowing that a *nanm* or *zonbi* is the cause of affliction is the simplest and most certain part of the process for prophets and prophetesses. Clients must then work with the prophets and prophetesses to further identify the social or economic circumstances that permitted the afflicting spirit in the first place. Within these communities, someone who is *fidèl* (“faithful”) is usually considered protected from spiritual attacks by the “blood of Jesus.” Jean-Pierre’s illness and death were particularly difficult for the community of *La Famille* to understand and talk about for precisely this reason. If, indeed, his illness were “unnatural,” as *Sè Claudette* insisted, then he was lacking in faith. But no one dared make the suggestion, though Jean-Pierre himself was concerned while he was still alive. He prayed for long hours throughout the day and read from the Psalms. He told me that his only responsibility was to keep trying, but that it was in God’s hands, and he did not want to be angry with whomever sent the affliction upon him.

Life in Public

In general, though, cases of affliction are less complicated than Jean-Pierre's. Rare is the *konvèti* client that would dare to assume that he or she has no need to increase their faith. Thus, once it is established that the afflicted person needs to increase their faith through prayer, reading, and song, the next step is to consider the circumstances that have led to the moment of crisis. For that, family, friends, and neighbors are often the suspects, and jealousy often the motive. With some exceptions, the crowd that gathers at a healing service is predominantly comprised of members of the neighborhood, and there are few secrets in these neighborhoods. For that reason, prophets and prophetesses never have to search long for information to help them in diagnosis. Life in the neighborhoods of Port-de-Paix is what Sè Claudette calls "life in public," and that, she tells me, makes a difference.

She explained this to me one morning when I arrived and found her lying on the hard concrete, face down. As I rushed over to check on her, she said in a voice muffled by the floor, "Bonjou, blan."

"Are you ok?" I asked immediately. I had been genuinely afraid.

"My back is hurting, and this feels good," she said. "My cousin is bringing some tire rubber to burn. That will help." She said she had woken up with bad pain. It was, in her view, almost certainly cause by *lemò* (the dead) who had been bothering her since Jean-Pierre's passing. Her cousin, who lived just down the hill from where we sat, worked a small terraced garden on the side of the hill. He also lived right next to a vacant lot that served as a neighborhood dump. An old tire would not be hard to find, Sè Clau told me.

Confused, I reminded her that burning tires is not a good thing to do, especially not indoors. But she informed me that bad spirits hate the smoke from burning tires. I found that believable since I, too, hate the smoke from burning tires. I immediately wondered, though, why a woman in her sixties who walks around in shoes that are too small and sleeps on a concrete floor every night would decide that bad spirits were to blame for her back pain.

“I woke up with a headache this morning, *Sè Clau*. How do I know it’s not a bad spirit?” I asked.

“It’s just a headache. You need to drink more water, stay out of the sun...or stop thinking so much,” she said immediately. All of those seem much more likely than a bad spirit, to be sure. Before I could point out the inconsistency with which she was treating our respective symptoms, she continued: “You do not need to be afraid of bad spirits making you sick. You are *blan*, not Haitian.”

“That does not make sense, *Sè Clau*. Spirits do not care what nationality I am,” I said.

“No, but you live differently. You live in your houses, in your rooms. In Haiti, we live outside. We live in public. People are always coming and going, and everyone knows everything. If you lived like that...maybe. But you just have a headache.”

Sè Claudette’s explanation suggests the important role of interpersonal and intra-familial relationships to spiritual affliction. The intimacy of life in Port-de-Paix and in Haiti in general and the interdependency and the public quality of every part of life exposes a person to the dangers of interpersonal violence experienced in or as spiritual affliction. There are few secrets, and there is no anonymity. Offenses rarely go unnoticed

or unpunished. Perhaps this is the reason that clients are anxious to accept their own complicity in their affliction, because the afflicted person knows that there are no secrets, so there is no sense in denying it. It is certainly why the process of discernment is no great challenge. The prophet or prophetess is usually unveiling an open secret, simply proclaiming in the healing service what everyone already knows: that the afflicted person and the afflicting agent are both responsible.

Discernment Is Healing

The process of identifying the afflicting spirit and then apportioning blame to both the afflicted and *someone* or *something else* is, itself, one of the most important aspects of spiritual healing in these independent Pentecostal communities. Most clients present themselves to the prophets and prophetesses with a host of physical symptoms, and in many cases these can be helped and sometimes resolved with the herbal remedies, teas, tinctures, and massages that are available within these communities. In such cases, prophets and prophetesses often skip the process of discernment altogether and simply address the symptoms. In doing so, prophets and prophetesses allow their clients to avoid an expensive trip to a clinic or hospital where they will be treated by a stranger. These cures also help to bolster the community's confidence in their skills as a healer and their social and spiritual authority. But in the more complex cases of vague and shifting physical symptoms, mental disturbances, depression and malaise, disrespectful or antisocial behavior, or chronic illness, then the process of discernment is one of the most crucial stages of the healing process. Without correctly identifying the spirit, and most importantly, without correctly identifying the origin of the afflicting spirit in the concrete

circumstances of economic precariousness or in the entanglements of “life in public,” there can be no healing.

The social world of these communities of independent Pentecostals, however, is not free from its own dangers. Life in public is only partly shut out in the *jeune*, and communities have their own entanglements and precariousness. The next chapter examines the occurrence of violence within the spiritual healing practices of these communities and the way that anxieties over sexuality, gender identity and mental health enter into the ritual practices of independent Pentecostal communities.

CHAPTER 4: THE POLICE: VIOLENCE, SECURITY, AND DISCIPLINE IN THE HEAVENLY ARMY

Pastor Jean-Claude

“In the way I understood things at the time, I felt like I was called to be part of *Lame Selès*,” Jean-Claude began his story. The pastor has the deep baritone voice of a radio personality and a carefully manicured beard with patches of grey near his temples.

“But, I didn’t yet have a good biblical conviction; I didn’t have a good education. I saw a lot of people that could do things like healing and prophecy, and I wanted to be able to do it, too.” Jean-Claude closed the door and sat down. He offered me a clean white washcloth to wipe my face. He could see that I was uncomfortably hot in his one room apartment. There was no fan, and the windows didn’t open.

Jean-Claude Baptiste was born in Artibonite in 1968, but he was raised in Port-de-Paix. He became *konvèti* when he was 17 years old in an *egliz de Dieu* — a community that he identified as *Lame Selès*. “I didn’t have anyone that taught me these things,” he said. “I just watched the prophets, and I learned from them how to dance, how to heal, and how to pray.” He was shaking his head as he told me these things. Even though I understood well that outsiders looked negatively upon *Lame Selès*, I was surprised to see his sense of shame in front of me.

“Do you feel bad when you think about being a prophet?” I asked.

“When I look at my life then, I see that I wasn’t working with *Sentespri*. It was a different spirit,” he answered. He was wiping his forehead now, too. It made me feel

better to see that I was not alone in that regard.

“What ‘other spirit’ were you working with?” I asked. “Was it Satan or demons or the *lwa*?”

“That’s hard to say. The Prince of Demons can do many good things like healing, too. But, there are also other spirits that are not demons and are not angels. They are *neutre*,” he said, making sure that I heard his embellished French pronunciation of the word.

I had become very familiar with the demonizing discourse of *konvèti* and American evangelical missionaries in Haiti. In the seven years that I lived in the country and during my research, it was clear that becoming *konvèti* in Haiti turns most every other spiritual power into a demonic or “bad” spirit. The *lwa* and the ancestors were considered demonic. The saints in the Catholic Church were demonic. I expected that if the spiritual forces of *Lame Selès* were not thought to be *Sentespri*, then surely they would be demonic, too.

“Neutral spirits?” I asked. He grabbed his English-language Bible and began to thumb through the ruffled and torn pages. Like many pastors who were trained by American missionaries, Jean-Claude spoke very little English, but he was very proud of his ability to read it.

“Yes,” he mumbled as he looked down, switching from Kreyòl into heavily accented English, “I think Ephesians says... Ah, *wi! Se sa!* Ephesians 6 verses 10 and 11.” Some kids outside the apartment turned on a stereo at that very moment, and Jean-Claude was obviously annoyed. “*Pardon*,” he said as he stood up to step outside. By the time he came back, the music had ended as quickly as it began.

He handed me the well-worn Bible, and he leaned over my shoulder to read:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Jean-Claude switched back to Kreyòl: "It's the spiritual forces of evil in this dark world, not the demons and not Satan. He's the boss, but it's not Satan himself. I was working with the ones [forces] in this world. They are very powerful. They can make miracles. They can heal people. They can exorcize demons. But they are not *Sentespri*."

"If these forces can do all these things, then how do you know it's not *Sentespri*?" I asked. My question was sincere. I have struggled throughout my research to understand any consistency in the modes of discernment that I see various *konvèti* employ.

Sometimes, a prophet or prophetess claims to hear a voice. At other times, the client seems to know the cause. Still other times, an affliction is only understood as "supernatural" by a process of elimination. I had assumed, though, that the *fòs Sentespri* would be knowable by its perceived efficacy. Indeed, this is exactly what others told me distinguished *Sentespri* from other spirits. On what basis, then, did Jean-Claude conclude that these efficacious forces were something other than *Sentespri*? For Jean-Claude, my question sounded like a question of his proficiency in spiritual things. He seemed eager to give an answer, but he slowed himself and appeared to consider where he should start.

"With the Heavenly Army, I was a missionary for four months in Jean-Rabel [a nearby city in the Northwest]. I found a man with a *baka* in him. With this demon, he always gave people problems in the church. He made people get dirty on the road to church, throwing mud and dirt at them, touching their beautiful clean clothes. He was

very menacing. Everyone was afraid of him. They didn't want to walk near him. But, when he saw me, he was afraid of me. When we were doing *jeune* one day at the church, the man came into the church.”

Jean-Claude became visibly upset as he remembered the events. He rubbed his hands on his knees and wiped his forehead again. His pause was long enough that I began to wonder if we should take a break or change the subject. I started to reach for my recorder to press pause, but my movement seemed to jar him, and he noticed that he had stopped talking. He quickly resumed the story: “The spirit that was manifesting in me...it was not *Sentespri*. I mistreated him. O! I mistreated him...I banged his head against the wall, his clothes were wet with his own blood. My clothes, too — they were wet with his blood. It was not from *Bondye*...not *Sentespri*. But, I was not *bokò*, either. It was not Satan. It was something else, and I did not want to do it anymore.”

It was this day as a prophet in *Lame Selès*, Jean-Claude recalled, that made him reconsider everything. The Holy Spirit, he believed, could not have inspired that kind of violence. However, neither was he using demonic powers like those he associated with the work of a *bokò*. He attempted to reason his way forward from there. The only solution was to imagine a neutral spirit. Furthermore, his brutality was not directed at the man, he told me; he was beating the demonic spirit. But, it was the battered body of the man, especially the presence of blood, which seems to have tested the limits of this reasoning for Jean-Claude. Perhaps he considered for the first time the relationship between the spirit and the body that housed it. Or perhaps he simply began to perceive his own actions as violence instead of healing. Whatever the case, he left that *Lame Selès* community, attended an American-run pastor training college, and he went on to lead one of the many

mainstream, “Bible-based” evangelical churches in the area. He often preached against *Lame Selès* and what he called their “charlatanry.” But his story suggests that his primary concern with *Lame Selès* was not any kind of trickery but instead the source of their power. He did not know what kinds of spirits were moving and acting in these communities, but he was certain it was not *Sentespri*.

The Possessed Body as *Mélange*

Relatively “simple” afflicting spirits, like *nanm*, abound in Haiti, especially during the “season of affliction,” manifesting in a variety of illnesses. Instances of affliction by other kinds of spirits like *zonbis*, *baka*, or *dyab rasiàl*, however, are of a different order in communities of independent Pentecostals. These afflictions are understood to *posede* (“possess”) those they afflict and to elicit some of the most aggressive healing rituals that occur in the *jeune*, much like Jean-Claude described.

One hot afternoon, high over the city on Mount L’Hopital, I asked *Sè Henri* to help me understand these possessions. “Does the bad spirit come in and take the place of the afflicted person’s personality or their mind? How does it work?” I asked.

Sè Henri took my arm in her large, powerful hands, and she walked me to the side of her balcony. She told me to look off to the west of the city at the place where *Trois Rivière* formed a small delta and emptied out into the sea. “You see there,” she said, “where the water is brown in the river?”

“Ah, yes,” I replied. “That is where the men are washing their trucks and taxis?”

“Yes, but you see now that the sea is clean and blue way out there?” she continued pointing in the direction of *La Tortue*. “Now, look at where the water and the sea come together. You see it is not brown, but not clear. It is not brown, not blue. It is a

mélange. Affliction with *zonbi* and *baka*, it is like that.”

The possessed body, for *Sè Henri*, is a mixture. It is a meeting place, a kind of juncture, which creates a zone of opacity. Within the cloudy space of this mixture, borders and boundaries are hard to delimit. It is impossible to discern where the water stops being clear blue sea, but it is equally impossible to identify a place where it becomes brown river water. My concern to follow and discern the shifts and movements of subjectivity in the midst of a spirit possession seemed equally impossible. For *Sè Henri*, and I suspect for *Sè Claudette* and many others, my concern was also irrelevant.

I often recalled this vivid image of hazy, brackish delta water as I watched later *jeune* services. When was the prophet filled with *fòs Sentespri*? When was he no longer? When was the afflicted person acting as her “self”? When was it the afflicting spirit? It was never clear to me, and only the most extreme boundaries of the *jeune* service itself — the ringing of the bell at 6am or the closing of the front door at 6pm — provided any sort of delimiting structures.

The Haitian Pentecostal self is permeable. This permeability accounts for much of the danger of “life in public” in a frenetic spiritual world. However, it is also the most important socio-spiritual resource, because *fòs Sentespri*, too, requires a permeable self. The combative musical rituals of these communities, like the musical rituals in a service for the *lwa*, are organized specifically to encourage permeability. Disembodied spirits must become embodied, and the thin veil of invisibility that hides that spirit world from view is thereby pulled back. Once embodied, spirits can be discerned and located so that they can be engaged and fought. Jean-Claude’s story, however, suggests that for some, the body that houses the permeable self is a body just the same. For Jean-Claude, the

bleeding body of the afflicted man pushed him across a limit at which his healing transformed into violence. The experience called into question the source of his spiritual *fòs* and the moral value of his ritual work.

This chapter situates instances of aggressive ritual healing among independent Pentecostal communities simultaneously within the political and social context of contemporary Haiti and within the militant cosmological vision of warfare that these communities cultivate in order to discern the multiple resonances of these ritual performances. Despite the prevailing discourse of peace and security that authorizes the work of foreign and domestic military and police forces in Haiti, many Haitians experience these agents of stabilization as forces that augment insecurity and perform sanctioned violence. In aggressive healing rituals, independent Pentecostals embody and locate spiritual forces of violence and insecurity in the bodies of the afflicted, and they meet violence with violence. The controversy of this ritual warfare, though, concerns the nature of the battlefield on which it takes place — the material body.

Violence and Insecurity in Haiti

Violence and insecurity are near constant companions for Haiti's poor majority. Early analyses of violence often considered the violence of "weak states" as deeply engrained or essential to certain cultures, whereas the violence of Euro-American states was always treated as a product of rational, historical disagreements. The violence and insecurity of contemporary Haiti, however, is no less specific to its history and its state and social structures.¹¹² There was, for instance, nothing unique about the violence of

¹¹²David Scott, 1997. "The 'Culture of Violence' Fallacy," *Small Axe* 1.2 (1997), 140–147. Scott argues against the notion that violence in places like Africa and the Caribbean is unique to these cultures and that cultural actors are somehow powerless to transform them. These notions he links instead to racist discourse derived from a cultural-evolutionary model.

Haiti's revolution over and against the revolutions in France or America that should have inaugurated a longer-lasting violence within Haitian society or have ingrained it in Haitian culture. Rather, the characterization of Haiti's revolution as uniquely violent and the characterization of contemporary Haitian society as violent are partly born out of a racist discourse about the incapacity of Haitians for self-government.¹¹³ Following Pierre Bourdieu and "practice theory," contemporary scholarship suggests that violence should not be understood as automatic, inevitable, or even random.¹¹⁴ Instead, as Deborah Thomas suggests, violence must be studied as "historically situated practice that is not only destructive and damaging, but also expressive, performative, and productive, a potentially spectacular though also too often banal way of experiencing the world."¹¹⁵ In the context of Haiti, there are indeed concrete factors that have led to the normalization of violence and insecurity as a part of everyday life. Though qualitatively different, the reproduction of violence in the ritual context of healing should be explored in continuity with those factors.

Despite displacing the inherent violence of slavery on colonial St. Domingue, Haitian independence did little to eradicate exploitative practices among domestic

¹¹³Erica Caple James, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) 8.

¹¹⁴Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Bourdieu emphasized the dialectical processes of "habitus" as a way of accounting for the reproduction of social formations, including violence in all its forms. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, eds., *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois have compiled a series of historical examples that highlight the continuity between experiences of everyday violence and the extreme violence of war. See also Betinna Schmidt and Ingo Schroeder, eds., *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹¹⁵Deborah A. Thomas, "Violence," *Oxford Bibliographies in Anthropology*, accessed May 3, 2017, <http://oxfordbibliographiesonline.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0027.xml>.

powers. Elite leadership in Haiti often reproduced the very colonial systems of labor and production that characterized life in colonial St. Domingue.¹¹⁶ Additionally, the promise of Haitian sovereignty and equality was constantly undermined by France and the U.S., and the Haitian state frequently colluded with these foreign powers to produce policies favorable to everyone except Haiti's poor majority.

In the face of such violence and insecurity, however, Haiti's poor majority has devised and maintained a set of cultural forms to build social and economic security and even to protest and resist the claims of the Haitian state and foreign powers. Laurent Dubois identifies these forms as "the Kreyòl language, the Vodou religion, and innovative ways of managing land ownership and extended families." These have been among the few resources available to Haiti's poor to maintain and practice sovereignty from the revolution until now.¹¹⁷

The twentieth century produced a series of challenges to the tenuous sovereignty of Haiti's poor laborers. The U.S. occupation (1915-1934) itself began to chip away at the landholdings of laborers while simultaneously increasing the nation's dependency on imports.¹¹⁸ Then, one of the most violent eras of life in Haiti occurred in the latter half of the century, during the rule of "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier (1957-1986). Their dictatorship introduced into Haitian social and political life what Achille Mbembe calls "necropolitics" — that is, using the threat and experience of real death to control the

¹¹⁶Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) 34-35. Trouillot points out, for example, that Henri Christophe's famous palace at San Souci was in fact the French plantation of Milot that he took over and managed even during the revolution.

¹¹⁷Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2012) 104.

¹¹⁸James, 11.

population.¹¹⁹ This era of *tonton makout* (the Duvalier era “secret police”), sexual violence, political violence, and instances of seemingly random violence against the populous has been crucial to the construction of the contemporary portrait of Haiti as a violent and unstable society. Unfortunately, the efforts at stabilization that followed the Duvaliers have done little to change that portrait or to change the concrete experiences of violence and insecurity experience by Haiti’s poor majority.

Violence and the “Stabilization” of Haiti

The United Nations has been especially focused on Haiti for more than two decades, often in partnership with the Organization of American States (OAS). In 1990, in the wake of the Duvalier regime, the UN arrived in Haiti to organize and oversee the presidential election that placed Jean-Bertrand Aristide in power. The UN returned again in 1993 for a “civilian mission,” was expelled by the existing military regime, and then returned again in 1994 to reestablish Aristide as president. Finally in 2004, after a second coup removed Aristide from power, the UN returned again to Haiti, though this time amid allegations that the US had orchestrated the coup. Since then, the UN has remained in Haiti operating under the acronym MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) established by the UN Security Council. The most recent UN Security Council resolution authorizes up to 4,791 uniformed personnel split evenly between soldiers and local police.¹²⁰

The presence of MINUSTAH for such a long period of time has, of course, led

¹¹⁹Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15 (1): 11-40, quoted in James (2010) 8.

¹²⁰“MINUSTAH Facts and Figures,” accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/facts.shtml>.

many Haitians to understand the stabilization mission as yet another foreign occupation, and the various scandals that have plagued MINUSTAH have done nothing to improve the public's perception. The cholera outbreak that came quickly on the heels of the 2010 earthquake has been irrefutably linked to UN troops that arrived from Nepal.¹²¹ As the outbreak spread to Port-de-Paix, there were reported violent demonstrations against UN soldiers and local police officers. One UN soldier was even murdered with a machete in his sleep in the usually quiet neighborhood of Chalet. Since then, accusations of rape and sexual violence have also surfaced, leading to a widely supported call for the withdrawal of MINUSTAH from Haiti completely.¹²²

Insecurity and the Invisible World

For many among Haiti's poor majority, the abuses and oversights of MINUSTAH in Haiti reproduce patterns of policing that have come and gone throughout Haiti's history from sources inside and outside the country. It has produced tension and even animus between the population and the forces that patrol their streets. In these conditions, though, violence has also become, as Deborah Thomas suggests, a "banal way of experiencing the world."¹²³ For independent Pentecostals, the violence of everyday life is but a reflection of insecurity and violence on a cosmic scale. The police, as a category of authority that *Sè Claudette* described to me as *aprè dye*, are abusing and exploiting an

¹²¹Fabini D. Orata, Paul S. Keim, and Yan Boucher, "The 2010 Cholera Outbreak in Haiti: How Science Solved a Controversy," *PLoS Pathogens* 10, no. 4 (2014). *Science in Context*.

¹²²Valeria Vilardo, 2009. "Haiti: Reported Cases of Rape Up 40 Percent," *Global Information Network*, Jul 22.

¹²³Deborah A. Thomas "Violence," *Oxford Bibliographies in Anthropology*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0027.xml>.

authority granted them by God. Independent Pentecostal communities construct a spiritual battlefield, grafted onto the bodies of the afflicted, upon which to engage in their own spiritual police work. Just as with Haiti's police forces, the spiritual work of security is also sometimes violent. Unlike the daily violence of MINUSTAH, however, the violence of independent Pentecostal ritual is designed to bring security, stability, and protection to the community. The afflicted body, and the permeable self that it houses, is only a temporary site of the conflict. Once the threat has been eliminated and the body secured, the afflicted person is restored to the community of the faithful.

Anthony Giddens defines what he names "ontological security" as "confidence or trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity."¹²⁴ No idea could run more counter to independent Pentecostal wisdom. These communities do not challenge the prevailing sense of insecurity by insisting that the natural and social worlds are *as they appear to be*, but rather by insisting that they are *more than they appear to be*. Just as these Pentecostals do not reject modern medicine, so also these communities do not reject or deny temporal authorities like MINUSTAH. They simply insist that the concrete impacts of violence and insecurity are reflective of a wider array of forces. This claim that things are "more than they appear to be" ultimately affirms the cosmic scale of insecurity, and it offers resources to address this insecurity. Insofar as its cosmic scale must be condensed in the bodies of the dancers, the healers, and the afflicted, aggressive ritual works out its solutions at the level of the concrete by also affirming the knotty entanglements of social relations and the complexity of interpersonal violence.

¹²⁴Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 375.

Performance, Efficacy, and Entertainment

The ritual space of the *jeune* is, at all times, a grand Spirit-filled performance. The pounding of the drums, the twirling of dancing prophets, and even the concocting of herbal remedies is undeniably entertaining. Certainly, much of the power of the *jeune* and much of its appeal derives from its impact as such a performance. Take, for example, the comments of a well-known Baptist pastor in Port-de-Paix who, though he disapproved of these communities, could not deny the appeal of their music and dance. Yet, like all ritual, the *jeune* is not only performance in that sense of the word. It is, in Richard Schechner's sense, a "human performance activity," "restored behavior," or "twice-behaved behavior."¹²⁵ Evidence of the performative quality of the *jeune* is not hard to find. Jean-Claude, for example, claimed that no one taught him how to do the work of a prophet. However, immediately following this, he affirms that he grew up watching people who could do this, and that he wanted to do it, too. Similarly, I once walked into Sè Claudette's place and found two young girls playing in the dark empty room. The girls were playing at being filled with *fòs Sentespri*. One would dance and shake, and the other would spin. The girls took turns laying hands on one another, each being healed in turn. These girls may one day be powerful prophetesses themselves, having been "taught by no one" just like Jean-Claude.

In a discussion of the *kaiko* festival in the Tsembaga of Papua New Guinea, Schechner describes the dance ritual as a transformation of combat behavior into performance. It is, he writes, "a transformation of real behavior into symbolic

¹²⁵Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) 36-37; Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 6.

behavior.”¹²⁶ This transformation involves “the displacement of antisocial, injurious, disruptive behavior by ritualized gestures and displays.”¹²⁷ Schechner’s analysis demonstrates the way that ritual performance can be not just entertainment but also efficacious. That is, the ritual performance works to achieve some social or material end. This is only true from a single perspective, though. He writes that these two, efficacy and entertainment, exist as two poles of performance, and no performance, whether ritual, theatre, or even the performance of an identity, is purely one or the other.¹²⁸ Rather, the experience of participants fluctuates between these poles based on their rapidly changing perspective and role in the performance. For audiences, performances are much more likely to lean toward entertainment. For ritual performers, however, it is more likely to operate at the pole of efficacy.

Efficacy: Possession as Double-Authorization

Instances of affliction that produced symptoms of bodily illness or discomfort were most often attributed to *nanm* in the communities of independent Pentecostals in Port-de-Paix. However, mental disturbances and social disruptiveness were typically attributed to *zonbi* or *baka*. Both *zonbi* and *baka* are described as having *posede* (“possessed”) the afflicted. This distinction is an important one. For the prophets and prophetesses who function as spiritual healers during the *jeune*, a possessed body is the kind of body that often requires aggressive healing — beating, restraint, binding with ropes, or the application of any number of irritants. Because the normal markers of

¹²⁶Schechner, 109.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid., 120.

subjectivity become cloudy and opaque in the midst of possession, the violence of the healer against the afflicted body is understood as directed against the afflicting spirit and not the person who is afflicted. In this way, this specific kind of affliction authorizes physical violence in the healing ritual. The community not only does not intervene but encourages and participates in the healing ritual.

This distinction between classes of affliction is also beneficial to the afflicted person. Although an afflicted person must sometimes endure physical violence and occasionally injury in the healing ritual, she is also not held accountable for her disruptions, disrespect, or any of the physical harm she may have caused for others. The usual social consequences are removed for the person afflicted by *zonbi* or *baka*, and the violence of the healing ritual restores them to the community without harm at the social level. The first time I visited *Sè Henri's La Piscine* community, for example, there was a *zonbi*-afflicted teenager. Before the musical portion of the *jeune* had started, *Sè Henri* was delivering a brief sermon about cultivating faith through giving money to her ministry. Every time she spoke about money, the *zonbi*-possessed girl shouted out, "Liar! Liar! You are greedy, greedy! Liar!" Each time, *Sè Henri* would wait for the girl to stop, and then she would continue her sermon. Eventually, the disruption became unbearable, and *Sè Henri* walked to the back of the crowded room, grabbed the girl by the arm, and held her down in the dirt. She proceeded to place one of her feet upon the girl's chest and pronounce, "In the name of Jesus, I command you to be silent!" *Sè Henri* leaned heavily on her foot to keep the girl down in the dust as she writhed and shouted, "Liar! Liar!" Once the girl had settled down and gone silent, *Sè Henri* picked her up, dusted her off, and returned her to her seat beside her mother. She leaned forward and gave her a kiss on

the head and went back to her place at the front of the church. Everyone responded with, “Amen.”

In this situation, the possession functioned to authorize violations of social norms on both sides. *Sè Henri* was permitted to express her frustration and annoyance through markedly aggressive actions toward the girl. Likewise, the girl publicly expressed doubt and skepticism about *Sè Henri*'s motives, a sentiment that may have been shared by others in the congregation. The possession permitted a restoration of order to the service and the preservation of social reputations for both parties.

Entertainment: Performing Real Violence

The introduction of real violence into the ritual performances of the *jeune*, however, pushes the *jeune* away from analogies with tribal dance in Papua, New Guinea, and toward instances of self-wounding in art and ritual. Jean-Claude may have been disturbed by his own brutality toward the possessed man, but his response is not the norm. At *La Famille* and *La Piscine*, mothers and fathers knowingly bring their afflicted children for healing. In fact, the afflicted often submit themselves for healing. For many of these people, the violence of aggressive ritual is experienced as healing. It is therapeutic and restorative violence. The afflicted consider the harsh treatment of their bodies, or the bodies of their sons and daughters, to have produced the important socio-spiritual work of restoration. But, for the crowd — those who have come to sing, to dance, to watch, and to support — the violence of aggressive healing rituals also functions in a different register.

When we talked, Horace often mentioned a *jeune* at a place called Ofouno. “Sè Ketya,” he said shaking his head as if in disbelief, “she is the prophetess there. Oy! Ketya makes a service that is *cho anpil* [very ‘hot’/intense].”

“Does she have a lot of people who come?” I asked. “More than Sè Claudette?”

“Oy! Haha! Of course, more than Sè Clau! A hundred people come to Ketya’s little church! There are so many people there with bad spirits! So much *fòs*! Ketya is very powerful, and you can see it. The people come from everywhere. They come from La Croix and even Gros Morne! They walk all day to see her service. You will see *zonbi*. You will see *baka*. You will see everything at Ketya’s service. It is *cho anpil*!”

The relationship between affliction, *fòs*, prestige, and the quality of the music is difficult to disentangle in these communities. It is hard to discern which aspect of a *jeune* service is the most important, and it is unclear which aspect leads to another. In some instances, Horace told me that the music at a certain location made the *jeune* very *cho* (“hot”). In other instances, it was the *fòs* of the prophet or prophetess that was the source of the energy. In the case of Sè Ketya’s community, his comments suggested that the number of afflicted who came to the service was the primary measure of quality. Yet, each of these aspects of ritual performance — music, healing, and affliction — is braided into the others, and they all move synergistically toward the production of socio-spiritual prestige for the community leaders. High-quality music elicits more manifestations of *fòs* in the prophets and prophetesses, which is accompanied by more manifestations of affliction, which increases the prestige of the prophet or prophetess. But the process continues. The prestige of the prophet or prophetess leads to higher quality music and

musicians, which leads in turn to more spectacular afflictions from more powerful *zonbi* and *baka*.

Each of these aspects can then also be seen operating at both of Schechner's poles of performance, both efficacy and entertainment. In the case of Sè Ketya's community, the volume and quality of performances of affliction and aggressive ritual healing were crucial to the maintenance and growth of her community. It was at one of Sè Ketya's *jeune* services that I was witness to the most dramatic and spectacular ritual performances that I saw during my fieldwork. It was also, however, a performance of real violence that was not easy for me to participate in. Like every performance of aggressive healing that I saw in these communities of independent Pentecostals, it involved affliction by *zonbi*.

Pentecostal *Zonbis*

Despite their shared origins, the *zonbi* that afflicts independent Pentecostals has little in common with the zombie of American popular culture. The etymological origins of the word itself have been debated for more than a century. In 1928, Elsie Clews Parsons suggested that the word came from the French *ombres* meaning "shadows" (given the tendency in Haitian Kreyòl to add a "z" sound to mimic the liaison of the French pluralized definite article). *Les ombres*, she believed, was being rendered as *z'omb'e*.¹²⁹ She wondered also of a possible link to the West Indian term *jumbie*, meaning "ghost." Maya Deren, in her now famous study of Haitian *Vodou*, suggested a link to the indigenous Arawak word *zemis*, which referred to souls of the dead.¹³⁰ Most recent

¹²⁹Elsie Clews Parsons, "Spirit Cult in Hayti," *Journal de la Société des Americanistes de Paris*. 20 (1928) 157-159.

¹³⁰Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1953).

scholars, however, have sought the word's origins in the African languages of either Bonda (*zumbi* = cadaver) or Kikongo (*nzambi* = spirits of the dead).¹³¹ As historians have gathered more concrete data about the origins of various African populations in the West, it has become clear that much of Haiti's population has descended from Dahomean and Kongo cultures, making this final suggestion perhaps the most convincing. However, as with so many parts of Haitian culture and language, it would hardly be inadvisable to imagine the word as an amalgam of several of these, or at least as bearing multiple resonances.

The difficulty in determining the proper derivation of the word was mirrored early on by confusion in description. Much of this confusion came from the existence of what now appears to be two kinds of *zonbi* in the speech and thought worlds of *Vodou*. One *zonbi*, the so-called *zonbi astral*, is a bodiless soul. These are spirits of the recently dead that can be captured, bought, and sold. The resemblance between *zonbi astral* and the Kongo *nzambi* has led some to consider this the most original or at least the primary sense of *zonbi* in Haiti.¹³² The second is the *zonbi kadav* (Fr. *zombi cadavre*), which is a soulless body. This is the *zonbi* with material form that made its way from Haiti to the American popular imagination through films like Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* and was added a measure of veracity by the accounts of journalists like William Seabrook, the accounts of marines during the occupation, and the "positivism of the [Haitian] law,

¹³¹For examples, see Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) and *The Passage of Darkness* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1988), and Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002).

¹³²For example, McAlister (2002).

which seemed to provide undeniable proof in both its text and its application” in regards to the practice of “zombification.”¹³³

Early folklorists provide what appears to be the earliest account of Haiti’s *zonbi*. One of the earliest examples comes from Mary F.A. Tench. Published just prior to the U.S. occupation of Haiti in 1914, Tench wrote a short entry on the “The Zombi,” though it was not limited to the Haitian variety, which may account for the more unrecognizable elements of her description. She claims the zombi “has a trace of the vampire about it, and probably its nearest parallel is the Irish Love Spectre.”¹³⁴ In the second half of her description appears a semblance of the *zonbi astral* (though hers is still technically material). She writes, “Fortunately, it [the *zonbi*] sometimes appears as a small creature which can be trapped [in bottles], not killed, but henceforth in service of its captor.”¹³⁵ This version of the *zonbi* — the one that could be bought and sold in bottles, used for protection, healing, or for evil — was easily overshadowed in American popular culture by Seabrook’s more sensational account of his encounter with *zonbi kadav*. Still, it is this incorporeal *zonbi* that remains most common in Haiti’s religious cultures, including within independent Pentecostal *jeune* services.

According to Elizabeth McAlister in her account of the *zonbi* in Haitian ritual contexts, a *zonbi* is “a spiritual category with a practical dimension.”¹³⁶ In some cases, a *zonbi* — a spirit of the recently dead — can be used for good luck or protection. In other

¹³³Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 160.

¹³⁴Mary F.A. Tench, “West Indian Folklore,” *Folklore* 25, No. 3 (1914) 370-371.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 371.

¹³⁶McAlister, 102.

cases, one of these spirits may also be used for harm or misfortune. In the context of Bizango-Petwo-Kong ritual, a *zonbi* can be used to “heat up” or increase the spiritual power of a group of people.¹³⁷ *Zonbi* can be captured and placed in a bottle and thereby entered into systems of exchange or sale. *Zonbi* can also be sent to afflict a person with illness or even death. For communities of independent Pentecostals, *zonbi* is a type of spirit understood to function exclusively in this final way — to afflict someone and bring illness or other harm. Their *konvèti* cosmological perspective disallows the possibility of a *zonbi* providing good luck or fortune.

What was initially most puzzling to me was the fact that, in communities of independent Pentecostals in Port-de-Paix, affliction with *zonbi* was specific to a single subset of the Pentecostal population. In every case of affliction that was described as *zonbi*, it was in a young or teenaged girl. In Sè Claudette’s community, I witnessed two *zonbi* afflictions, both of which were in teenaged girls. In both cases, parents brought their daughters to Sè Claudette for healing, and in both cases, parents described months of inexplicable and disrespectful behavior. At Sè Henri’s *La Piscine* community, I witnessed very similar afflictions much more frequently. In every case at that location, the afflicted was a teenaged girl accompanied by parents. Healing in these instances involved the attention of the entire gathered community and required multiple *jeune* services to fully resolve.

I began searching for explanations from people inside and outside these communities. In most cases, informants affirmed that this was indeed the most common appearance of *zonbi* but rarely believed there was any particular reason why it was so. Among those who did propose an explanation, there were two very common suggestions.

¹³⁷McAlister, 105.

One, offered most explicitly by the pastor of a large *konvèti* congregation, was that *zonbi* possession occurred when a young girl lost her virginity and became “crazy” because of her “sadness” that she would never be able to find a proper husband. The other explanation was that teenaged girls are more susceptible to *zonbi* possession because of their disrespectful behavior in public and at home. *Frè* Jacki, the deacon-prophet at *La Piscine*, told me that “girls don’t always know how to act in public, and they are disrespectful to people who can send a *zonbi* on them. It could happen to boys, but it doesn’t because boys know how to act.” *Zonbi*, it seems, is a gender-specific affliction among independent Pentecostals.

Undressing the *Zonbi* at Ofouno

Just as Horace had suggested, the highest volume of this kind of affliction occurred away from *Sè* Claudette’s and *Sè* Henri’s communities at *Sè* Ketya’s community at Ofouno. Just past Trois Rivière on the western edge of Port-de-Paix, the landscape changes. Riding a taxi out of the city, I could feel the change. The ambient noise of car horns, trucks, and the sound of street vendors faded quickly into the background, and it was replaced by a rare calm. The tunnel vision induced by buildings that are too tall and too close to the road opened up to a wide desert as I crossed the bridge over the river. Mango trees growing out of concrete *lakou* became open fields of beans and bananas. A breeze blowing off the ocean to the north quelled the heat of the city, and conditions became tolerable and even pleasant. Off to the south and west was what looked like a desert complete with cacti and dry shrubs. This is the area known as La Saline — the Salt Flats.

Just as I began to enjoy the peaceful ride, Horace and his driver turned off the

main road toward the ocean. We headed down a relatively wide footpath, uneven and rutted from recent rains. As we wound our way through the short trees and gardens toward the coast, the path became sandy and I began to see thatch and mud homes. Small craft fishing boats and canoes were scattered on the beach. We passed some older men leading a bull down the same path, a few fishermen carrying fish traps, and a group of children heading off to school. Otherwise, we were alone in the quiet and the dust.

Sitting about two miles down this footpath, a mere 100 yards from the ocean, was a church building of thatch and tin. When we pulled up in our taxis, more than a hundred people were socializing in the yard around the church. Children were eating crackers and sipping on sodas purchased from a vending table at the entrance to the church. A few older women squatted around a basin filled with herbs and leaves. The women were sorting and cleaning them in preparation for the *jeune*. Horace pointed and leaned up to my ear: “There! That’s Ketya. She’s the one in the green.” No doubt, she stood out. She was younger than the other women by at least a decade. Judging by her smooth skin and sharp eyes, she was about 40 years old. She had on a robe of deep green fabric and a matching headscarf. She wiped her wet hands on her robe and rose to greet Horace and me. Just as in the other places that Horace had taken me, the people seemed familiar with him, but did not seem to be his “friends,” as he had described. Horace walked around confidently and chatted with folks. I was left standing alone, because *Sè* Ketya returned almost immediately to her work in the basin of water and leaves. As I looked around, I noticed the low shrubs that were the majority of the surrounding flora. Black plastic bags, candy wrappers and plastic bottles created a retaining wall along the sandy road, remaining trapped in the brush by the constant ocean breeze. The sound of fluttering

plastic made it hard even to talk with people.

We seemed to have arrived during the midday food break, though it was only mid-morning by my reckoning. Horace explained that this community started and ended its *jeune* services earlier so that people had time to return home while the sun still shone. People were preparing themselves to go back inside for the main event — the drumming, singing, and dancing. Like the other independent Pentecostal communities that I visited, with the exception of *Sè Claudette's*, *Sè Ketya's* church was crowded to the point of bursting. As we all tried to file back into the church, I was skeptical that we would be able to clear a space in the center of the shelter for any of the rituals of the *jeune* to take place. Horace and I were graciously seated in an area at the front of the church that was offset by a few wooden boards. It was not raised, but it seemed to function something like a stage. That day, there was a table in the center, which normally served as the pulpit. The drums hung from the corner of the tin roof by twine. The chair I was given was made of steel reinforcing bars, and it barely provided a wide enough surface for sitting. Having just dismounted from a moped taxi, I was not excited to spend the next six hours perched on it. Once the people managed to crowd the edges of the church and clear out the center, it was clear I would have the best seat in the house.

In the corner to my left, there was a girl — about fourteen or fifteen years old — lying only about five feet from my legs. She peered at me with an unfriendly gaze. I noticed immediately that she was poorly dressed and unusually dirty. Her hair was tussled and frizzed, and she was lying down when everyone else was standing. Noticing my attention, Horace told me, “She has a *zonbi*.” Her parents were with her, though I had not noticed them at first. Her parents were trying to get her to eat a pack of crackers, but

she was busy countering my gaze with an unflinching stare. Then, she burst into laughter, laid her head down, and closed her eyes.

Sè Ketya entered the room and began singing in the center of the circle. She walked counter-clockwise around the room, and the people joined her singing several choruses from the traditional Protestant songbook called *Chants D'Esperances*. We had only just begun the third song, however, when the *zombi* girl began to writhe on the floor. She was crying out and arching her back. The dirty floor did not provide much traction for her bare feet, and her arching produced clouds of dust as she slammed her back down against it repeatedly.

“The *zombi* doesn’t like the music,” Horace said. “They are singing about *Jezi*.”

“I see that,” I whispered back.

Sè Ketya stopped the singing as soon as she noticed, and asked for the girl’s parents to bring her to the center of the circle. As her father tried to lead her into the circle, though, she wiggled her way from his grip, hit the dirt floor on her hands and knees, and began crawling straight for the wall. Slamming headfirst into a section of wall made of thatch, the girl burst out of the building. Several people chased after her, and though I could not see outside or exit the church from my position, I followed the chase and its outcome by listening to the voices and screams, which moved out into the Salt Flats.

Inside the church, Sè Ketya began asking questions of the parents. Why were the parents there? When did this happen? How many *zombi* did they think she had? The girl’s parents seemed rather ashamed throughout the interrogation and answered each question with their faces toward the floor. According to the parents, when the affliction appeared

more than a month earlier, they took her to the house of a *mambo*. The girl's mother paid a sum of money for her to stay at the *mambo*'s house but soon realized that their daughter was only getting worse. "Of course!" Horace said in my ear. "A *mambo* always makes things worse." Realizing the danger of the situation, the girl's parents brought her to Sè Ketya for healing. They needed the community's help and Sè Ketya's guidance, they said. Unfortunately, the family now also owed the *mambo* money, but refused to pay because their daughter had not been healed. Indebted to the *mambo* and desperate for help, the girl's mother stood before Sè Ketya and began to cry.

"We must pray a lot," Sè Ketya told the crowd, "and this will take a lot of effort." Everyone offered an "amen," in approval, and several people began to pray aloud. Others shook and twitched with *fòs* from the Holy Spirit. At about that time, the group that set out to chase down the *zonbi* girl arrived back at the front door of the church. A group of five men had struggled to chase her down, but there she was — covered in mud and gritty sand. The girl was out of breath, but calm. She stared off into the distance, making eye contact with no one. The men stripped her down to naked in front of the crowd. Holding her arms out, they bathed her with water and scented oil that they called *lwil sen* ("holy oil"). Her father led her back into the assembly, gave her a new set of clothes, and her mother began combing and braiding her mess of hair. The girl seemed calm but absent, as if dreaming with her eyes open. She sat without expression and was easily led back to the corner where I had first seen her. "Is it over?" I asked. "Is the *zonbi* gone?"

Horace laughed. "No," he said. "One is gone, but there are many. It will take a lot of effort." Apparently, *zonbis* — like their American cinematic offspring — come in hoards. Or a more accurate association might be demons in the Gospels. The *zonbi* at

Ofouno was *legion* — there were many.

Indeed, as the service restarted and the drums and singing “heated up,” the *zonbi* acted out many more times. Sometimes, she writhed and moaned. Other times the girl laughed and sang along. Sometimes, she danced provocatively to the drums, standing and lifting up her dress to expose herself to the congregants. More than once, she looked at me and licked her lips, gesturing for me to come closer to her. I tried to ignore her and follow the behavior of my guide and my hosts. After almost two hours of dancing, singing, and prophecies, the assembly reached its climax. The *danm misyone* were dancing around following *Sè Ketya*’s lead. Several of the afflicted came into the circle for healing. A pregnant woman was lying in the middle of the floor covered by a green blanket called a *banyè gerison divin* (“banner of divine healing”). *Sè Ketya* and the women grabbed and squeezed her belly. Eventually, *Sè Ketya* laid down on top of her, belly to belly, and the other women placed an opened Bible atop them both and read from the Psalms.

At about this time, *Sè Ketya* stood up and began to point toward the *zonbi* girl. She must have felt it was time to begin working on the remaining *zonbi*. The girl, however, was by then completely asleep on the ground. She was lying on her side with her head turned toward the wall and her feet toward the circle of dancers. *Sè Ketya* continued to point and sing with the rest of the congregation. I was startled when the sleeping *zonbi*-afflicted girl began to slink her way toward *Sè Ketya*’s outreached arm. Only her legs moved to pull the rest of her body across the dirt floor. Her eyes remained closed, and her head turned away. But, slowly, the girl’s legs pulled her into the center of the circle. She stood up and began moving around in the circle. She stumbled and fell,

she rolled and jumped, she screamed and cried, and sometimes she tried to run away. But, this time, the dancing prophets and *danm misyonè* kept her in the center of the circle. The *danm misyonè* formed a wall of bodies and blocked her every attempt to escape. With the drums pounding and the dancers aflame with *fòs*, the *danm misyonè* again stripped off her clothes. This time, however, she was bathed, not with water, but with *diven* (wine). *Sè* Ketya came toward the table in the center of the stage area where I was sitting, and she took a can of “Hombre” — a men’s deodorant spray sold in downtown markets. She began to spray it into directly into the girl’s eyes, nose, and mouth. She hacked and coughed and spit, but *Sè* Ketya continued to spray. The room was filled with the smell. Then, one of the *danm misyonè* brought *Sè* Ketya a large piece of aloe from a plant outside the building. She tore it open and scooped a handful of green slime from inside. First, she rubbed it across the girl’s face. The next handful she forced into the girl’s mouth, and the *zombi*-afflicted girl began to gag and vomit onto the dirt floor.

Bathing and re-clothing her, the parents once again took her to her place in the corner. This time, she cried and moaned, presumably from the pain of her red and swollen eyes. Her parents brushed her hair and brought her clean water to drink. “Many *zombis* are gone,” Horace says, “but there are many more. She will need to stay here for a long time.”

I left that evening unsure of how to make sense of many of the things I had seen. I was unsure how to account for the strangeness of the girl’s possession and the way her sleeping body slid across the dirt floor toward *Sè* Ketya. I was more puzzled, though, by the way she had been treated and the knowledge that her parents brought her for this kind of ritual. These parents brought their daughter to a church community where she was

stripped naked in front of the crowd and inundated with various liquids and chemicals. She sat crying in the corner with burning eyes and a burning throat. Her mother combed her hair.

Blood and Nakedness

In an essay in which he puzzles over the significance of representations of violence and self-wounding, Richard Schechner speculates that “[t]he display of blood is related to public nakedness, both primary (all are born naked) and secondary (choosing to be naked).”¹³⁸ Just as Jean-Claude was disturbed by the appearance of blood in that healing ritual so many years ago, the public nakedness of the *zombi*-afflicted girl transformed this healing ritual into violence for me. Not only that, of course, but I was also bothered by the induction of vomiting, her flailing on the ground, and her gasping for breath as wine and water poured over her dusty face.

Having my own children, I found it difficult to empathize with the girl’s parents. I could not understand their decision to submit their daughter to this kind of healing. Her father had stood passively to the side of the ritual gathering, and her mother stayed in the corner praying throughout the service. Neither sang nor danced but simply waited patiently, as if in the waiting room of a hospital. Of course, independent Pentecostal communities had been described to me as “spiritual hospitals” by more than a few informants, and perhaps that is one way to understand the violence of these healing rituals. I have no doubt that I would feel equally uncomfortable being a spectator for a physical surgery in an actual operating room. Cutting and bleeding is, of course, necessary for healing in medicine, and only the constant exposure that the surgeon receives in training tempers the impact of the sight of blood and viscera. Were the girl’s

¹³⁸Richard Schechner, *Performed Imaginaries* (New York: Routledge, 2015) 147.

parents disengaged from the violence of the healing ritual in this same way? Did they perceive it as necessary for their daughter's healing?

Yet one person's violence is another's healing. Within the banality of everyday violence and the perennial sense of insecurity that characterizes life for Haiti's poor majority, perhaps the aggressive ritual does not register as violence at all. The very forces that aim to stabilize and secure the lives of Haitians are themselves often experienced as agents of violence and insecurity. By contrast, the violence of these aggressive rituals in *Sè Ketya's* community and other communities of independent Pentecostals is experienced as performative and productive. Violence is simultaneously condensed in the body of a teenaged girl and also cast out of the community back into the vastness of the invisible world. As Schechner suggests, social disruption and antisocial, injurious behavior is managed and transformed in the ritual performance. Like a sacrificial animal, the body of the teenaged girl becomes the temporary site of spiritual warfare. The *jeune* becomes a space of violence, an altar of sacrifice, in which the frustration and aggression of parents and of Haiti's poor majority more generally can be expelled in aggression. It is directed against the offending member of the social body without judgment or retaliation. At the same time, the offending member of the community is absolved of their violent and disruptive behavior and restored to the community, at least for a time. The concrete experiences of violence and insecurity are, in this way, lifted out of the community and placed back into the independent Pentecostals' sovereign domain of spiritual warfare.

CHAPTER 5: JUDGES: PATIENCE, PRAYER, AND SECLUSION IN THE HEAVENLY ARMY

Pastor Freddie

Pastor Freddie was well known among *konvèti* in Port-de-Paix. He was the pastor of one of the largest *konvèti* churches in the Northwest. He was also a vocal critic of *Lame Selès* communities. He frequently warned his congregation against visiting these places for healing. I had even once encountered someone at a *jeune* who knew that I was acquainted with Pastor Freddie. After the service, she politely asked that I keep her visit a secret.

I visited him in his air-conditioned office one afternoon and asked him simply, “What is *Lame Selès*?” Without hesitation, Pastor Freddie answered:

Bizango and Chanpwèl — this is what *Lame Selès* is like. What is Bizango? What is Chanpwèl? That is a hard question, because these are things that only a few people really know. They are secret groups that use dangerous spiritual powers. They are the people who control everything in Haiti. They are bokò and mason, sometimes politicians and judges — really powerful people. They meet at night to do work, but they are always watching everything. They can transform into anything, and they can steal you to eat you. But, if you are really a Christian, this can never happen to you. But, *Lame Selès*, they are like that, too. They dance like Chanpwèl, and their leaders always become bokò when they leave the church. They are like Bizango and Chanpwèl, and that is why I do not trust them.

Sosyete Sekrè and Lame Selès

Pastor Freddie’s comments about independent Pentecostal communities known as *Lame Selès* were reflective of stories that I heard often repeated from *konvèti* in Port-de-Paix. Many critics compared these Pentecostal communities to Haiti’s widely referenced but poorly understood secret societies, which are rumored to covertly control the country,

sometimes through collusion with Haiti's elites and sometimes in opposition to them. To be sure, Bizango and Chanpwèl are real; secret societies do exist, and I suspect that many of the rumors are grounded in concrete experiences. However, for most of my informants, rumor and speculation exceed concrete data.

Ethnographers of Haitian religion in the early and mid-20th century seem to have encountered these *sosyete* (societies) and perceived their significance and organization quite variously. Maya Deren, for example, understood the word to indicate something like a "parish," or members of a particular *hounfort* (*Vodou* temple compound) organized primarily according to proximity.¹³⁹ Several decades ago, Michel Laguerre suggested that these secret societies originate with pre-revolutionary communities of maroons. He wrote, "Marronage offered proper means for a restructuration of groups of slaves who had fled from plantations and provided the mechanism by which secret societies could function in colonial Haiti."¹⁴⁰ Whatever Laguerre meant by "proper," recent scholarship has confirmed that, indeed, these societies historically evolved in slave resistance and the context of *marronage*.¹⁴¹ These societies seem to have served, from the start, as an important shadow government of which the Haitian state was quite aware.¹⁴² These civic organizations have traditionally functioned to collectivize labor and as mutual benefit

¹³⁹Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New Paltz: McPherson, 1983) 219.

¹⁴⁰Michel Laguerre, "Bizango: A Voodoo Secret Society in Haiti," in *Secrecy: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Stanton K. Tefft (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1980) 156.

¹⁴¹Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 17.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

associations.¹⁴³ Most significantly in the generation of rumors and speculation on the part of many of my informants, these societies have also served as a “nighttime legal system” allowing the local poor access to semi-formal mediation for interpersonal disputes. For this reason, Kate Ramsey describes *sosyete sekre* (secret societies) as voluntary but exclusive groups whose legal processes “closely resemble the formal judicial and disciplinary institutions that they supplement and in some cases altogether supplant.”¹⁴⁴

The relationship between local *hounfort* and *sosyete* has also been variously described. Wade Davis famously featured these *sosyete* as central to the threat and practice of “zombification” as a form of social discipline. He describes them as a “parallel institution” to the local *hounfort*, each with its own leadership and set of rituals. His description overlaps largely with Ramsey’s later description, but Davis emphasizes their use of “poison” and “sorcery” as primary tools of discipline.¹⁴⁵ Among many of Davis’ informants, the *sosyete* had developed a “nefarious image,” which he contrasts with the “logical and apparently purposeful character of its actual functions.”¹⁴⁶ Just as the pastor’s words suggested in my interview, Davis recounts the way that the fear and secrecy surrounding these societies has led to the common myth, perpetuated by parents, that disobedient children will be sold to and eaten by the *sosyete*.¹⁴⁷ In my own research, this perception is not just perpetuated by parents, but also firmly believed by many of

¹⁴³Ramsey, 17.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 18.

¹⁴⁵Wade Davis, *The Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 10.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 272.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 275.

them.

Elizabeth McAlister posits a very close relationship between the *sosyete* and the *Petwo-Kongo* style within *Vodou*.¹⁴⁸ The *Petwo* ritual style within *Vodou* is closely linked to the Kongo culture of central Africa. In Haiti, it is popularly understood as the “hot” and aggressive branch of the tradition, incorporating whips, gunpowder, chains, and sorcery. It is no surprise, then, that the ritual practices of *Bizango* and other *sosyete* are also considered to be “hot” and aggressive.

These diverse images of Haiti’s *sosyete* are difficult to decipher, and even more so because the secret societies are indeed secretive. On the one hand, scholars have pointed out the ways in which these civic organizations have functioned for the benefit of the poor and the protection of local peasant sovereignty and for their well being. On the other hand, many of the poor in my own research perceive *Bizango*, *Chanpwèl*, and other *sosyete* as cabals of sorcery that are dangerously aligned with the Haitian elite and the government. The polycephalous nature of these organizations likely means that there is truth to be found in both images. Almost certainly, these *sosyete* have at times worked with and through the official government to achieve their interests, and at other times

¹⁴⁸Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 87. McAlister seems to understand “Bizango” as a subset of “Chanpwèl” — a name which she appears to use as a title for all secret societies, though she also uses the name “Bizango” in this generic way. Other researchers have listed a longer set of secret societies which include *Bizango*, *Chanpwèl*, *Zobòp*, and *Vlengbedeng*. Davis (1988) suggests that all the names of secret societies have been given to them by their original maroon organizer — even that *Petwo* itself is a secret society based on the work of maroon “Don Pedro.” In this regard, research has not yet presented a singular picture of the differences between the *Vodou* “nations” or “rites” and secret societies. This confusion is no doubt helped by the various understandings that circulate within Haiti itself. My own research supports McAlister’s emphasis primarily on *Bizango* and *Chanpwèl*, two names that seem to function somewhat generically for such societies among outsiders and critics. There are almost certainly a variety of such societies that go by various names. However, for the purposes of my own research, the popular perception of these societies matters most.

they have worked against these powers. For some, no doubt, *sosyete* function as a source of civic support and as a source of power and influence that is otherwise impossible. But for others, and especially for Haiti's *konvèti*, they represent a dangerous occult power that must be taken as seriously as any official government institution or perhaps even more so.

The pastor's and others' association of *Lame Selès* with *sosyete sekrè* is instructive in several ways. As Stanton Tefft has suggested, "Secrecy enables individuals and groups to manipulate and control their environments by denying outsiders vital information about themselves."¹⁴⁹ Indeed, though not overtly secretive, independent Pentecostal communities cultivate a certain measure of secrecy about their ritual activities. They operate as *egliz de dye* and refuse the name *Lame Selès* in part to protect themselves. Ritual meetings take place in out-of-the-way or difficult-to-find locations. In this way, these communities exercise some degree of control regarding their reputation. After all, many *konvèti* have been warned by pastors or other religious authorities to avoid *Lame Selès* meetings. It would not serve them well to overtly advertise themselves in such contexts. However, it is also true that, regardless of warnings, most *konvèti* know where to can these ritual services and have, at least once in their lives, attended a *jeune* service at one of them.

There are other compelling reasons that these communities are associated with *sosyete sekrè* by many in Haiti. The signature dance of *Lame Selès*, the twirling dance of the prophets and prophetesses, has been linked by several of my informants to the ritual dancing of *Chanpwèl*. Yet *Chanpwèl* ritual practice is so under-documented that it is hard

¹⁴⁹Stanton K. Tefft, "Introduction," in *Secrecy: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1980) 14.

to know if the dance is indeed the same, or if the claim is born out of the assumed identity between the groups. Many of the healing practices and the herbal remedies prescribed by the prophetesses and prophets also evoke an association with sorcery for Haiti's *konvèti* consensus. These kinds of herbal traditions, though, are more closely related to the healing practices of *houngan* and *mambo* than to any of the *sosyete*.

On the whole, the potential points of connection between *sosyete* and communities of independent Pentecostals as seen by outsiders and critics seems primarily based upon superficialities and popular perception rather than concrete features. Despite this, there is an undeniable relationship between independent Pentecostal communities and *sosyete sekrè* in terms of their function. My time among the communities of *La Famille* and *La Piscine* suggests that, just like *sosyete sekrè*, these communities of independent Pentecostals serve to “supplement and in some cases altogether supplant” official judicial and disciplinary institutions that so often fail in service of the poor majority.

Interpersonal disputes and the potential dangers of “life in public,” as *Sè Claudette* described it to me, fall well within the purview of independent Pentecostal healing. In fact, the vast majority of spiritual afflictions to which *Sè Claudette*, *Sè Henri*, and other prophets attended during my fieldwork found their origins in interpersonal and intra-familial disputes. As this chapter will illustrate, the extent to which these afflictions can be healed depends largely upon the afflicted person's willingness to submit to the healing community and withdraw from “life in public” to participate full-time in the communal life of the church. These are the subtlest pathways of healing that occur in independent Pentecostal communities. In many cases, healing requires the cessation of

any effort to engage in official and formal modes of mediation on the part of the afflicted. Instead, the afflicted must accept the community's proposition that the formal legal structures are ill-equipped to deal with the scope and scale of the problem because, by the time the afflicted person seeks spiritual healing, the conflict has become elevated to the level of spirits. In other words, the afflicted must concede that there is "more than can be seen" by judges and lawyers. They must bring their interpersonal or intra-familial conflict into the domain of independent Pentecostal sovereignty, which is the domain of spiritual warfare. Through prayer, patience, and periods of withdrawal into the communal life of the church, the afflicted is tasked with finding healing and justice in the resources of the Spirit-filled community.

Justice is Blind, but Blind Men Still Have Pockets

According to a 2016 study by the *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI)*, bribery and other forms of illegal persuasion remain the most pressing problems facing Haiti's justice system.¹⁵⁰ Thanks to chronic underinvestment, low salaries, and little oversight or accountability, the agents of the state who are tasked with fairness and justice are some of the most vulnerable to influence.¹⁵¹ According to the study, the primary obstacle to reform in Haiti starts with the culture of the system itself. The researchers write, "The elitist and exclusionary culture of Haiti's legal system (...) discriminates against the needs of Haiti's poor and perpetuates impunity for the rich."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Mario Joseph and Nicole Phillips, "Judicial Corruption in Haiti: The Need for Discipline and Civil Society Participation Symposium Commentary," *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review* 39 (2016) 183.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Joseph and Phillips, 185.

Even when there is no bribery involved, the system itself still fails to serve the poor in other ways. For instance, people are often lined up outside the local justice of the peace office in Port-de-Paix as soon as the sun is up in the morning. Administrators, however, often arrive later in the day, and they only have time to advance cases from clients with representation or who have paid to have a clerk file the paperwork in advance. The justice system in Haiti is also composed almost exclusively of men in all but the most cosmopolitan areas of Port-au-Prince, and without representation from men, poor women have very little access or voice in the formal and informal spaces of justice. The lawyers at BAI, for instance, report unusual difficulty getting judges to hear cases of rape without medical documentation acquired within 72 hours of the purported event, even though no such documentation is legally required.¹⁵³

At every stage, Haiti's poor majority struggle to access the legal system. Even when one achieves access, it rarely works in her interests. It is a system that at its most pernicious works to exploit the poor and augment and protect the fortunes of the elite. At its most beneficial, it requires significant time, luck, and money to pursue justice.

For the poor majority, however, there is an additional deterrent to participating in the legal system. Presenting a case before a local justice requires an extreme and risky form of "life in public." There are very few formal procedures for protecting the privacy of claimants in local justice systems. Rooms are small and overcrowded almost all the hours of the day. Claimants are often assisted by a clerk or any of the people standing nearby as they fill out official forms to present their claims. Private disputes are quickly made public when brought before the justice. As *Sè* Claudette warned me, this kind of "life in public" is one of the most dangerous aspects of life in Port-de-Paix. It opens a

¹⁵³Joseph and Phillips, 197.

person to any number of retaliatory attacks, including spiritual attacks.

For these reasons, Haiti's poor majority has little confidence in local systems of justice. Many prefer to access other systems of mediation, justice, and even discipline. This is one of the reasons, for example, that local communities often brutally and publically beat thieves who are caught in the act of stealing. Most people in Port-de-Paix have little faith that a person will be adequately punished for their crimes otherwise. It is also the reason, I suspect, that *sosyete sekrè* have been a necessary supplement to official judicial institutions. It is as Asedy, one of Sè Claudette's clients, suggested: "Justice is blind, but blind men still have pockets."

Afflicted by Injustice

Asedy was one of a handful of clients that stayed at *La Famille* during the entirety of my time with Sè Claudette's community. He considered himself a taxi driver, but he was not working at the time. His two sons, Junior and Franky, came to visit him during the afternoons, and they often brought him water or food from home. The two young boys, however, always returned to sleep at their home with their mother and their teenaged sister.

The first time I met him, Asedy told me that he was sick, but he could not describe to me his illness with much precision. "This is a spiritual hospital, you know. I've come here to be healed," he said. "I would not be here if I was well."

I asked about his family. I wanted to know how they were getting along if he was here all this time and not working. "Don't they suffer when you are away?" I asked.

"Yes, they are suffering. But I am suffering, too. It's important to suffer, though. If you don't suffer, you don't have a testimony to give people. When you walk with

Jesus, you are supposed to carry a cross. A cross is something that makes you suffer, like being hungry, poor, naked, sick, or mistreated — like this sickness that I have.”

I did not understand, though, exactly what his sickness was. He described to me that his limbs felt heavy. Sometimes he felt like something was biting him in his chest. Sometimes, he said, it felt like there were birds fluttering their wings inside him. It was, he said, *nanm*. Although the word in Haiti typically means something like a “soul,” among independent Pentecostal communities *nanm* specifically referred to the soul of a little child. It was an affliction that affected “your body or your head,” according to Asedy, but it was not understood as “possession.” Asedy was in control of his mind and his body, even though afflicted. He was in control of his words. But, despite this, he said he was losing control of his life.

Asedy’s affliction and the story of failed local justice in his life that unfolded over the few months of our relationship offered entry into the more subtle pathways of healing in communities of independent Pentecostals. Patience and prayer in the seclusion of these houses of healing offered an opportunity for the afflicted to temporarily escape “life in public,” to withdraw from the demands of daily life, and to reconcile themselves to the fact of systemic injustice. Achieving reconciliation in these circumstances involves a careful distribution of blame and a responsibility that serves to recalibrate standards of justice.

Rape and Sorcery

When I met him, Asedy had been staying at *La Famille*, without leaving even once, for five months. He lived in the neighborhood of Ripidis. He was acquainted with the community prior to coming to stay there, though he had only come for Sunday

services prior. As a child, he had always dreamed of being a lawyer. He was good at French in school, he said, and he even knew a little Latin. He never made it past the grade level in Haiti known as *rhet* (approximately tenth grade). His family, like most in the area, was too poor to continue paying his school expenses, and teachers rarely showed up at the *lycée* (the free state school). He began driving a taxi in his teenaged years before the “taxi boom” in Port-de-Paix. Over the last two decades, the number of taxis has far surpassed the number of pedestrians that can regularly pay for their services. As a consequence, every intersection and especially those near missions or foreign aid organizations are crowded with waiting taxis at all hours of the day. Most taxi drivers technically rent their taxis from one of a handful of wealthy taxi businesses. Drivers are obligated to pay a fixed amount every week to the owner of their moped scooter, and the rest they keep as income. Increasingly, taxi drivers found it hard to break even. Still, as Asedy suggested, “It keeps us occupied.” In a context of chronic underemployment, doing something is better than doing nothing.

It took a long time for Asedy to begin to describe the circumstances that led to his affliction. Once he was convinced that I had no interest in making his situation worse, Asedy agreed to tell me his story. In the spring of 2015, Asedy’s teenaged daughter was raped by one of her friends in the neighborhood. In contrast to stories I have heard from other fathers in Port-de-Paix, Asedy went to great lengths to care for his daughter and support her. He and his daughter went to the doctor as soon as he learned what had happened. After an examination, the doctor confirmed that she had been raped. “She had bruises on her arms and legs,” Asedy told me. “This kind of thing happens here a lot,” he

said. “But, it is very bad for my daughter, and she has a lot of trouble in the neighborhood and at school.”

It was also very bad for Asedy. His daughter identified her assailant as the oldest son of the man who lived at the end of their street in the valley below Ripidis. He was, in Asedy’s words, “*gwo nèg*.” In Haitian culture, a *gwo nèg* (a big man) is the term for a person of significance and influence. In this case, the *gwo nèg* was a very well-known pastor, whose church was one of the biggest and most visible *konvèti* communities in the area. Asedy agonized for weeks about what he should do. He knew that the pastor needed to be told, but he was worried about the risk to his own social standing if he confronted the man. Asedy considered himself a “small man” in relation to the pastor. He worried that the pastor would not believe him, or worse.

“After a lot of praying and not sleeping, I went to the pastor’s house, and I told him. I thought he should help us with some money to pay for the doctor and for helping my daughter,” he told me. “But, he only told me he would talk to his boy. A few days after that, a lawyer came to my house and gave me papers. It said the pastor was suing me for defamation of character.”

Hearing this from Asedy did not surprise me. When I was living in Port-de-Paix in 2004, I had encountered a similar legal predicament. I was robbed several times within the same month. One evening, I waited for the thief, caught him in the act of entering the house through a window, and I realized that he was someone I knew from the neighborhood. Instead of trying to detain him, I talked with him. He denied having stolen anything, and I sent him on his way. Naively, I filed a report with the police the following day. Within a week, I received papers calling me to court, not to testify against the man,

but to defend myself against charges that I had defamed the man by accusing him of theft. As a foreigner, however, I was in a privileged position. The local judge dismissed the case against me as a money-grabbing scheme (supported by the fact that the thief's lawyer was asking for \$50,000 U.S. in damages). Still, there were legal fees to pay. Asedy's situation was much more difficult. He was accused by a *gwo nèg* (a "big man"—a well-known man of influence). The judge was not likely to dismiss his case, and even if he would have, Asedy could not afford legal representation to make that happen.

"I didn't know what to do," Asedy said, "so I went back to the doctor. He wrote a document for me that said that my daughter was raped. I took it to the judge, but the judge said I needed to come back with a lawyer. I could not do that. So again I did a lot of praying and thinking. I went again to the pastor and told him to pay me, and I told him that the judge had ordered it. I didn't have a paper from the judge, but I thought the judge would have ordered him to pay me if I had a lawyer. The pastor said, 'Ok, ok. I will pay you in April.' But, without papers, I was stressed."

The month of April came and went. In May, Asedy went back to the pastor. This time, though, the pastor had a different message for him. Asedy repeated the pastor's words very slowly for me: "*Gade! Kite sa, pa vin ankò. Ou pa vle kontinye sa.*" ("Look! Leave this, don't come again. You don't want to continue this.") The pastor's words stayed with Asedy. Over the next few months, Asedy says that he started to feel very ill. His symptoms, the symptoms that he had when I met him, began to appear. Slowly, a little more every day, he became weak. He could not think. He could not work. He could not eat. He could not sleep. He knew something was wrong, and he suspected that he knew exactly the cause — the pastor.

Asedy's narrative, while perhaps an extreme example, demonstrates the sense of danger that many among Haiti's poor experience as part of their daily "life in public." Asedy's social world is rife with dangers, and a conflict like this placed him at an increased risk of disaster on all fronts — social, legal, economic, and spiritual. The systems of justice that exist in Port-de-Paix, like those throughout Haiti, offer the poor little recourse. Even with evidence of his claims against the pastor, he was unable to make the system work to his benefit. Taking matters into his own hands opened him up to a possible malevolent spiritual attack. Even in the best-case scenario, Asedy knew there would be little he could do. "From the start," he told me, "I knew that a big problem had come to my house."

From Asedy's perspective, all of the pathways for seeking justice were dangerous and opaque. He did not know exactly why the evidence had to be presented on a paper and written by a lawyer, but he was willing to do it. He did not understand for whose interests the judge was working, but he was willing to try. The pastor himself presented an even more dangerous problem. As a pastor and a *gwo nèg*, the pastor had access to a set of powers that could make Asedy's situation much worse. The pastor had legal and economic resources that could destroy him. Asedy also believed that the pastor, whom he called a *charlatan* and a *bokò*, had access to spiritual forces that could destroy him.

Spiritual Diagnosis

It was not until he finally went to a *jeune* at *La Famille* that he received an official diagnosis. Asedy was quite shy, and he tells me that he did not identify himself as afflicted during the healing part of the *jeune*. "I love to dance and sing," he said, "but I did not want people to see me like this. I was so weak and so tired." Instead, he waited

until the drumming, dancing, and singing had concluded. He approached *Sè Claudette* as everyone was leaving, and he told her his symptoms — fatigue, sleeplessness, weakness in his limbs, and a fluttering in his chest.

“What did *Sè Claudette* say when you described this to her?” I asked.

“She told me I was sick — that someone had sent *nanm* to me. *Sentespri* told me I was sick,” he replied.

“Wait,” I interrupted, “was it *Sè Claudette* or *Sentespri*?”

“It was *Sentespri*. *Sentespri* showed me I was sick. *Sè Clau* told me with her words,” he explained. “She told me that I needed to stay here to pray and read. I sent my boys home to get my things, and I haven’t been home since then.”

I was surprised to hear how eagerly *Asedy* submitted to *Sè Claudette*’s diagnosis and instructions. The task of the prophet or prophetess in these communities is aided by the fact that those who come to the *jeune* are often seeking validation for an affliction that they already believe they have. In *Asedy*’s case, he suspected the source of his affliction and simply needed confirmation from a spiritual expert. *Sè Claudette*, attuned to spiritual affliction, had little trouble discerning the problem. In fact, according to *Asedy*, *Sè Claudette* even told him that the source of the affliction was in his neighborhood — someone that he knew. For *Asedy*, *Sè Claudette*’s ability to discern the source with this kind of specificity just augmented her credibility.

Such successes are precisely how *Sè Claudette* and other prophets and prophetesses build their socio-spiritual prestige. However, any newly earned prestige has to be accompanied by an effective cure, and this is a much more difficult domain of prophetic work in these communities. In cases of supernatural affliction with specific and

uncomplicated physical symptoms, prophets and prophetesses often prescribe effective herbal remedies. Nausea, diarrhea, coughs, and fevers are frequent among the afflicted, and such maladies are treated with a surprising degree of success. Treating *nanm* that present with vague symptoms like Asedy's, however, is a much more significant challenge. Healing the physical body is much easier than healing the social body.

Sè Claudette was incapable of resolving the situation that produced Asedy's affliction directly. To approach the pastor would put *Sè Claudette* and her community at significant risk, and neither *Sè Claudette* nor her community had the social capital or economic resources to bring about a legal solution to the problem. The justice system, although *Sè Claudette* considered it endowed with the authority of God, was not her domain. As in other cases, these communities instead insist that there is more to the situation than can be quickly or easily perceived by anyone — even a judge. It is in this space of “more than” that Pentecostal communities intervene, because it is here that these communities possess the means to effect change.

In Asedy's case, the experience of profound injustice, a failure of justice produced by a lack of access to legal resources, meant that justice had to be sought in a different domain. Recognizing that the impacts on his body were being wrought at the level of spiritual affliction immediately placed the injustice within reach and presented him with resources and experts — indeed, an entire army — that could fight for justice on his behalf and bring healing to his social world.

Prescribing Prayer, Enlisting Labor

In circumstances like these, *Sè Claudette* and *Sè Henri* both had constructed a system of healing into their communities. At all times, both prophetesses were

surrounded by what I first believed were domestic laborers. At *La Famille*, Tanyès, Neila, and Asedy all were a constant presence during the months that I spent with the community. They carried water, ran errands, washed and ironed clothes, and prepared food under *Sè Claudette*'s oversight. At *La Piscine*, a much larger community, there were more than ten people present at all times and involved in all parts of the daily functioning of the community. In time, I learned that all of these were spiritually afflicted individuals. Such people stayed in these communities full-time patiently waiting for healing. But, in all cases, it was healing that could not immediately be accomplished by a prophet or prophetess. Instead, what was prescribed for them was patience, prayer, and withdrawal from social life.

When not engaged in daily chores for *Sè Claudette*, Asedy napped, prayed, or read from the Psalms. He participated in every *jeune*, every bible study, and every Sunday church service, and he did this week after week for nine months. By the time my fieldwork concluded, Asedy said he was beginning to feel much better and was thinking about going home.

The Immanence of Affliction

By insisting that there is always more than can be discerned in every situation, these Pentecostals appear to run the risk of ignoring concrete factors of disease, injustice, and insecurity. By locating the source of injustice in the spiritual realm, it would seem that Pentecostals avoid challenging the social, political, and economic forces, and the actual agents who bear responsibility. However, though these Pentecostal communities consider the spiritual domain to be invisible, they also understand it as a radically

immanent domain. The embodied performances of spiritual affliction and *fòs Sentespri* are but a single example of this nearness.

Locating the source of injustice in an invisible domain is but the first step toward impacting the concrete condition of affliction. In contrast to the judge who exercises his sovereign judgment squarely in the concrete, material world, *Sè Claudette* specializes in the invisible. To place it there is to place it precisely within her reach. Rather than a psychological or emotional salve, *Sè Claudette* aims to do real work and effect concrete changes in *Asedy's* condition by grabbing ahold of the unseen and the imperceptible and carefully bend *Asedy's* fate toward his comfort, dignity, and peace.

One of the primary criticisms of these communities from other Haitian *konvèti* centers on this very fact. A pastor at a large Baptist church suggested that his church also conducted services that were “hot” and many people are healed. “We have services like this, too,” he said, “but our services don’t involve touching. Why must their prophets touch people like this? Why do they use medicines and oils? The Holy Spirit doesn’t work this way.”

The pastor was expressing concern about the way that these independent Pentecostals seem to have entangled spirits and matter. In the pastor’s more characteristically Protestant perspective, the Holy Spirit is immaterial and therefore requires no material to operate. Independent Pentecostals, on the other hand, contend that the spiritual and material worlds are inseparable. The *fòs Sentespri*, like all spirits, is unknowable outside its manifestation in a body. The afflictions of bad spirits are only afflictions insofar as they impact the flesh-and-blood bodies of the afflicted. For

independent Pentecostals, then, because the spiritual world articulates itself in and through the material world, it must be engaged in that way.

Fòs is not something that these communities cultivate as a way of transcending or escaping the circumstances of life. Rather, it is something that is brought into the concrete, material circumstances of life to offer an alternative mode of addressing those circumstances. In complex cases like Asedy's, in which the possibility of justice seems out of reach with every decision, processes of spiritual healing become, at least in part, a process of reconciling oneself to the reality of injustice rather than just seeking justice. Asedy's daughter and his entire family certainly have a notion of what would constitute justice in this case, and it would involve, primarily, economic help from the pastor's family. The social and psychological damage was done, but for Asedy, payment would help him attend to his daughter's and his family's needs. More importantly, perhaps, payment from the pastor would signify the pastor's acceptance of responsibility for the misdeeds of his own family.

Assigning Blame

Philosophers have long debated what constitutes human responsibility, and even more so, when and in what circumstances a person is rightly held morally responsible for an action. Christopher Cowley, in a discussion of the various ways that philosophers have understood the concept of moral responsibility, suggests, "The agent's freedom is a necessary condition for the agent being morally responsible for the act."¹⁵⁴ In other words, the concept of moral responsibility is inherently tied to a notion of free will. If an agent is unable to choose to act differently, then she is not held morally responsible for

¹⁵⁴Christopher Cowley, *Moral Responsibility* (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2014) 8.

their actions. This, however, is not the same question as the question of blame, which resides with an observer. Blame, according to Peter Strawson, is but one of many possible “reactive attitudes” with which a person might evaluate the actions of another.¹⁵⁵ There are always other possibilities, each reflecting varying perspectives on the existence of human free will. A person may respond to the actions of an agent to which he ascribes “responsibility” with “admiration, contempt, delight, ridicule, gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, [...] reward and punishment.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, blaming is an action that resides, finally, with the offended agent, not with the acting agent. The offended agent is capable of determining from within a range of possibilities what will be the best course of action, where “best” is taken to mean the most productive and conducive to the offended agent’s personal happiness and sense of well being.

Matthew Talbert has further dissected the question of blame and responsibility from the perspective of moral philosophy. He suggests that, in some cases, a person may be blamed in the sense that the impacts of her actions can be attributed directly to her, but not be held accountable. Attributability and accountability are, for Talbert, not a single consideration. Additionally, choosing to assign blame also does not necessitate the expression of that blame. He writes, “Perhaps a particular piece of moral criticism applies just as well to me as to the person that I propose to blame, so it would be hypocritical of me to offer the criticism; or perhaps the criticism would be, in one way or another, pointless, cruel, or excessive.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵Peter Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Routledge, 2008), quoted in Cowley, page 3.

¹⁵⁶Cowley, 3.

¹⁵⁷Matthew Talbert, *Moral Responsibility* (Malden: Polity Press, 2016) 61.

Perhaps most importantly, the process of assigning blame and the moral evaluation that comes with it is, for the blamer, a claim to total knowledge of the circumstances and social conditions in which the offense occurred. Marion Smiley writes, “The causal responsibility of an individual for external harm requires both a mediator and a set of social and political norms, neither of which an individual can possibly control.”¹⁵⁸ Smiley’s suggestions are an important intervention into the philosophical discussion of blame. The assignment of blame is, fundamentally, a social and political practice. The “rightness” of any ascription of blame is entirely dependent upon the social and political field in which it occurs, and it assumes specific kinds of subjects — those possessing free will who are operating outside the influence of compulsions, whether biological or social. Ultimately, blaming is a mode of constructing the boundaries of community. The more agents are held responsible for their actions through the ascription of blame, the more those agents are drawn inside the boundaries of the blaming community. In contrast, the less often blame is assigned to actors, the fewer are those who find themselves included in the blaming community. In Smiley’s words, “Our communities shrink as a result of our reluctance to hold particular individuals causally responsible for harm.”¹⁵⁹ It is in this sense that blaming is most fundamentally a social practice.

These insights from moral philosophy offer us some perspective on the healing practices of independent Pentecostals. Asedy’s story is illustrative of the difficulty faced by Haiti’s poor majority. The expression of blame, in situations like this, is unlikely to benefit Asedy or his family. In the words of Talbert, his expression of blame, regardless

¹⁵⁸Marion Smiley, *Moral Responsibility and the Boundaries of Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) 225.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 212.

of his perception that the pastor is responsible, achieves no positive gains in his life or the life of his family; it is “pointless.”¹⁶⁰ In fact, for Asedy, the ascription of blame is more than pointless. Instead, it actually opens him and his family to significant social and spiritual harm. One of the first things that Sè Claudette’s healing environment achieves is a disengagement from the social practice of blaming. By identifying an afflicting spirit, attributability is immediately made more complex. The pastor is not directly responsible for Asedy’s illness. Rather, Asedy’s symptoms are being caused by a *nanm*, an entity that is an unambiguous enemy for Pentecostals. Pursuing a measure of justice with the pastor is exchanged, in Sè Claudette’s community, for engagement with the afflicting spirit — a more direct and accessible agent of harm for Asedy.

More importantly, however, is the social impact of this decision to displace blame to the realm of spirits. Critics and analysts of Pentecostalism more generally have often suggested that Pentecostalism as a religious practice and identity is appealing to the poor and disenfranchised because it extrapolates from concrete social circumstances to the indecipherable domain of spirit. This perspective has historically operated as a form of social deprivation theory, which suggests that those who lack certain social and material resources, but live in contexts in which others do have these resources, will engage in social actions designed to acquire those resources or surrogates for those resources. In the study of Pentecostalism, beginning with Robert Mapes Anderson’s *Vision of the Disinherited*, scholars suggested that the appeal of Pentecostalism was primarily based upon such conditions of deprivation, which led Pentecostals to seek access and

¹⁶⁰Talbert, 61.

affirmation by other means.¹⁶¹ Too often, however, deprivation theory has led scholars and readers to conclude that Pentecostalism offers exceedingly poor substitutes — spiritual and imaginary rather than concrete and material benefits. Such analyses suggest that religious motives are insignificant on their own and are only reflective of social and economic concerns.¹⁶² Technically, such analyses operate in two different ways. On the one hand, they operate as a compensationalist model in which Pentecostals make up for their social and material deprivation with otherworldly, psychotherapeutic benefits. The same argument can also lead to a functionalist model, which suggests that Pentecostalism primarily supplies the community with the kinds of support that enable the community to navigate the impacts of social and economic deprivation.¹⁶³ Grant Wacker’s assessment of the growth of American Pentecostalism, on the other hand, offers a perspective on the way that Pentecostalism holds the transcendent and immanent in productive tension. He identifies this productive tension as the difference between the “primitive and the pragmatic,” which can also be understood as the difference between the ideal and the real or principle and practicality.¹⁶⁴ This insight offers an important corrective to other models that favor either one side or the other in the equation. Instead, spiritualizing tendencies serve Pentecostals in both domains — by drawing them closer to the principles of their religious community and also by offering practical approaches for managing the concrete experiences of their material and social circumstances.

¹⁶¹Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

¹⁶²Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 10.

¹⁶³Wacker, 10.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

In Asedy's case, it is clear that *La Famille* supplies him with necessary support for navigating a social world that refuses him and his daughter any real justice. Wacker's analysis, however, provides insight into the cosmological vision with which Asedy and the community head down this path of healing. For members of *Sè Claudette's* community, there can be no spiritual solution that is not also a practical, concrete solution. To the extent that the spirit world is influenced, so also will that influence be manifested in the bodies of the community.

Conversations with *Sè Claudette* and *Sè Henri* demonstrated this perspective to me. For example, one warm afternoon at *Sè Claudette's* place, I talked with her while she concocted several medicines for the *jeune* that was to occur the following day. She crouched over her medicine table, which was no more than a folding card table covered with a vinyl tablecloth. Trays with herbs, garlic, citrons, and various toiletries were strewn across the table. She was, at that time, mashing garlic, citron, and toothpaste in a mortar and pestle. She had a second bowl that contained pureed beets, coconut, and carrots mixed with some kind of fragrant oil.

"What are these medicines for, *Sè Claudette*?" I asked.

"It is medicine, *Frè Leonard*. What do you mean? It is for making your body better," she answered with her typically incredulous tone.

"How does it work?" I asked. "Does it work because of the things in the medicine or because of *Sentespri*? Some pastors downtown tell me that the power of *Sentespri* is enough to heal people without the medicine."

"It works because of both," she responded without looking up. She was pulverizing the garlic-citron-toothpaste mixture.

“So, can I make medicines, too, and *Sentespri* will work with those medicines? For example, can I put together mango, garlic and citron? Will *Sentespri* work with that medicine?” I asked. *Sè* Claudette laughed and laughed. She looked over her shoulder at me as she pounded the pestle into the wooden mortar.

“Mango does not do anything! What are you saying?” *Sè* Claudette laughed. “You cannot just choose anything and make a medicine.”

“So the materials of the medicine are important. *Sentespri* cannot do work with all kinds of medicines. Right?” I asked, knowing that I was pressing her.

“You do not understand,” *Sè* Claudette answered. “You never understand these things. White people and people in Miami [Haitians] are not interested in these medicines. For those people, I might just pray, and *Sentespri* could still do work for them. But, here, it is different. In Haiti, everyone knows these medicines work. They do things to your body, and *Sentespri* can do work, too.”

“So, you are telling me that you would work differently in Miami than you do here in Haiti? What is the difference?” I asked.

“If the medicines work, then they work even more with *Sentespri*. But you cannot choose anything. You must choose medicines that work. White people use medicines all the time, but they don’t even know what they can do. People brush teeth every morning, but they don’t know that toothpaste can drive away bad spirits. But, here, people know this. So, it’s different. It’s *Sentespri*, and it’s medicine. It is both at the same time,” *Sè* Claudette rebutted. She put her medicines into washed plastic butter tubs, pressed down the lid, and walked out the back door to stand in the breeze.

For *Sè Claudette*, there are not clear boundaries between the work of *Sentespri* and the biological and chemical effects of the substances that she combines to make “medicine.” Of course, she does not deny that *Sentespri* is capable of working in the absence of medicine, but this is also not her preferred method of healing. She is certain that these medicines work, and she suggests that other Haitians in Haiti also know this is true. So when the work of *Sentespri* is combined with the medicine, the power of the Spirit is made manifest in the material bodies of the afflicted. My questions, solely designed to interrogate the limits of each, were irrelevant questions. The material world is the medium through which spiritual forces are made effective. To try to separate the two is like trying to separate the knowledge of a surgeon from the movement of her hands and her scalpel.

When *Sè Claudette* asks a person to stay in her community, separated from their normal social life, she is not asking them simply to exchange material and social life for an imagined spiritual life. Instead, she is asking them to submit to a series of prescribed spiritual therapies that will necessarily impact material and social life. Asedy, for example, was in an impossible situation. Every strategy available to him risked opening his life to increasing dangers in every domain of his life, from the economic and legal to the social and spiritual. All of this was condensed in his body as illness, and within the community of *La Famille* the illness could be addressed at the invisible but efficacious level of spirits.

The social impact of these strategies is significant. Diffusing blame within the realm of spirits is not a rejection of concrete material causes, but it is an acknowledgment and an affirmation of the opaqueness of agency in situations of social conflict like this.

Was the pastor to blame for the actions of his son? Or was he only responsible for his failure to respond to the accusations? Furthermore, the pastor too is socially bound to care for his family and to seek to protect them from harm, just as Asedy was. Could Asedy really evaluate him as morally “bad” in that case? Was that hypocrisy? How free were any of them to begin with?

The messiness of a conflict like this can only be rectified by a judge through a process of simplification that would find some individual agent responsible for things undeniably outside of his or her control. Furthermore, justice as it would be pronounced from a judge would only serve to increase Asedy’s confidence that he should express blame towards the pastor and his family, the results of which would be extremely uncertain. The potential for economic benefit in such a situation would potentially be outweighed by the spiritual and social dangers it would pose to Asedy and his family. The healing therapies at *Sè Claudette’s* community, therefore, are not just a means of coping with injustice, and neither are they designed to achieve an imaginary, transcendent justice. Rather, these therapies are strategies born out of the productive tension between the ideal and the real. These strategies draw the interpersonal conflict into the domain of spiritual warfare where it can be engaged by Asedy and the community of spiritual warriors. These therapies provide Asedy and others a means of navigating the fraught social space of conflict too often animated by overly simple ascriptions of blame and responsibility.

Accepting Responsibility

In addition to complicating the afflicted person’s ability to assign blame to a single agent, the healing practices of independent Pentecostal communities also require

the afflicted to assess their own responsibility in the situation. In these communities, there was never any spiritual scapegoating. In fact, discernment of spiritual affliction always led to an indictment of the moral standing of the afflicted.

During my research, I spent every Sunday afternoon at *Sè Claudette's*. Once the Sunday church service had concluded, *Sè Claudette* would eat lunch, change her clothes, and bring her portable DVD player out to the table where she normally prepared medicines. She had a vast collection of films produced by filmmakers from Miami and Port-au-Prince. Her favorite films, she told me, were the "*konvèti*" type. I discovered that *konvèti* has become its own genre among the Haitian diaspora film industry. The majority of the films that *Sè Claudette* had purchased employed the same set of actors and actresses, and the star of these films was a popular evangelical pastor named Pastor Reno. The pastor played himself in every film, though the plots were entirely fictional and often sensationalistic. Each film concluded with a call to repentance and long period of music and dance filmed in his actual church congregation in Miami.

Pastor Reno's films told stories about spiritual attacks that came from his in-laws, from his friends, and from his cousins in Haiti. In each of four films that *Sè Claudette* watched frequently, his extended family's jealousy of his position and his prosperity led them to send malevolent spiritual forces upon him. Sometimes, the family would do this while visiting him in Miami, and other times, they would send these spiritual attacks from afar. In each case, however, the pastor had to spend long periods of time in prayer and in solitude, usually in the comfort of his Lexus SUV or sitting behind his stately desk at his church office.

In the films the pastor always discovered through prayerful introspection a moral failing of his own that had to be addressed before he could be freed from the spiritual attacks of his jealous family. In *Sè Claudette*'s favorite film, his mother-in-law came to stay in his huge Miami house, but out of jealousy, she hides several *pakèt* (magical bundles) around the pastor's home. He and his wife both become physically ill, he loses several friends to accidents and illness, and he becomes unable to preach on Sundays to his church. Eventually, the pastor discovers that the source of the affliction is that he has not been faithfully praying for his mother-in-law's "conversion" and "salvation" in Jesus' name. Once he begins to do this, he is given the *fòs* to conduct a healing exorcism over his mother-in-law and his home. At the end, the entire family, including his mother-in-law, is seen walking into church arm-in-arm as the pastor stands up to preach.

In *Sè Claudette*'s and *Sè Henri*'s communities, spiritual affliction is likewise understood to reveal moral weaknesses in the afflicted person. The afflicted person is not necessarily blamed for their own affliction; however, the person is always deemed responsible for some kind of weakness of faith that produced vulnerability to spiritual attack. In this way, these communities cultivate a sense of moral responsibility in members. If a person is spiritually afflicted, especially in complex interpersonal social conflicts like Asedy's, then the person must invest himself in the introspective processes of prayer and patience that will uncover their own moral failings.

Systems of Secrecy

Judges, like doctors and police, are ambiguous authorities among independent Pentecostals. The legal system itself is a system of opacity, and entering it is filled with risks for Haiti's poor majority. Asedy's story highlights these risks and the anxiety, fear,

and frustration that accompany experiences of long-standing injustice. Like *sosyete sekrè*, communities of independent Pentecostals serve as alternative systems of justice, intervening at the socio-spiritual level — a domain of sovereignty for these spiritual warriors. The afflicted are withdrawn from their “life in public” to pursue healing through prayer and patience. Overly simple attributions of blame are diffused, and the complexity of social relations is affirmed. The afflicted are asked to look inward, to examine their own moral life, and to discern their own level of responsibility for their suffering. Prophets and prophetesses, like *Sè Claudette* and *Sè Henri*, engage the long-term afflicted in the daily labor of the community: cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and carrying water. This system of communalism is a boon for the entire community, and the simplicity and solitude of their labor may be therapeutic on its own.

This approach to healing is illustrative of how these Pentecostal communities understand the relationship between the invisible world of the Spirit and spirits and the material and social realities of their lives. Afflicting spirits and *Sentespri* alike are profoundly immanent forces. Though they are not material, their impacts always are. Spirits manifest in and through the objects, bodies, and relations of the community. Thereby, processes of spiritual healing should not be understood as mere coping strategies or efforts at transcendence. Rather, these processes aim to address the socio-spiritual self and its socio-spiritual context.

CONCLUSION: MUSIC AS LAW, SPIRITUAL WARFARE AS SOVEREIGNTY

*Marshal your troops now, city of troops,
For a siege is laid against us.
They will strike Israel's ruler
On the cheek with a rod.*

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are small among the clans of Judah,
Out of you will come for me
One who will be ruler over Israel,
Whose origins are from of old,
From ancient times. (Micah 5:1)*

These were pastor Jean-Pierre's favorite lines from the Bible. Every day that I sat and visited with him the summer before he died, he held his Bible open to Micah chapter 5. He would read it over and over aloud to himself, shaking his head up and down in approval. *Sè Claudette* says that, before he died, he asked that it be read aloud every day in his community. Since his death, Pastor Wisner, the new pastor of *Sè Claudette's* community, reads it at the beginning of every service. Despite having spent much time with Jean-Pierre and his community, I can only speculate about why he loved these words so much. I suspect that Jean-Pierre imagined his community of Pentecostals, though "small among the clans" of Haiti's *konvèti*, to have been called up to the frontlines in a spiritual war. The community is a perennial underdog, being primarily composed of the poor and the sick. The institutions and authorities designed to protect them, to serve them, and to heal them seem often to work against their best interests or to

ignore them completely. Jean-Pierre imagined his community of spiritual warriors like David with a slingshot staring down a horde of Goliaths.

Idioms of Excess

Spirit-filled dancing and ritual music have been at the center of Haitian popular culture throughout its history. The original political, social, and economic conditions that bore these ritual practices were hostile, violent, exploitative, and elitist. As preceding chapters have demonstrated, despite foreign and domestic interventionism into the lives of Haiti's poor majority and the discourse of improvement that accompany them, Haiti's poor stand a world apart from the economic, legal, and health resources that flow endlessly into their lives. NGOs and missionaries, often despite their best intentions, are perceived and experienced by the poor as just another part of the inaccessible world of the elite. In these conditions, the fiercely independent communities of Pentecostals take great pride in their creative ability to generate resources, provide healing, and most of all, to wage war against all these pernicious forces and the spirits that surround them, and ultimately, exceed them.¹⁶⁵

In an effort to untangle what appear to be contradictory understandings of global Pentecostal culture, Joel Robbins suggests that it is Pentecostalism's "openness to local spiritual languages" that allows it to be and mean different things in different places.¹⁶⁶ He writes, "Through such preservation [of local cosmologies], [Pentecostalism] avails itself of locally meaningful idioms for talking about the past and about current social

¹⁶⁵See Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992) 36-38.

¹⁶⁶Joel Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (January 1, 2004) 129.

problems — for spirits always are a language for talking about broader concerns.”¹⁶⁷ The preceding chapters have illustrated very explicit examples of this kind of spirit language among independent Pentecostals in Haiti, and I have attempted to situate the spirits within the web of challenges that comprise daily life among Haiti’s poor.

Yet attempting to explain or decode the meaning of spirits as idioms is to make the same mistake that “white doctors” make when they dismiss spiritual affliction as “idioms of stress.” These independent Pentecostal communities differentiate themselves from such analyses of affliction precisely by affirming the reality of the spirits. Rather than identifying spirits as a language for broader concerns, I have attempted to treat spirits as an idiom of excess. In every case of affliction that I encountered during my fieldwork, whether an affliction manifested as physical illness or mental illness, discerning and diagnosing the affliction as spiritual served to resolve the issue, not by simplifying it and assigning it to an imaginary realm, but rather by affirming the complexity of causality, the web of relations, and the afflicted person’s inability to perceive things in totality.

The excessiveness of life for Haiti’s poor majority is not the same as the material excess of Haiti’s elite or of Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago. Rather, their experience of excess is an experience of opacity, of indecipherability, and powerlessness. Therefore, the practice of spiritual warfare is a way of gaining a foothold on the invisible forces that inevitably impact daily life. To confront economic challenges, poor health, violence, or interpersonal conflict simply through visible institutions is rarely adequate for these Pentecostals. It would be like trying to cure cancer with outpatient surgery. It can be

¹⁶⁷Robbins, 129.

effective in the simplest of cases. Far more often, however, surgery is inadequate. The excess that escapes the surgeon's tools is no less dangerous for being imperceptible.

Nanm, *zonbi*, and *baka* are names for the too-muchness of human life, but so is *Sentespri*, for not everything that escapes perception works against our best interests. In fact, the theology of these Haitian Pentecostals affirms that there is no greater force than *Sentespri*. From the seemingly miraculous successes of the Haitian revolution until the present, independent Pentecostals affirm that this great force has been working on their behalf to bring healing, to bring justice, and to bring prosperity. Thus, while spiritual warfare has sometimes been perceived as a pessimistic vision of life which sees spiritual harm at every turn, in these Pentecostal communities it expresses an unflagging optimism that the most efficacious forces in the unseen world are also the most benevolent, preferring healing to illness, peace to conflict, and freedom to bondage.

Lame Selès Futures

There is no clear consensus concerning the etymology of the word *lwa*, the name for the “spirits” in Haitian *Vodou*. Although linguists have traced the word to its likely origin in a family of Yoruba words like *oluwa* meaning “gods,” it also has a homologous and homophonic relationship to the French word *lois* meaning “laws.” Kate Ramsey’s book title, *The Spirits and the Law*, plays on this very fact. However, Ramsey suggests that this long-acknowledged resonance with the French *lois* should not be readily dismissed.¹⁶⁸ Double resonances like this abound in Haitian language and culture. The *lwa*, then, are not gods or the law; the *lwa* are both gods and the law. The *lwa* constitute the center of popular religious culture in Haiti. Service of the *lwa* is recognition that they

¹⁶⁸Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 6.

are the law. It is recognition of the conditions of a life lived well. The *lwa*, like the law, mark limits beyond which a life may no longer cohere. However, the *lwa*, like laws, make demands on their subjects. Finally, the *lwa*, like the law, can be benevolent or pernicious, steady or capricious, but they must be served all the same.

Sosyete sekrè, like *Bizango* and *Chanpwèl*, have at times bridged the gap between the demands of the *lwa* and the laws of the state. Surely this is why *sosyete* have historically experienced less hostility from the state and the Catholic Church, even in times of severe persecution of the practices of *Vodouizan* more generally. It is, however, also noteworthy that these societies are associated with the “hot” *Petwo* style rather than the *lwa* of the *Rada* style rituals. The *Petwo lwa* are aggressive. They do not ask or negotiate for power. These are the *lwa* that Maya Deren describes as “more hard, more tough, more stern; less tolerant and forgiving, more practical and demanding.”¹⁶⁹ Associated more closely with the violence of the revolution but also with *Kongo* traditions, *Petwo* “is the rage against the evil fate which the African suffered [...]. It is the violence that rose out of that rage, to protest against it.”¹⁷⁰ Perhaps, then, the sovereignty possessed by *sosyete sekrè* has less to do with their capitulation to the law of the state and the elites whose interests it represents and more to do with their well-known and established power to resist and even destroy the state itself.

Previously, I recounted how pastor Jean-Pierre described music as something that comes *après Dieu* (“after God”), just like police, judges, and doctors. This means, according to *Sè Claudette*, that they are endowed with the authority of God to maintain

¹⁶⁹ Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New York: McPherson and Company, 1983) 61.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

order in this world. It is surely no coincidence that one of the older names for the *lwa*, in addition to names still in use today like *Les Mystères* and *Les Invisibles*, is *Les Après Dieu*, or “those who come after God.” For *Vodouizan*, the *lwa* are endowed with authority to oversee and intervene in the world and in the social lives of humans. They maintain order, and they establish limits. For these independent Pentecostals, however, the *lwa* are usurpers of sovereignty. They are demonic forces whose “laws” are no laws at all.

Like the historical role of *sosyete sekrè*, independent Pentecostal communities are engaged in a battle for sovereignty. The military ethos of these communities, their *Petwo*-inspired duple-meter rhythms, their spinning *Chanpwèl*-like dances, and their sometimes violent engagement with afflicting spirits should perhaps not surprise. Like the *lwa* of *Petwo*, independent Pentecostal spiritual warfare is born out of the anguish of a violent and exploitative contemporary history. That these communities extend the sovereign claims of warfare all the way back to the success of the revolution illustrates the desire to bring even the gods and ancestors of the revolution, esteemed by so many Haitians, under the sovereign rule of *Sentespri*.

In recent decades, Haiti’s religious demographics have begun to register a shift away from Catholicism and toward various Protestant denominations. The Protestant population is now approaching 30%.¹⁷¹ The earthquake of 2010, it seems, has served as a catalyst for some of that change, though as the first chapter demonstrates, it is a change that has been underway for many decades. The preceding chapters have primarily focused upon the spiritual war waged by these communities and the way that the practice

¹⁷¹The CIA World Factbook (www.cia.gov/worldfactbook) lists 28.5% for Protestants based on 2015 census data.

of spiritual affliction and healing confronts and challenges the impact of an array of transnational and domestic forces. However, if current religious trends continue, such communities of independent Pentecostals, though now “small among the clans,” may indeed come to hold a place alongside Haiti’s other cultural innovations.

These innovations, which Laurent Dubois identifies as “the *Kreyòl* language, the *Vodou* religion, and innovative ways of managing land ownership,” have been powerful political weapons on behalf of the poor majority. Haitian *Kreyòl* has been praised by Edouard Glissant for having quickly moved beyond the wholly negative practice that he calls “diversion,” or a strategy “formed, like a habit, from an interweaving of negative forces that go unchallenged.”¹⁷² In the case of Haitian *Kreyòl*, he writes, it “quickly evolved beyond the trickster strategy, for the simple historical reason that it became very early the productive and responsible language of the Haitian people.”¹⁷³ Despite the hostility of the elite, *Vodou* also exercised itself not as the culmination of “negative forces that go unchallenged,” but rather as a productive social and political force born out of a direct challenge to negative forces. Finally, the system of land management, which Dubois refers to as the *lakou* system (from the French *la cour*, the “courtyard”) established a system of family land ownership, inheritance, and economy that “developed largely in the absence of — indeed in opposition to — the Haitian government.”¹⁷⁴

Despite the sense of timelessness and stasis with which media and scholarship often describe Haiti, and despite its strategic marginalization within the western

¹⁷²Édouard Glissant and J. Michael Dash. *Caribbean Discourse : Selected Essays*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989) 19.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷⁴Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012) 108.

hemisphere, Haiti too is caught in the flow of history. Some of the cultural resources and tools that have served as such potent political weapons have been slowly ground down, despite their resilience. Although traces of the *lakou* system remain, migration towards dense urban areas continues to increase even after the lessons learned in the 2010 earthquake. *Vodou*, too, is fraying at the edges in some places in Haiti — the relentlessly charismatic and increasingly Pentecostal culture of Port-de-Paix is but one example.

However, this should not be taken for a story of Pentecostal triumphalism. On the contrary, as preceding chapters have shown, the spirits and the ancestors are still very much alive, though undergoing considerable reevaluation. Ritual music and ritual dance, once incompatible with *konvèti* culture, is alive and well in the dark and humid halls of independent Pentecostal meeting houses. Herbal medicines and other therapies, some of which likely reach back to West and Central African cultures, are still passed along from prophetess to prophetess. The strength of these traditions is not diminished, but it is surely transformed.

However, lest we commit the error of assuming that “possession is possession,” we must also pay attention to the social and political formations that these ritual transformations and adaptations produce.¹⁷⁵ The preceding pages have attempted to begin to sketch out the edges of the social and political engagements of these communities. As these communities war with the *lwa* and the ancestors who have been transformed into demonic *movèz espri*, the memory of the revolution is already being transformed for some. It remains to be seen what role memories of *Gine* (“Africa”) will come to play. Will the ancestors be forever vanquished to either heaven or hell? Will the *lwa* be consigned to the fringes of society? Will the *lwa* and the communities and secret societies

¹⁷⁵Robbins, 126.

that serve them fight back and regain ground? These and many more questions remain to be answered. For now, these communities, though “small among the clans,” sing and dance their way toward the frontlines in a battle for Haiti’s future.

All Three at the Same Time

On my final afternoon in Haiti, after I had spent the morning packing my things and sending them on a bus to meet me the following day in Port-au-Prince, I made the now-familiar journey to Ripidis to say goodbye to *Sè Claudette*. It was about 100 degrees that afternoon — unusually hot for early December. I found the door was locked, and I was disappointed. She knew that I was coming. As had become my habit when the door was locked, I reached through the steel bars, pushed aside the wooden plank that *Sè Claudette* used to reinforce the door, and unlocked the door from the inside. As I opened the door, the sunlight poured across the dark room, and I saw *Sè Claudette* sitting in her usual chair, hands folded across her chest. She was asleep.

“*Ayisyen!*” I called. Since she insisted on calling me *blan*, I had taken to calling her “Haitian.” It made her laugh, and that made me happy. She did not laugh that day.

“*Bonswa, blan,*” (Good afternoon, white/foreigner) she answered sluggishly and with her eyes still closed. “*W ap kite m?*” (You’re leaving me?)

Even after sitting together nearly every afternoon for months, *Sè Claudette* was mysterious. She did not talk much, and she rarely smiled. It was hard to know what I should ask her about. I had so many questions, and I mostly wanted to know more about her. Several months earlier, she had told me that she chose to become a prophet. When I pressed her, she told me that maybe she was called by God. She simply could not remember. I was determined to get her to talk more about it before I left.

I closed the door, replaced the wooden plank, and I took my place beside her on a plastic lawn chair. For the first few weeks, I had to gather the chair from the yard behind the church. In the final months of my time with her, she simply left it out.

“How do you know so much about medicines, *Sè Clau*? Did your mother teach you?” I asked.

“You are leaving, and you still have questions.” She laughed. “No, no one taught me. *Sentespri* shows me. That’s how I know.”

“How do you know which medicine to give to each person? Does *Sentespri* show you with a vision? Or is it a voice? Or is it just an idea that comes into your head?” I had been planning to ask for months but had never remembered.

She paused and looked at me with a smile. She shook her head side to side. “Oy! *Blan!* A vision, a voice, and an idea. Ok?” she said as she began to stand up. She always stood up when she did not like my questions.

“How can it be all three, *Sè Clau*?” I only had one afternoon left, and I wanted to know. “Do you see something in your mind, or do you hear something? Or, do you just get an idea?”

“*Tou le twa,*” she said. All three.

Max Weber defines the role of prophet in *The Sociology of Religion* as “a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.”¹⁷⁶ The prophet, Weber asserts, in the same way as the magician, “exerts his power simply by virtue of his personal gifts.”¹⁷⁷ Weber considers

¹⁷⁶Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991) 46.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 47.

the difference between the magician and the prophet to be what lies at the “core” of the mission. For the prophet, he suggests, it is not magic but doctrine or commandment.¹⁷⁸ Yet, prophets and magicians are not so easily distinguished, in part because Weber claims that prophets often practice divination, magical healing, and counseling, things that are usually reserved for the magician.¹⁷⁹ Neither is a prophet simply a philosopher or teacher. These, he claims, are differentiated by their “lack of that vital emotional preaching” that characterizes prophecy.¹⁸⁰ In the end, Weber concludes that prophets are primarily characterized by the way that they engage with power. He writes, “It is characteristic of the prophets that they do not receive their mission from any human agency, but seize it, as it were.”¹⁸¹

Sè Claudette herself, it seems, is all three at once. She is prophetess, magician, and teacher. But, perhaps, if we are to follow Weber’s sociological analysis, Sè Claudette is a prophetess most of all. A little girl from Port-de-Paix, who became *konvèti* in Cité Soleil, studied culinary arts and nursing, and became the leader of *La Famille*. Within the context of independent Pentecostalism in Haiti, Sè Claudette discovered the freedom to lead a community and to employ her knowledge of cooking and nursing. Despite the conflicts and struggles of her community, Sè Claudette is queen of Ripidis. Almost certainly, she was called by God. Or, maybe not.

¹⁷⁸Weber, 47.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 53.

¹⁸¹Ibid., 51.

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