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# Counternarratives of the Diaspora: Haitian Musical Performance in World Beat Markets

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

COUNTERNARRATIVES OF THE DIASPORA:  
HAITIAN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE IN WORLD BEAT MARKETS

By

Kevin Francis Mason

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Music

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COUNTERNARRATIVES OF THE DIASPORA:  
HAITIAN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE IN WORLD BEAT MARKETS

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This study will investigate the performance motivations of three Haitian musicians based in South Florida who use their artistic platforms to offer a version of their country omitted from dominant media projections of the country. This study focuses on narrative as a device that allows these musicians to offer counterstories against dominantly negative media projections that have real effects on Haitians. The thesis will examine the work of world beat artist Erol Josué and his performance motivations in global record markets. His work as a *oungan* (Vodou priest) plays a large role in the composition of his “electro-Vodou” world beat music, but is also the source of misrepresentation by the label that relies on the disjuncture created by biased narratives in the media. The second focus of this thesis observes the performance motivations of two musicians: Jean-Michel Dauder and Aldore “Empress Addi” Casseus of Rara Rock and their actions in cultural settings to offer a version of Haiti not seen in media presentations. Utilizing frameworks of disjuncture, transnationalism, and world music, this thesis will utilize local ethnologies to contextualize Haitian performance practices in global and local situations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been very blessed to be in a position to explore my intellectual and consumerist pursuits of Haitian music at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music. The school appealed to me not only because of its strong reputation as a great music school, but also because of its geographic location that is home to one of the largest populations of the Haitians outside of Haiti. In my application for admission, I expressed interest in undertaking fieldwork with the musical community there and have been given such an opportunity by the faculty in the Frost School of Music's Musicology Department.

For such an opportunity, I would like to thank Dr. Deborah Schwartz-Kates who granted me admission despite unfamiliarity with the work I would like to undertake. Nevertheless, she was amenable to my interests and guided me through personalized readings for cultivation of ethnomusicological frameworks to develop them further. Through weekly meetings, Dr. Schwartz-Kates helped me develop this thesis that began upon my enrollment in August of 2010 and concludes in May of 2012. Dr. Kate Ramsey has been immensely generous with her time and expertise on Haitian history, which helped me narrow my focus to the topic of performance in the Diaspora. Dr. Willa Collins introduced me to my first semester as a TA in her African American Song Traditions and Modern American Pop classes. Her advice and encouragement along the way as a graduate student has been a great motivator throughout this entire process.

A great deal of gratitude is certainly owed to Erol Josué, Jean-Michel Daudier, Aldore "Empress Addi" Casseus, Eduoard Duval-Carrié, and Viktor El-Saieh— the performers and artists who helped me develop the content for this thesis. They have all

been exceptionally open, generous, and accommodating to my academic inquiries about their work. By granting me personal interviews with them, they offered insights that have enlightened my own positions and sowed further intellectual curiosities about Haitian culture and music. Their testimonies encouraged me to also use whatever platform I have to offer a counternarrative of Haiti that runs against the dominant negative media projections that their work seeks to counter.

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## Introduction

In May of 2007, the Haitian world beat performer Erol Josué released his first album *Regleman* on Mi5 recordings, the world music subsidiary of EMI Records. Steeped in themes of Vodou, the popular religion of the country, the album and the corresponding marketing approaches are highly spliced with glossy and vague imagery of the belief system. This release and the subsequent media coverage of the album, which was largely influenced by the language of the Mi5 Recordings press releases, serve as vantage points to critique common misconceptions about Vodou and Haiti internationally. These misunderstandings affect issues of representation, performance, race, and style for Haitian artists, often causing them to counter dominant media projections of their culture through artistic platforms. Josué is a figure on the international stage who serves as a case study for Haitian artists who must constantly deal with areas of misrepresentation by those with financial stakes in their presentation. In my fieldwork as an oral historian for the University of Miami Special Collections, I found a theme among Haitian artists who want to dispel myths projected about their culture through performance platforms. Josué, for instance, uses his position as a world beat performer on an international scale to “wash the face of *Vodou*.”<sup>1</sup> He explains that this is an act of correcting dominantly negative outsider representations of his belief system. Another Haitian musician Jean-Michel Daudier based in Aventura, Florida seeks to project “a Haiti you don’t see,” which strikes back at common media narratives that

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<sup>1</sup> Erol Josué, interview by author, April 7, 2011. Miami, FL.

project the country as poor.<sup>2</sup> This motivation is a response to a perceived media strategy of omitting positive news coverage of Haiti. Daudier expresses that media narratives show images of clear power dynamics that repeatedly depict Haiti in a position of vulnerability or failure. These two individuals share a thematic performance strategy that chooses to depict Haiti in a way that offers a counternarrative to preconceived notions held by a media consumer population with whom they engage. This study begins with a focus on Josué as a way to examine the global experience of a Haitian artist. His experience provides a case study to analyze how Haitian music functions inside the world beat genre and how he is marketed internationally. The second large chapter will highlight the case studies of two local Haitian musicians in South Florida who are involved in local cultural production and community engagement. These artists, Jean-Michel Daudier and Aldore Cassueus, offer a perspective of their culture that challenge those held by non-Haitians in the region.<sup>3</sup> These artists employ distinctive styles and media, but share the same desire to offer an alternative point of view of the country in which they remain extremely tied to through systems made more complex in the experience of the Haiti Diaspora.

The vantage point of narrative offers a framework in which one can look at the dialogue between actors to see the meta-linguistic responses to dominant power dynamics in which these artists' responses are constructive and creative. This approach also confirms that although there is a clear balance of power at work by global factors, Haitian

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Michel Daudier, interview by author, September 21, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> In "Global Imaginings," Gage Averill divides the discussion of Haitian music into local and supra-local sections, which includes the national, diasporic, and transnational experiences of Haitian musicians. I choose, however, to focus on the discussion of local and global because of Josué's ventures in non-Haitian world beat spheres. These contain supra-local ideals, but are commodified internationally another manifestation of world beat music that is performed by a Haitian.

artists still have the agency to denounce the prevailing narratives they know to be inaccurate. I will be analyzing these case studies with the understanding provided by geographer Patricia L. Price who describes narrative studies as follows: “Dominant groups tell stories that construct, naturalize, and reproduce the *status quo*, while subalterns tell counterstories that can serve as correctives or even frontal attacks on the world-view circulated by those in power.”<sup>4</sup> The dominant focus in this study will examine strategies of Haitian performance that seek to use corrective narratives that contradict the well-preserved “status quo” that perpetuates discrimination against Haitians globally.

With narrative as a greater lens, the case studies conducted with the five artists will formulate the original content base for this thesis. As well as these firsthand interviews with the artists, I will employ material from several fields, primarily from ethnomusicology and geography, to contextualize Haitian performance motivations throughout the course of this study. Additionally, I will undertake a firsthand analysis of industry market data, press materials, and media projections of Haitian culture. This will be done in order to explain a climate made of interdependent outlets of media, finance, and official policy that create an understandable uneasiness for Haitian performers abroad. The main problems addressed in this study are as follows: Why do Haitian artists feel a need to combat prevailing stereotypes through music and performance and what strategies are used when power structures are clearly unbalanced? What is the source for this shared motivation of dispelling myths or correcting incorrect narratives? What are the real consequences of these projections? What are the fiscal motivations

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<sup>4</sup> Patricia L. Price, “At the Crossroads: Critical Race Theory and Critical Geographies of Race,” *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 2 (April 2010): 147-174.

behind projections of Haiti, and are those a part of a longstanding strategy to keep the nation vulnerable and poor? What damage could further perpetuation of these ideas cause in the future? Do they impede on Haitian artistic output because they must be addressed as a certain prerequisite for general performance?

### **Disjuncture and Flawed Media Coverage of Haiti**

From the dynamic event of the Haitian Revolution of 1804, Michel Rolph-Trouillot suggests that Haiti's triumphant narrative has been silenced because many people believed it could simply not happen.<sup>5</sup> The very presence of a slave revolt created a historical rupture that deviated from the white dominated narrative that unsettled their privileged position in world affairs. From its origins, the relationships between Haitians and Others are steeped in disagreement. The theme of disjuncture outlined by Appadurai makes sense of the rift of understanding between two nations that have been geographically and historically linked, but certainly at odds since. The social theorist observes our current era as one characterized by flows of information that take place over great distances at rapid speeds. These constant flows and exchanges are formed through "relations of disjuncture," broken links of exchange that always limit the full potential of understanding by those engaged. This has been the basis of Haitian and non-Haitian interaction from the start.

Initial US human interactions with Haiti began with the American occupation that Mary Renda argues was based in doctrines of paternalism and racism in *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of US Imperialism, 1915-1934*. The largely white US Marine force came from various regions of the country, but never had such close

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<sup>5</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995).

contact with people whose skin was darker than theirs. The marines carried tales and lore from the distant land of Haiti back home with them, several publishing their own sensationalized accounts. A focus will be on how the majority of people in North America and Europe receive most of their information on Haiti through dominantly negative and inaccurate US Marine accounts that have certainly impacted the lives of many Haitians.

Because of the flawed reportage on the situation of Haitians, inaccurate projections have real consequences for them. These challenges of outsider perceptions that are clearly inaccurate make a real impact on their daily lives and have done so historically. For instance, the thriving tourist industry in the country began to sink in the summer of 1982 when an inaccurate US health report accused the country as the source of AIDS. The 70,000 North American visitors in 1981 dwindled to only 10,000 after international news media sensationalized the report, causing the loss of thousands of jobs and increased suffering for the Haitian people.<sup>6</sup> Although cited as the “birthplace” or origin of the disease, Paul Farmer maintains that the strain of AIDS prevalent in Haiti known as subtype B was the same found in the United States and was more likely spread to the island by North American sex tourists.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the misery of AIDS that ravaged Haiti’s financial, social, and physical stability in the early 1980s, as well as the cholera outbreak following the January 10, 2010 earthquake, was brought in by outsiders and strategically blamed on the victims to perpetuate a dominant power dynamic. Not only

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<sup>6</sup> Marlise Simons, “For Haiti’s Tourism, the Stigma of AIDS is Fatal,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1982. <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/11/29/world/for-haiti-s-tourism-the-stigma-of-aids-is-fatal.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed January 10, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 87.

were those actually infected by HIV recognized as carriers, but all Haitians were thought to have some trace of the disease and felt the humiliation caused by slanderous inaccuracies about the epidemic that actually generated revenue for the very outlets that perpetuated these ideas through advertising to their viewership.

Since tourism and therefore firsthand experiences with Haitians have declined for thirty years, a greater rift in the interactions of power between Haitians and North Americans has grown. Increasingly, travel to Haiti is based on volunteerism or “voluntourism,” through the rise of what is termed as the “NGO state,” which is a result of an expanding industry constructed on business models of international relief.<sup>8</sup> Based in ideas of philanthropy and aid, these extra-governmental organizations reinforces a power dynamic that relies on the trope of Haiti as a failed state, reliant upon foreign aid in several different forms to improve its situation. The Haitian artists represented in this thesis reject these ideas as further projections of a disconnection between accurate information about Haiti to media consumers with whom they necessarily interact. These consumers have been influenced by fragmented flows of information that will be later referenced according to Arjun Appadurai’s construct of disjuncture.<sup>9</sup> The flow of inaccurate narratives can only be further fragmented and dominate common dialogues that affect Haitian perception in the Diaspora and specifically in Miami.

In the case of Haiti, I characterize the dominant flow of information as an imprecise pipeline of biased storytelling that is often wholly incorrect. Magnified and

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<sup>8</sup> Terry F. Buss, *Haiti in the Balance: Why Foreign Aid Has Failed and What We Can Do About It* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2 (June 1990): 295-310.

enhanced by the overarching problem of globalization, the problems that arise from disjuncture “produce problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have contexts that are anything but local.”<sup>10</sup> This exchange is localized in Miami and South Florida, an inclusionary geography that accounts for the movement of Haitians based on different levels of socioeconomic status. The exchange of local and global connections stressed by Appadurai is uniquely fitting to the Haitian performance objectives outlined in this thesis. This central understanding will formulate the understanding of this thesis. These motivations are a response to global exchanges that affect daily lives of the artists and their overall creative content.

Haitian artists feel the pressures of these global flows of information that affect them on a local level. These relations instead create a fragmented reality created by disjunctures that “produce fundamental problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice, and governance.”<sup>11</sup> Although they live abroad away from Haiti, they still remain affected by these projections through an intense network of social, cultural, and spiritual ties to their homeland. Disjuncture will therefore ground the overall topic in discussion of common media projections, Haitian artistic responses, and consumer understanding of the music they purchase.

### **The Transnational Haitian Presence in World Markets**

Erol Josué is a musical presence in various outposts of the Haitian Diaspora and feels that his testimony has been informed by these spaces in several ways. He also

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<sup>10</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 6.

<sup>11</sup> Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” 296.

engages new audiences that have been opened to him through international record success. Therefore, theory on transnationalism helps restructure arguments that focus on the limited definitions provided by postnationalism, Diaspora, and exile—all terms that do not quite capture his presence in international music markets. In general discussion of world music artists who do not necessarily fit into a transnational framework, Jocelyne Guilbault suggests: “The notion of world music stars and transnationals may become a key to our understanding of the socio-political, economic and cultural constraints and opportunities which these stars are confronting at a local and global level.”<sup>12</sup> The unique experience of Haitian Diaspora is part of the nation’s continuous dialogue and indeed more so when involved in the market economy of world beat music. On December 2, 2011, the Minister of Haitians Living Abroad, Daniel Supplice said that Haiti needs more from the experience of Haitians abroad beyond the financial commitments they have at home.<sup>13</sup> On this role, Josué has increasingly worked with cultural and governmental organizations abroad, while working on his new acoustic album *Pelerinaj* in Paris.

This interconnection is shared by the Haitian population in the Diaspora and these case studies reveal artists who are informed by the new environments they experience that are connected to the affairs at home. Such analysis of the Haitian transnational experience has been provided in the ethnology, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home*.<sup>14</sup> Here, scholars on the Haitian

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<sup>12</sup> Jocelyne Guilbault, “World Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rock and Pop*,” ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 188.

<sup>13</sup> Jonel Juste, “Haitian Government Wants More From Its Diaspora, Says Minister Supplice.” *Defend Haiti*, December 3, 2011. <http://www.defend.ht/news/articles/political/2140-haitian-government-wants-more-from-diaspora-says-minister-supplice> (accessed December 3, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).



Diaspora, Glick Schiller and Fouron suggest that Haitian emigrants remain wholly Haitian even while living a geographical distance from place of birth. The work helps contextualize a nationalism deeply rooted in Haiti, one that is influenced by worlds and cultures abroad. Since former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's creation of the Ministry of Haitians Living Abroad in 1990 and the term *dizyém depatman* (Tenth Department), Haitians living outside the country have remained part the national dialogue, decision-making processes, and fiscal well-being of those at home. The contemporary life in Haiti is largely funded by a system of remittances that reinforce social contracts and sustain families at home. Ninety-percent of Haitians in Miami and New York send money "home" to Haiti electronically or through other mail providers, usually at least \$100 a month.<sup>15</sup> Transnational discussion also helps situate the flow of global commerce in which "curators" and musicians are engaged. Gage Averill in "Global Imaginings" refers to the transnational qualities of industries as the "global electronic flow of capital" that Mi5 Recordings and Erol Josué by affiliation are engaged.<sup>16</sup> EMI Publishing is now owned by what is legally known as the Group, a international set of stakeholders made up of Sony, the Estate of Michael Jackson, the Mubadala Development Company, Jynwel Capital Limited (Hong Kong), the Blackstone Group's GSO Capital Partners LP, and David Geffen. As a result of this recent acquisition, Sony boasts "one of the world's most comprehensive and diverse catalogs of over 1.3 million music copyrights covering all genres, periods and territories of the world."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Glick-Schiller and Fuoran, *Georges Woke Up Laughing*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Gage Averill, "Global Imaginings," in *Making and Selling Culture* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 203-222.

Haitians abroad are continually growing more involved with the social and political landscape at home. Indeed, it is Erol Josué, a Haitian living in Miami, as well as in New York and Port-au-Prince, who is taking the charge for the accurate representation of his country as a performer, educator and advocate. Haitian artists living abroad are impacted by negative media narratives because they remain connected to Haiti through intense networks based on fiscal and social obligations at home. Haitians are living in various parts of the world, but nonetheless there is still a misunderstanding about their culture perpetuated dominantly by the media. This study will focus on how dominant projections and official policy are interwoven to reinforce commonly held perceptions of Haitians. The approach of narrative will highlight the mission statements of the artists as a counternarrative. This will be necessarily observed to inform the overall presence of Josué in the global market. These testimonies will also be observed on the localized level in South Florida where official reception policies have largely affected Haitians with extremely negative consequences.

### **Methodology and World Music Theory**

With literature on the transnational experience of Haitians in the global economy, I will also utilize ethnomusicological theories on world music from several different sources to frame Josué and two other musicians based in South Florida—Jean-Michel Daudier and Aldore “Empress Addi” Casseus—in the context of world beat artists. To analyze the market term “world music” and the nuance of world beat, we must consider its earnest academic origins that sought to bring in a music education outside of the

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<sup>17</sup> Sony Corporation, “Sony Global - Investor Group Including Sony Corporation of America Enters into Definitive Agreement to Acquire EMI Music Publishing from Citi,” <http://www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/Press/201111/11-1112E/index.html> (accessed October 10, 2011).

Western classical approach. Early ethnomusicologist Robert E. Brown is credited for coining the term “world music” while at Wesleyan University, but it was a meeting of record executives and interested musicians on June 29, 1987 that created a marketable genre.<sup>18</sup> The timing of this decision corresponded with the rise of commercial music merchandise stores and the popularization of CDs, which made the new market development an instant success. The commercial success of Paul Simon’s *Graceland* the year before, which quite literally pulled sounds from the styles of Chicano-rock outfit Los Lobos and South African vocal act Ladysmith Black Mambazo, saw the potential of developing a new music market.<sup>19</sup>

In further analysis on the concept of world music, Steven Feld’s “A Sweet Lullaby for World Music” paints two narratives that contextualize collaboration. He suggests a “celebratory” versus an “anxious” narrative when discussing the problems of world music collaboration and production.<sup>20</sup> The celebratory musicians first seek out new innovations with others regardless of their geographic locales, looking at cross-cultural collaborations as a means of pushing their own music forward. Josué indeed does this as vocalist for Jazz Racine Haiti, a group led by saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart from Guadeloupe. Josué’s touring band features recurring musicians of all international backgrounds, an element of many worldbeat collaborations. It is, however,

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<sup>18</sup> During a meeting of record executives from various labels, the market genre of “world music” was born: “We discussed various names for our type of music(s) and on a show of hands ‘World Music’ was agreed as the ‘banner’ under which we would work.” *fRoots Magazine*, “Minutes of Meeting Between the Various ‘World Music’ Record Companies and Interested Parties, Monday 29th June 1987.” [http://www.frootsmag.com/content/features/world\\_music\\_history/minutes/page03.html](http://www.frootsmag.com/content/features/world_music_history/minutes/page03.html) (accessed October 10, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Louise Meintjes, “Paul Simon’s *Graceland*, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning.” *Ethnomusicology*, 34, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 37-73.

<sup>20</sup> Steven Feld, “A Sweet Lullaby for World Music,” *Public Culture*, 12, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 145-71.

the curiosity of Western musicians in cross-cultural collaboration in which areas of exploitation, power, and cultural imperialism are investigated. The second discussion, Feld suggests, arouses suspicion and some reservations from the academic side of the spectrum. Here, various problems of power dynamics, exploitation, a loss of “authenticity” and regional identities are presented for analysis. These two narratives must be considered in Josué’s case as his music crosses genre influence since his early interactions—he sang and danced in the *peristyle* and also to the radio that played international pop music. He feels that his story is a product of the transnational experience and is therefore interested in “celebrating” the differences that encompass the testimony of his experiences. Josué welcomes the celebration as an expression that Haiti is contemporary and takes new directions musically that question cross-cultural collaborations enhanced by diasporic settings. However, ethnomusicological approaches of the “anxious” are also needed to observe Haitian misrepresentation for financial gain and Mi5 Recordings failure to pay him. These dynamics must be considered in the Haitian transnational experience that does not guarantee fairness or protection, two fulfilling concepts secured by clear status of citizenship.

In her analysis of the aesthetics of world music, Jocelyne Guilbault suggests that world music is more of a pastiche than a hybrid.<sup>21</sup> Instead of two easily identifiable sounds crossing to make a new one, as in a hybrid, the influences are mercurial and not easy to solidify with one single term. In her essay, “On Redefining the ‘Local’ through World Music,” Guilbault suggests that the industry is extending “dominant traditions” to

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<sup>21</sup> Jocelyne Guilbault, “World Music,” 179.

impact and maintain power relationships in a consumer-producer model.<sup>22</sup> Through the means of production, glossy marketing savvy and global outreach, multinational record labels are able to extract resources abroad to generate more revenue through deepening their global market presence. With high profits at stake, accurate representation takes a backseat to overall product success. Overall product values take precedent over the marketing of “authentic” music. The artist presented is hyper-nationalized and the exoticized location of Haiti becomes what is for sale.

Considering the power dynamics of these collaborative elements, Timothy Taylor’s *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* provides further details about these relationships. “Collaboration” is used as a way to help record executives dodge accusations of exploitation, while acknowledging that these power dynamics exist.<sup>23</sup> Artists like Simon enjoy “music by a particular ethnicized, racialized Other and want to participate in making it.”<sup>24</sup> It is not that they only want to make it, but make it on their own terms, in their familiar settings, and empowered with dominant artistic direction. Although Simon’s story is rote by now for a readership interested in such topics, Josué’s story offers a new element of Feld’s idea of “pop curation” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, expedited and accessed through extremely fast communication media that has treated Haiti negatively. Ted Mason, the president of Mi5 Recordings and former guitar player for the 80s alternative act Modern English, embarks on his own collaborative ventures, but also

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<sup>22</sup> Jocelyne Guilbault, “On Redefining the ‘Local’ through World Music,” in *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Jennifer C. Post (New York: Routledge, 2005), 137-46.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy D. Taylor. *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 127.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

has the capital to produce the world music artists whom he enjoys.<sup>25</sup> Such pastiche timbral, rhythmic, and regional varieties illustrate the essence of world music as a genre, able to pull from different styles to make a marketable category. This style is not based in a specific region or specific language, but deterritorialized enough to have global cosmopolitan appeal from endless cultural depth. It also shows the widespread reach of Mason's interests that he can accommodate as his role as musician and record label chief executive. Despite coming from a specific cultural background, Haitian artists still cross genres and participate in the world beat market.

Veit Erlmann points to a "self-congratulatory pathos" that arrives with world music collaboration.<sup>26</sup> He further suggests that it becomes "a kind of shorthand figure for a new— albeit fragmented— global economic reality with alluring commercial prospects."<sup>27</sup> In this reading, one must consider that cross-cultural collaboration has more to do with the commercial viability of the artistic output, which I will argue impacts its critical acceptance and positive press coverage, than its overall content. Erlmann's "fragment" of the "global economic reality" serves as a means to sell a product without having to actually define it. The space of ambiguity created by this fragment corresponds with Arjun Appadurai's suggestion that disjuncture is at the core of understanding the global economy, relying on a steady flow of unsteady relationships. In order for these all to work and co-exist, there must be overlapping that is not always aligned with

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<sup>25</sup> Ted Mason, interview by author. He told me of an upcoming project: "the Rap MC stuff is not integrated yet and more Indian motifs will be added. We have the classical stuff, sitars and arab (sic) percussion already." Such pastiche timbral, rhythmic, and region varieties capture the essence of world music as a genre.

<sup>26</sup> Viet Erlmann, "The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s," *Public Culture* 8, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 474.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

understandings and interests. In global music markets, artists are sold in small interactions and snapshots without full details allowed, leaving a void between artist and music consumer.

### **The Narrative Frame**

In conducting interviews with the musicians in this thesis, Erlmann offers a useful approach that guided the interaction: “Musical ethnologies will increasingly have to examine the choices performers worldwide make in moving about the spaces between the system and its multiple environments.”<sup>28</sup> Not only must the environments that affect the individuals be observed, but also the specific artist responses to these circumstances as well to determine a multi-tiered understanding of global projections and dangers. The frame of narrative highlights the agency of Haitian artists discussed in this thesis. According to social anthropologist Huon Wurdle, this creates an ambiguous space, a “middle ground” between “co-ordination and incommensurability” where actors engage in “cultural interplay, evasion, joking, ambiguation, reversal, and rhetorical displacement.”<sup>29</sup> In this space, artists can challenge and announce their disagreement to dominant flows of information through mechanisms in the forms of counternarrative. This study seeks to consider the global factors causing these responses, but utilizes an analysis of specific artist motivations throughout different spaces based on personal narratives and performance practices.

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<sup>28</sup> Veit Erlmann, “The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s,” *Public Culture* 8, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 474.

<sup>29</sup> Huon Wardle, “Ambiguation, “Disjuncture, Commitment: A Social Analysis of Cultural Creativity in the Caribbean,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 8, no. 3 (September 2002): 494.

Artist responses to generally negative treatment of Haiti's image will provide the content analyzed in this study. Artists like Daudier and Josué point to the overwhelmingly slanderous projections specifically in the media, but also consider other factors that affect the Haitian global presence as a source for artistic response. This study will begin with a theoretical discussion of outsider impact on Haitian perception internationally and also look at the theme of narrative to see how these artists enter into dialogue with the dominant projections. As mentioned above by Erlmann, ethnologies of the Haitian artistic community must be undertaken to see how these actors reformulate their own image of their culture. To pursue this, I will employ the binary of "global" as narrated by Erol Josué's moves within the international entertainment industry and "local" actions of the artists Jean-Michel Daudier and Aldore "Empress Addi" Casseus who provide artistic responses in South Florida.

By using narrative as a general framework, the motivations for these performers are expressed not only to highlight the prevailing disjunctures between Western media consumers and Haitians, but also to observe what exactly Daudier and Casseus seek to achieve through performance. In the transnational Haitian experience localized in South Florida, these artists respond to the real effects of media disjuncture through world beat performance. By performing styles deeply rooted in Haiti and influenced by the cross-cultural influences of their environments, they advance their positive counternarratives of Haiti to wider audiences. Community organization and advancement of the arts are integral to achieving this end. These frames will be observed in the ethnologies conducted in Chapter 2 as strategies to advance Haitian artistic platforms in wider audiences through world beat performance in transnational settings.



## Chapter 1

### Erol Josué in the Global Economy

In the sixth season premiere of *Dexter* called “Those Kinds of Things” (aired October 2, 2011 on the Showtime Network), police discover a mutilated fruit vendor behind his beachside stand—a morbid event that characterizes the sensational deaths depicted in every other episode. The lead character, Dexter Morgan, an expert crime-scene investigator by day and serial killer by night, narrates the likely account of what had occurred. The victim’s body is displayed to show a pair of brutal carvings on his stomach, which one detective named Quinn suggests appear to be superimposed carvings of Greek alpha and omega symbols. From these wounds, seven small snakes begin to emerge, adding a grisly turn of events to the already morbid crime scene. After reeling from the initial shock of this discovery, Dexter’s sister Debra, a rising detective on the force concludes that it is likely Santeria or Vodou.

Detective Morgan’s inability to understand the symbols creates a space for outsiders to construct ideas of the “Other” and ascribe them with pre-determined explanations even as those symbols—the snakes and the Greek letters—are not at all relevant to the accusation. Vodou has been a source of imaginative delights for Westerners that stem from early testimonies of French plantation owners during slavery before the 1804 Revolution and also from accounts of United States Marines in the country during the military occupation of 1915-1934. Both parties expressed their curiosities in published and fictional accounts that perpetuate disjuncture—the inaccurate flow of dominant information—that largely shaped Western perceptions of the country

and impacted official US policy decisions for Haiti, which were steeped in racism and unbalanced power dynamics. The Marines, many brought up in Christian households in rural parts of the American South, misunderstood Vodou's true nature and simply claimed that religious practices were "Satanic."<sup>30</sup> The formulations of disjuncture have historical origins and are reinvigorated in present day perpetuations by these media outlets, in casual reference in episodes like *Dexter*, which have found amenable audiences for the inaccurate profile of Haiti.

This interaction between non-Haitians and Haitian practitioners of Vodou provides a source of misunderstanding between the two cultures, which has only been exacerbated by dominant media accounts that are strategically based upon false information. Following the January 10, 2010 earthquake that affected an estimated three million Haitians, journalists in various media outlets blamed Vodou for the suffering caused by the natural disaster. Television evangelist and media mogul Pat Robertson broadcast a report on his *700 Club* television program that Haitians, who were "under the heel of the French," organized and "swore a pact to the Devil" to gain their independence in 1804.<sup>31</sup> He broadcast this message on his Christian Broadcasting Network, a station with affiliates throughout Asia and Latin America, and further summarized the alleged pact the revolutionaries made with the Devil: "[The Haitians] said: 'We will serve you if you will get us free from the French.' True story. And so the Devil said: 'OK, it's a deal.'" Because of that alleged contract, Robertson suggests that "[Haitians] have been

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<sup>30</sup> Laurent Dubois, "The Citizen's Trance: The Haitian Revolution and the Motor of History," in *Magic and Modernity*, edited by Peter Pels and Birgit Meyer (Stanford University Press, 2003), 117.

<sup>31</sup> Associated Press, "Pat Robertson Calls Quake 'Blessing in Disguise,'" *YouTube*, Online video clip, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5TE99sAbwM> (accessed 12 November 2011).

cursed by one thing or another.”<sup>32</sup> Specifically, he blamed the earthquake on the story of slave leader Dutty Boukman, a Jamaican-born *oungan*, who led a Vodou ceremony at the site of Bois-Caïman in 1791 that started a major revolt against the French colonizers. The televangelist’s brief synopsis omitted much of the story and simplified the complexity of the devastation due to poor infrastructure developments among several other factors. Instead, Robertson’s argument misrepresents the important element of Haitian spirituality that helped fight against the brutal institution of slavery, simply by propagating it as a pledge of service to Satan.

Many Haitians consider the event as an iconic moment that gave birth to the Haitian nation today. Léon-Francois Hoffman argues that the event is most likely apocryphal in nature and was actually formulated by a white planter named Antoine Delmas.<sup>33</sup> Hoffman challenges Delmas’ early account and suggests that he fabricated the story in his *Histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue*, an account that was allegedly written in 1793 and not published until 1814. The planter suggests that he learned of the story by capturing and interrogating slaves, certainly not through a firsthand account of the ceremony itself. The confessions that he violently extracted led him to frame the story as evil and Satanic. Historians Kate Ramsey and Laurent Dubois contest Hoffman’s assertion that the Bois-Caïman ceremony is a myth, citing the historical probability and the importance of the event to many Haitians. Despite the discussion around its origins, Hoffman rightly charged Delmas for misrepresenting the event based

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Léon-Francois Hoffman, “Un mythe national: la cérémonie du Bois-Caïman,” in *La République Haïtienne: Etat des Lieux et Perspectives*, edited by Gérard Barthélemy and Christian Girault, (Paris: Editions Kharthala, 1993), 434-48.

on racial and hierarchical hostility of the white planters.<sup>34</sup> Delmas described the Haitians that he captured, tortured, and likely killed as belonging to an “ignorant and besotted caste” who believed in “superstitious rituals of an absurd and sanguinary religion.”<sup>35</sup> As Hoffman suggests, “Delmas' account is clear proof that his intention was in fact to denigrate the slaves.”<sup>36</sup> By casting this event as Satanic once again, Pat Robertson continues the legacy of perpetuating false claims about the history and origins of Haiti. This suggestion highlights the source of disjuncture about the very founding of the information: Outsiders do not understand the complexity of Haitian history and continually misrepresent it because of disjuncture, while Haitians consider it a source of national pride.

Instead of regarding the revolutionary Vodou ceremony simply as a myth, Josué disagrees with Hoffman’s assertion in the following statement: “As an *oungan*, it has a great deal of importance for me, because it is there that the religion I have inherited was born. But also because I am Haitian and I believe in the Bois-Caïman ceremony, and every day of my life I live the Bois-Caïman ceremony, and in every one of my ceremonies I live the Bois-Caïman ceremony.”<sup>37</sup> The dynamic event in Haitian history—one based on spiritual, political, and social revolution that broke from white-dominated historical power dynamics—is misrepresented by a demographic that is unfamiliar with the whole context. Despite the fact that the event is misconstrued by Delmas and

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<sup>34</sup> Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), 42.

<sup>35</sup> Hoffman, Léon-Francois, *Haitian Fiction Revisited* (Pueblo, CO: Passeggiata Press, 2000), 161.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Erol Josué, quoted in Dubois 2003, 123.

Robertson, it is nonetheless a source of agency and a pride for many Haitians. Like Josué's style of world beat, which is also misrepresented by outsiders through channels of disjuncture, it is also a source of pride and innovation for the artist. Though largely rejected by many practitioners of Vodou as a myth, Hoffman points out that Western misunderstanding of the Bois-Caïman ceremony is still peddled as "Satanic" by figures like Robertson although based on faulty projections originating from non-Haitians. The misrepresentation is nonetheless perpetuated as truth—Robertson specifically says "true story" for the television audience—and creates a further disjuncture to a widespread audience about Josué's religion that again denigrates Haitians on an international scale.

As Robertson wrongly blamed Vodou's alleged Satanic side for the natural disaster, several newspaper columnists also weighed in to hold the religion responsible for Haiti's infrastructure collapse following the earthquake. Lawrence Harrison wrote in his article, "Haiti and the Voodoo Curse," that the belief system is "without ethical content" and that it is a "progress-resistant force at work in Haiti." This perpetuation is exactly what Josué seeks to counter on an international scale. Harrison compares the situations of the more "modernized" countries of Barbados and Dominican Republic, two countries that also had brutal colonial pasts, but blames the presence of Vodou in Haiti as the only difference among them. He also suggests Haiti is unable to modernize because it has a "set of values, beliefs and attitudes rooted in African culture and the slavery experience that resist progress."<sup>38</sup> The presence of Vodou negatively affects everyone in the country, he argues, because his son-in-law, who is Haitian and a graduate of Harvard, told him this. Therefore, achieving upward mobility is something that a practitioner of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Vodou simply cannot achieve. The only way he suggests for Haitians to gain “progress” is through higher education and intermarriage to an affluent white American family, an intangible and likely undesirable goal for many in the country who embrace and indeed take pride in their cultural heritage.

In his article “The Underlying Tragedy,” David Brooks argues that Vodou is one of the “progress-resistant” cultural elements that prevent the nation from emerging from its difficult history. These authors argue that Vodou has an inability to be modernized at all. The misdealing that Haitian Vodou has received is not just a contemporary problem with new media personalities— hostile people of European descent have historically played a large role in misrepresenting Haiti since its origins and have done so with much of the similar verbiage as today.

### **Erol Josué as a Transnational Performer**

In a climate as hostile to Vodou in historical record and global media, Josué desires to “Wash the face of Vodou” and “further [his] culture” through music to a demographic outside of the Haitian Diaspora. Through performing the musical elements of his culture, he seeks to engage a non- Kreyòl speaking audience that has been informed by sensationalized media coverage that has categorized Vodou as resistant to progress. His testimony, however, as a *oungan* in transnational settings and specifically in music clubs in the Diaspora can challenge the expectations that Westerners have of practitioners of the religion. In order to challenge these preconceived notions based in disjuncture, the artist offers his performance as a corrective narrative to show that Vodou is not antiquated or the reason that Haiti is facing developmental challenges to its progress.

After 45 days of prayer in a Haitian forest at the age of 17, Erol Josué became an exceptionally young *oungan* to be initiated into the Vodou tradition. He made the decision to “take up the *asson*,”<sup>39</sup> the phrase associated with the fulfillment of taking up such a calling, because he was visibly gifted in interacting with the *lwa*-s (spirits), who often provided him with spiritual messages or took over his body with song. Up until this point, Josué learned the Vodou liturgy from his stepfather Erberle Lajoie, an *oungan* and engineer by trade, who taught him the songs, liturgy, and various responsibilities of community leadership that the calling required. Before becoming an *oungan*, Josué participated in a resistance movement against a church-led campaign of violence against practitioners of Vodou and especially those in positions of authority in the popular religion following the overthrow of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986. Duvalierism had been associated with Vodou since François Duvalier rose to power in 1957 and promoted the religion as a way to appeal to the black rural masses. Following Jean-Claude Duvalier’s departure, both Catholic and Protestant churches organized against the religion during the *dechoukaj* (uprooting) campaign led against Duvalierism. Josué’s participation in this activist network allowed the young man to demonstrate leadership and wisdom in dealing with adversity projected against his religion. Two years after the young priest’s entry into his religious calling in 1987, he moved to Paris to explore his artistic talents that he and his family felt could only be developed further abroad. These travels, caused by intellectual and political exile, influenced his aesthetic directions in music, dance, and theater by building on top of the Vodou traditions he experienced in Haiti.

As a child in Port-au-Prince, Josué adored the music of international pop acts that were transmitted on his radio and television. His favorite group was the reggae and

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<sup>39</sup> The *asson* refers to the calabash gourd that is integral to ritual performance.

R&B-influenced disco act Boney M that had members from Jamaica, Montserrat, and Aruba. Under the management of German producer Frank Farian, the band gained international appeal for its single “Daddy Cool” in 1976. Although Josué did not understand all of the lyrics at the time, he felt the song had a type of spirituality unfamiliar to him and also a definition of a sound that is “cool” and modern. The song was a number-one hit throughout Europe for nearly six months, although it only topped at 65 in the United States. Josué’s mother purchased the 45 single after becoming a fan of the group, which he explains had a major impact on his interest in performing later on in life. Boney M’s vocal harmonies that accompanied the band’s choreographed dancing on television inspired Josué to sing and dance in such a style that had the influences of the Caribbean, international pop, and European entrepreneurship across borders. Along with this band, Michael Jackson also played a large part in moving the young performer to dance. These pop influences prepared and intrigued the young performer who longed for a life as a transnational Haitian musician who was able to pull from various repertoires that typified his oeuvre. His catalog is undeniably modern and challenges tropes that Vodou is resistant to progress.

In 1990, Josué moved to Paris and developed a taste of the city’s nightlife, one largely driven by the electronic sounds of house and techno music. Longing for the familiarity of Haiti in his new environment, these new experiences impacted his later performance and composition of “electro-Vodou” music as a Vodou priest socializing in Parisian nightclubs. The performance of this style is uniquely Josué’s own as he feels it can only be described as a testimony to his career as a performer with spiritual roots in Port-au-Prince, as well as to his life that is largely defined by the unique experience as a



Haitian away from his home country. He considers this style of modern performance as one that is influenced by the Haitian transnational experience, but also the logical fulfillment of his musical tastes throughout his life.

Inspired by international trends in pop musical performance, Josué wanted to further develop his creative output abroad. Paris traditionally offered the young Haitian intellectual and artistic community an environment for sharpening its skills for nearly a century. Josué's studies of dance there led to his creation of the Compagnie Shango, a thirteen-member troupe that performed sacred dances of Vodou as part of the theatrical performances that he choreographed and wrote. One such play, *Peristyle des Nuits*, describes to a French audience the dryness, longing, and inspiration of the artist's exile. The play is danced in the style of ballet and tells the story of a Haitian man named Adole, who is born outside of Haiti but nonetheless feels a spiritual longing for his home country. Although the leading character is not born in Haiti, the similar connection of anxiety caused by Diaspora is one that is biographically similar to Josué's. In the preface of the play's script, Josué tells readers: "*Peristil des Nuits* transmits the strength and courage to live that Haitians and Vodou disciples want to carry outside of their borders and share with everyone in the world."<sup>40</sup> For Josué, presenting such thematic content in a Parisian theater fulfilled and stimulated his desire to use performance of Vodou to introduce wider audiences to a side of Haitian culture not otherwise seen. He felt a certain establishment, validation, and confidence that his work had become certified in his international performances. For him: "I [had] to bring Haiti to America...to show the

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<sup>40</sup> Erol Josué Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida. Box 1, folder 3.

real face of Haiti, that Haiti is not just poverty and Vodou dolls and *magie noire*.”<sup>41</sup> He believed these were stereotypes he had to address before he was accepted firstly as a performer.

The *mal du pais* (homesickness) described in his play and his desire to advance Haitian artistic performance to new audiences caused Josué to move to New York in 1998, where a larger Haitian community lived. Once in New York, he attended to the responsibilities as an *oungan* for the religious community there, but received more recognition for his musical performances and frequent appearances at American universities leading workshops. From this platform as an *oungan* with a position in the performing arts, he was invited to sing an *ochan* (song of praise) for the opening ceremony in honor of Christo’s artwork, *The Gates* in New York’s Central Park in February of 2005. For Josué, this was an honor, a validation, and a bold statement that Vodou was not the antiquated and progress-resistant force that people perceived it to be. Furthermore, he cited his performance for classical composer Philip Glass at the Interfaith Center’s annual James Parks Morton Award Ceremony on June 8, 2010 at the Tribeca Hotel in New York City, as a meaningful event where he felt validated by the composer’s attendance, who was the guest of honor for the ceremony and an influential figure on Josué’s music.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Tamara Lush, “Vodou Child,” *Miami New Times*, September 6, 2007, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Josué has worked with the Boston Healing Landscape Project with Dr. Linda Barnes of Boston University starting in 2004 until today. The objective of the project is to utilize the medicinal practices of many faiths to achieve healing alternatives for various communities in Boston. The annual gala recognizes individuals and organizations “that exemplify an outstanding commitment to promoting human development and peace.” <http://interfaithcenter.org/james-parks-morton-interfaith-award-recipients>.

While living in New York, he felt relief and comfort that the larger Haitian community provided, but still experienced an uneasiness about his environment because of his variety of roles as an *oungan*, performer, activist, and university educator. In the United States, Josué experienced a newly constructed version of his country that for him had no basis. Not only did he learn that people had misunderstandings of Haiti, but their knowledge of Vodou seemed abysmal and outright slanderous. Because dominant projections of Haiti impacted his interactions with others at home and abroad, Josué desired to “Wash the Face of Vodou” through performance as a way to contradict dominant opinion of the religion shaped through mass media projections and misunderstandings through infrequent interaction. Josué chose this wording as a reference to the ritual of *lave tet*, a ceremonial cleansing that means “washing of the head.” It is an important stage of initiation and also serves as a means to repent for a misdeed to a *lwa* or simply as a way to cleanse one’s head to feel refreshed in one’s faith. Josué does not necessarily want to initiate audiences into his religion, but rather aims to remove the stigma that Vodou may carry for them.

### **Erol Josué in World Beat Markets**

Although Josué’s recording company promotes him in a spirit of artistic celebration, it still relies upon and references the disjunctures and ironically reinforces the very projections that Josué seeks to dispel. He performs a style of Haitian-influenced electronic music in order to encourage independent listeners to determine their own cultural understandings of Vodou. In an interview with the *Boston Herald*, Josué personally invites anyone who wishes to experience a Vodou ceremony to contact him

through his personal e-mail address to arrange such an experience.<sup>43</sup> Though there might be initial misunderstandings for the curious outsider that could raise further questions for them, changing the perceptions of Vodou begins with firsthand experiences of it. Such access to the artist makes him an approachable figure, but he must negotiate the common stereotypes of Haiti as projected by media outlets to put him in contact with a larger international audience.

Amid the negative media projections of Haiti, Mi5 Recordings chose to use highly charged Vodou imagery for the release of the album *Regleman* (2007) that they expected consumers not to grasp fully, using disjuncture to market the artist. They were thereby the parties that mediated Josué's version of modern Vodou music in a language and style that could be embraced by unfamiliar markets. The singer himself describes his style as "electro-Vodou" music, a combination of the rhythms, song repertoire, and performance of the Vodou liturgy that was part of his daily life in Haiti and also the result of collective musical experiences he learned in the major outposts of the Haitian Diaspora. It is certainly not traditional Haitian folk music, and Josué suggests that it is more in the style of world beat music, which appeals to a larger audience. Such a style, Philip Spencer writes in the liner notes for *World Beat*, is "unfamiliar without being patronizing."<sup>44</sup> This category introduces elements of a musical culture with familiar studio quality sounds to an interested audience.

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<sup>43</sup> Bob Young, "Faith Healer," *Boston Herald*, May 27, 2007, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Philip Spencer, liner notes to *World Beat: A Listener's Guide to Contemporary World Music on CD*, A Cappella, 1992.

The marketing agency hired by Mi5 Rock Paper Scissors portrays Josué as a “voodoo child,” “voodoo singer,” and also as “Voodoo man.”<sup>45</sup> The last term, “Voodoo Man,” I believe is the record label’s misinterpretation of the album title, *Regleman*.<sup>46</sup> Because the majority of consumers who purchase his album are not native Kreyòl speakers or *vodouizan-s* (practitioners of Vodou), the vague designation is used as a marketing device to sell something that hovers between two poles: 1) music of Vodou as something not fully accessible to the general public and 2) a style of world beat music that provides something palatable with elements of the unknown. The unfamiliar term, “regle,” which translates as “rules,” coupled with the second syllable of “man” denotes something possibly associated with Josué: the figure pictured on the album cover dangling a microphone from his hands. Josué suggests in an interview with the author that this microphone represents the *asson*, a percussion instrument made from a calabash gourd, integral to musical performance in a Vodou ceremony, which carries symbolic value for one’s commitment to the faith.<sup>47</sup> The “regle” prefix, quite meaningful in the religion, is semantically meaningless for the non-Haitian consumer market, who rely on marketing agencies and media outlets to provide the translations.

The disjuncture between the understanding of mass-market consumers and the cultural capital purchased is used as a device for marketing by the label. Industry forces perpetuate such disjunctures that are reinforced through journalistic approaches to the music, which often rely on the press releases from the label to ground the journalists’

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<sup>45</sup> Readers will note the two spellings I use here. The phonetic “Vodou” is preferred in the phonetic spelling in the Haitian community, while “voodoo” refers to the system practiced in Louisiana and the common misspelling for Haitian Vodou in English.

<sup>46</sup> “Regleman” refers to the protocol and ritual ordering of a Vodou ceremony.

<sup>47</sup> Erol Josué, interview by author, Miami, FL, April 4, 2011.

stories. In the press release for Josué's album, Rock Paper Scissors marketing suggests that the thirteen-song release is "a musical mirror of the Vodou ceremonies [Josué] now conducts in New York's Haitian community."<sup>48</sup> This is a fair description that explains that the content of the lyrics is deeply rooted in spiritual values of the *houmfort* (Vodou temple). It also urges first-time listeners not to expect a "field recording," something seemingly associated with Haitian music by a consumer audience, although the packaging and sound of the album do not suggest this idea at all. This description seeks to achieve the objective of introducing and countering the alleged pre-conceived notions of Haitian music. Ironically, by distinguishing Josué's music from "a field recording" Rock Paper Scissors only conjures up an irrelevant association that is in no way evident from the sleek album artwork and modern style of dress that the artist wears on the cover. This attempt to correct listener expectations assumes that consumers associate Haitian music with field recordings, which certainly exist on several hundreds of releases. On the other hand, it does not acknowledge the well-documented popular music industry of the country's musicians. This gesture of denial is then part of a marketing plan that suggests that field recordings are the only kind of Haitian musical productions available.<sup>49</sup>

Such limiting language, moreover, directly impacts journalistic coverage of the album and perpetuates the misunderstandings further. In reviewing the album for AllMusic.com, Rick Anderson poaches directly from the press release to offer the following commentary: "When an album is described as a 'musical mirror' of Haitian

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<sup>48</sup> Rock Paper Scissors – Erol Josué, Régléman - Press Release, 2007, [http://www.rockpaperscissors.biz/index.cfm/fuseaction/current.press\\_release/project\\_id/314.cfm](http://www.rockpaperscissors.biz/index.cfm/fuseaction/current.press_release/project_id/314.cfm) (accessed 11 October, 2011).

voodoo ceremonies, what you might expect is something like a ‘field recording.’<sup>50</sup> He goes on to explain a confusing mix of sounds he suggests make up the album as “electric kalimba sounds of Congo to American R&B, Haitian folk and pop music, soca, and West African high life.” This description is inaccurate according to Josué, who suggests that while American R&B and Haitian folk music have certainly influenced the recording, he is not a fan of Haitian commercial pop or *konpa* music and is not personally familiar with the “kalimba sounds of Congo” or West African highlife.<sup>51</sup> Anderson instead seeks to accommodate a readership that is possibly familiar with these styles that have earlier been popular with world beat audiences. In 2004, the band Konono N°1 from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo released the album “Congotronics” on Belgium’s Crammed Records that featured “electric kalimba” among several other new instruments that were unfamiliar to Western audiences at the time. The album gained critical popularity in world beat and indie-rock music scenes, ranking at 31 of 50 top albums of 2005 by the influential Pitchfork Media website.<sup>52</sup> West African highlife also had been growing in popularity at the time of Anderson’s publication through a series of re-issue albums on various international labels, including Vampisoul, Honest Johns, Sublime Frequencies and several others that David Novak described as a trend in “World Music 2.0.”<sup>53</sup> These recordings introduced audiences to West African performers who blended popular *highlife* music with American funk, re-packaged as exotic, surprising, and

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<sup>50</sup> Rick Anderson, “Regleman Review – Allmusic.com,” *Allmusic.com*, 2007, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/rglman-r1042277/review> (accessed December 15, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Erol Josué, Interview by author, Miami, FL, April 21, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Although the album came out in 2004 in Europe, American audiences did not become familiar with the album until a year later.

<sup>53</sup> David Novak, “The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media,” *Public Culture* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 604.

familiar to modern audiences after a process of re-mastering. While struggling to explain Haitian music to a larger audience, Anderson described the album simply by comparing it to other relatively familiar styles of world music that had gained popularity in similar markets.

On *Regleman*, Josué effectively showed that music steeped in the Vodou liturgy could be effectively integrated with the most modern of styles. The result is electro-Vodou, a designation of a deterritorialized and international genre with distinct Haitian roots. The song “Krepsol” (which refers to the worn rubber on a sneaker), begins with a three-note melody played on *vaksin-s*, Haitian bamboo horns that only play one note and employ techniques of hocketing to create a melody. Underneath the melody, the rhythm is played on a Haitian *rada* percussion battery, which traditionally consists of three kinds of drums called *maman*, *segon* and *boula* with the addition of a bell called *Ogan*. On top of these Haitian elements, Josué arranges the song to include fretless electric bass and electric guitar with heavy flange and reverb effects, which give the song an oscillating texture. “Hounto Legba” praises the deity Legba, a necessary beginning to every Vodou ceremony. The song has a brief seven-note melody performed on a keyboard with several distortion effects that makes it sound like an “electric kalimba” as noted by Anderson in his review. Josué’s call and response vocals of praise to Legba are accompanied by a standard five-piece drum set in 6/8 time and a palm-muted vamp of an electric guitar with heavily tremolo effects. These sounds of “Elsewhere” in Vodou music are negotiated with familiar Western instrumentation that sets the formula for world beat performance. While some consumers do not seek a “field recording” of



Haitian music with the *vaksin* or *rada* drums, they are more accepting of them when introduced with familiar timbres of standard popular music performance.

In an effort to explain Haitian culture, journalists often reference and reinforce commonly misattributed characteristics of Vodou. In a story about Josué and the New York Haitian community, Tamara Lush suggests: “For Haitians, Vodou is not just the stuff of dolls with pins stuck in their eyes or zombies wandering in the forest,” meaning that Vodou is the stuff of such fantasies for non-Haitians, the main readership of the *Village Voice*.<sup>54</sup> Bob Young, in similar coverage of Josué’s life as an *oungan*, outlines Josué’s message that “his religion isn’t about black magic, zombies and dolls with pins stuck in them.”<sup>55</sup> This effort to challenge these stereotypes only conjures them up when they otherwise would not have appeared, thereby reinforcing and inadvertently contradicting the entire objective of Josué’s artistic mission.

### **Erol Josué and “Washing the Face of Vodou”**

Josué claims that his artistic performance is an act of *voye pwen* (sending a point) to global audiences. His point is that previously held notions of Haitian Vodou as resistant to progress are clearly wrong. In reality, it is the perceptions of Vodou held by outsiders that are more antiquated and resistant to progress. Josué’s participation and innovation of style under the world beat title sends the *pwen* (point) that Vodou is not the superstitious and out-dated religion as it is portrayed by journalists Lawrence Harrison, David Brooks, and the larger media. Instead, Josué presents a new style in sync with

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<sup>54</sup> Tamara Lush, “Vodou Child. Haitian Religion Rites in the Unlikeliest of Places: a Long Island Suburb,” *The Village Voice*, September 5, 2007: 10,14.

<sup>55</sup> Bob Young. “Faith Healer,” 33.

world beat aesthetics that is able to adapt and innovate in an electronic style: a symbolic representation of what it means to be modern and cosmopolitan—the very stuff of the Haitian transnational experience that contradicts the notions that Haiti shows stunted developmental progress.

In order to “Wash the face of Vodou,” Josué strategically utilizes world beat music that allows him to express values deeply rooted in his culture, but informed by intellectual currents of artistic curiosity abroad. This “washing” refers to the symbolic process of *lave-tet* (head washing) that is an integral component of induction for an initiation into Vodou. This act symbolically removes the blemishes caused by worldly influence before one can become spiritually clean and gain deeper understanding of the Haitian popular religion. Josué experiences a process of negotiation to utilize his “world beat passport,” which literally allows him to cross borders with greater ease than the average Haitian citizen.<sup>56</sup> The ability to cross such borders opens new worlds to Josué, but is only fully utilized because he makes certain accommodations that do not fully correspond with his artist desires in his presentation. For example, the most commonly used press photo for Josué’s international publicity depicts him with a painted-face looking intently off into the distance. On his face is painted a Vèvè symbol, a religious drawing distinct to each Vodou spirit. Below his face is printed “Voodoo Man.” Face painting as depicted in the photo is not a common practice in Haitian society or Vodou, but photographer Alex Troesch used such an addition to appeal to a population of consumers unaware of the distinctions between symbols of Africa and those of Haiti, with the assumption that they are considered the same or entirely similar. As evidenced by the frequency of this image with the subtitle “Voodoo Man,” the promotional media

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<sup>56</sup> Erol Josué, interview by author, Miami, FL, April 21, 2011.

portray the complexity of Josué's music as derived from the unfamiliar symbols of Vodou.

By not seeking to represent accurately the unfamiliar culture of Haiti, the record label relies on stereotypes of other artists of African descent with whom listeners might be more familiar. Josué regards the Vèvè symbol painted on his face in promotional materials, the frequency of the term "voodoo man" in association with *Regleman*'s release, and the use of a snake figure in the promotion of a forthcoming documentary about him as part of a "game" played with industry forces that offers him certain opportunities.<sup>57</sup> If a promotional medium generates interest for further interaction with Vodou for a music consumer, then it is an effective agreement between the label and the artist who both achieve their desires. Averill makes a case for Haitians in global markets who are fully aware of the role that outsiders have played the nation's cultural production and affairs at home. He also credits the "global outlook" of Haitian musicians in music economies "in order to dispel any notions that Haitian musicians enter global markets as naïve dupes of transnational corporations."<sup>58</sup> While label and media forces construct images of Vodou that will generate more revenue according to their market predictions, Josué uses this opportunity to challenge listener perceptions that have been constructed by mediated versions of his religion based on disjuncture.

Nearly twenty years before Josué entered the international recording industry, the Haitian band Boukman Eksperyans injected a style of *rasin* (roots) to jazz and pop arrangements for the commercially successful world beat sound. The band formed in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Gage Averill, "Global Imaginings," 342.

1978, with original members Daniel “Dady” Beaubrun (bass), his brother Theodore “Lolo” Beaubrun (vocals), and Theodore’s wife Mimerose Beaubrun (vocals). As a response to the popular style of *konpa* in the country, the music of the burgeoning *rasin* movement sought to address the realities of living under Jean-Claude Duvalier. Political in message, the band also pulled from the rhythms of Vodou to shape its sound and aesthetic as a progressive alternative for conscious music fans in Haiti and abroad. From the liner notes of the band’s debut album *Vodou Adjae*, the sound of the recording “bridged the dance floor and the Vodou temple, mixing influences from religious drumming and from the high-energy springtime festival called *rara*.”<sup>59</sup> The band signed a deal with Mango Records, the world music subsidiary of UK-based Island Records, now owned by Universal Music Group, which had distribution throughout North America and Europe. The label also marketed acts like Jamaican dub reggae act Black Uhuru, Senegalese vocalist Baaba Maal, and the New Orleans Mardi Gras Indian studio band The Wild Tchoupitoulas. The diversity in the roster shows the approach of the label by marketing musicians who are united by their roots to Africa, not a single language or style.

The band fully embraced Haitian cultural elements, eschewing the commercial pop influences that Josué had, but introduced world audiences to this Haitian cosmopolitan style in the new movement of *rasin* for the first time. Josué heard *Vodou Adjae* in Paris and immediately fell in love with the sound, excited to hear that such a style in his native language had gained such international success. The studio quality of the album also appealed to Josué because the instruments he heard in Vodou

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<sup>59</sup> Boukman Eksperyans, Liner Notes, *Vodou Adjae*, Mango Records 9899, 1999, compact disc.

performance were reinvented through modern recording technology. This sound impacted Josué's desire to perform in the style of world beat, and he worked with Daniel "Dady" Beaubrun to produce several tracks on *Regleman*. Beaubrun, a well-known producer in the Haitian music industry, also wrote "Madam Latan" (Mother Lake) on the album, working closely with Josué to keep the sound of *rasin* music in world markets as it has been produced for the past twenty years.

Although world audiences have experienced Haitian acts that are influenced by Vodou, Josué is nonetheless marketed heavily because of his status as a Vodou priest. It is a source of frustration for him that his interaction with the media must begin by challenging the pre-conceived notions they hold about him and seek to perpetuate. In a story on ABC News, he agreed to several interviews with reporters who supposedly wanted to cover the release of *Regleman*, but instead sought to film a Vodou ceremony in his home. Despite the dubious nature of the station's inquiry, Josué saw this as a possible opportunity to once again extend his *pwen* to a wider audience. He felt the recording crew, however, did not seek to learn, but to project already held beliefs that it had made its business of misrepresenting.

Journalists, like consumers, are not entirely familiar with Haitian culture, but are in a position to exacerbate misunderstandings about Haiti through their coverage of it. In their influential positions to elucidate, music journalists add more obscurity in their attempts to explain the material because neither they nor music consumers are very familiar with the work. Reportage on another Haitian act, The Creole Choir of Cuba based in Camagüey, Cuba who sing in French, Spanish, and mostly Kreyòl, also shows an inability of journalists to describe accurately the unfamiliar sounds of Haiti. In the

*San Jose Mercury News*, music journalist Andrew Gilbert effectively explains the Haitian-Cuban connection that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when many Haitians went to Cuba to work in the sugarcane fields. He gets much of the article wrong, however, in his attempt to explain the music and relies on the equal ignorance of his readers to convey the information. Gilbert praises the “gorgeous new album” entitled “Tande-La” and mistranslates it as “Real World” when *tande la* translates as “listening.”<sup>60</sup> He gives the same treatment to the song title “Fey” in attempt to describe an “assertively lapidary arrangement of the vodou anthem ‘Fey’ (Faith), which became a rallying cry for supporters of Jean-Bertrand Aristide after the 1991 coup removed him from office.”<sup>61</sup> Although the song was indeed banned under the military rule of Raoul Cedras and became a one of resistance to support Aristide, the song “Fey” refers to the kind of leaves used in Vodou ritual, not Gilbert’s mistranslation and familiar notion of “faith.” On the subject of Haiti, reportage on Haiti allows journalists to present their first impressions on the material without undergoing rigorous fact-checking expected for other coverage. Because the wider readership accepts the gloss of synoptic summary, it demonstrates its lack of intimate knowledge of the subject.

To appeal to this consumer market, the religious elements of the performance are further exoticized by those with high-financial stakes and presented as a type of Vodou music in a modern age. The misunderstanding of Vodou also creates a thematic space that can be marketed and thereby received by music consumers who have been informed by overwhelmingly negative media projections of the country. Consumers therefore rely

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Gilbert, “Mixing Music of the Caribbean,” *San Jose Mercury News*, October 20, 2011, [http://www.mercurynews.com/entertainment/ci\\_19132155](http://www.mercurynews.com/entertainment/ci_19132155) (accessed November 14, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

on imaginative narratives of the country generated by marketing interests instead of their own previous experiences with Haitian music, certainly a probable cause for disjuncture. The music is highly polished, a clear product of cosmopolitan society meshing with the timbral and rhythmic elements of what the ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong conceptualizes as “Elsewhere” right at home.<sup>62</sup>

The music, in essence, represents the cultural capital that symbolizes a value system informed by other currents of thought not native to one’s own country. Such values are also upheld by the musical audience for whom Josué performs. The world beat audience is amenable to learning about Vodou because it represents a style of music that is underrepresented in their acquisition of music from across the globe. The lyrics are steeped in the *regleman*, which can introduce the religion to those who are unfamiliar, but it is the performance of the modern sound of electro-Vodou music that challenges the attitudes of journalists like Brooks and Harrison. The artist projects a style of music that is uniquely informed by the transnational experience of a contemporary Haitian artist, revealing an influence of cosmopolitan values on aesthetic tastes that certainly are not resistant to progress. Cosmopolitanism, according to Stuart Hall, is a selective exchange that always “draws on the traces and residues of many cultural systems” that will create a specific global aesthetic of taste and preference accepted by performer and consumer.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Hall states that: “It means the ability to stand outside of having one’s life written and scripted by any one community, whether that is a faith or tradition or religion or culture—whatever it might be— and to draw selectively on a variety of discursive

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<sup>62</sup> Deborah Wong, *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10.

<sup>63</sup> Stuart Hall, “Windows on Cosmopolitanism,” in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Steven Verotec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.

meanings.”<sup>64</sup> Josué’s performance makes the point that cosmopolitanism is alive in Vodou, which not only adapts to modern trends, but also shapes them. Here, Josué expresses his point that Vodou is not a religion that is antiquated or superstitious. Haitians who subscribe to cosmopolitan values may choose different dialogues of interacting with their own cultural systems, but negotiate their previously held experiences with those informed by interactions with non-Haitians. Josué projects a version of cosmopolitanism that reflects his deeply rooted cultural values in Haiti with the styles he learned through international experiences abroad, which were shaped by his circumstances of exile and intellectual curiosity. These values are true testimonies that grant him access to a more expansive audience to fulfill his desire to “wash the face of Vodou” on a grander scale. This performance demonstrates that Vodou is not a static system, but an evolving ethos that adherents use it in different environments.

Josué’s ventures into the world of performing arts have granted him what he commonly refers to as a “passport,” a symbolic document that grants him access to new worlds that only existed in his global imagination as teenager. He feels artistic validation from the recording industry. His personal accomplishments in the music have granted him a larger theater because of the cosmopolitan appeal of those pursuits to his audiences. The system of cosmopolitanism embraced and performed by Josué is considered valuable cultural capital by the consumer demographic of world beat listeners to whom he wishes to appeal. Such a listenership, he suggests, has an intellectual curiosity and a general spirituality not represented in the pop music sphere.

To reach this new demographic, Josué negotiates misrepresentations such as the face painting, as well as the interjection of “field recording” and “voodoo dolls.” His

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



world beat listeners prefer “something else” that satisfies their interest in various cultures that often accompany other purchasing habits of cultural capital.<sup>65</sup> In the liner notes for *World Beat*, Spencer suggests that “world music is both entertaining and different” for such consumers.<sup>66</sup> Josué believes that they have an innate spirituality that attracts them to his music. Spirituality is not the same as religion, he suggests, but both of these pursuits maintain a belief in a higher being that has an impact on one’s moral codes in everyday life. The music of Vodou in a world beat setting is extremely evocative for this demographic. Josué’s form of “electro-Vodou” therefore has a greater appeal to buyers who are not knowledgeable about Haitian culture.

Josué suggests that consumers who have cosmopolitan interests that draw from many cultural systems find his music as an alternative to previous experiences with world beat entertainers. Indeed, it is more than his music that is intriguing: it is also the glimpse that his listeners get of a foreign culture with which they have limited previous engagement. Josué’s world beat style is influenced by his spiritual calling, which has led to his pursuits in music, dance, theater, and academia. These values make up a specific Otherness in the music that Western audiences desire. Jocelyne Guilbault calls this mindset a “colonial vision” that views the world beat musician as “exotic (in the sense of the unusual), sensual (in its connections with dance), mystical (in its philosophical dimension), and attractive.”<sup>67</sup> In this sense, Josué is an attractive singer not only because he is a well-established musician, but also because he meets the other qualities, including

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<sup>65</sup> Erol Josué, interview by author, May 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Spencer, 1992.

<sup>67</sup> Jocelyne Guilbault, “World Music” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 178.

sensuality and exoticism, and has a marketable (if somewhat manipulated) story to tell. A press release for Josué's performance at the Babel Med Music Festival in Marseille, France, described his style as: "a Haitian Voodoo Man-inspired style of roots music, [which is] sensual and spiritual."<sup>68</sup> These are requirements for consumer appreciation and acquisition of cultural capital in the form of new music made available in world beat markets.

Listener demand for these characteristics in world beat serves as a bridge for potentially mitigating relationships that have been fragmented by disjuncture. These listeners seek relatively familiar sounds combined with those outside the commercial fringe. Because their desires are met, Josué gains access to a larger market of consumers that are eager to hear the music of Vodou. Through world music in the market realm, Josué asserts that Vodou is just as modern and informed by global shifts in technology and style as anything else in the world of international music performance. He accomplishes this through using performance styles deeply rooted in Haiti, interwoven with those he learned, felt, and experienced abroad.

In moving to Paris, New York, and Miami, which are key cities in Haiti's Tenth Department, Josué became interested in the nightlife and social atmosphere that was driven largely by electronic music. Josué's "electro-Vodou" style carries this designation in name and points to the cosmopolitan experience abroad with the undeniable Haitian roots inseparable from the music. The repertoire performed on *Regleman* reveals these influences, but Josué also collaborates with other artists in the Diaspora to perform a style

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<sup>68</sup> Press release for Babel Med Music Festival, "Africultures – Événement – Erol Josué," *Africultures*, <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=evenement&no=24443> (accessed February 22, 2012). In French, "*un Haitian Voodoo Man aux inspirations musicales roots, sensuelles et spirituelles...* "

of music truly informed by his experience abroad. The malleability of “electro” is appropriate in its depth to describe a sound that does not denote a specific genre, but more of a generalized listenership. Because “electronic music” has many distinctions in each of the places where Josué lived, the versatility of the term allows him to explore many styles and express his understanding of cosmopolitanism to a wider audience. His performance in genres that allow broad flexibility is key to accomplishing his ultimate goal of engaging a broader listenership in Haitian culture—a position that challenges his audience’s aesthetic comfort zones and leads them to observe the rift between idealized and real-life projections of Haiti.

Electronic music became an integral part of his social life and part of the testimony of his experience in the Diaspora. Following the release of *Regleman* in 2007, Josué worked with Haitian-American house-music producer Jephthe Guillaume to produce a 12” single, “Twa Fey” (Three Leaves). The record was released on Active Ingredient Records, a label that claims bases in New York City, Helsinki, and throughout Europe.<sup>69</sup> The song is at 124bpm in 4/4 time in a house-music style, one that is largely deterritorialized with several different hybrids and subgenres.<sup>70</sup> “Twa Fey” mixes elements of deep house, a style influenced by soul and R&B music instrumentation and mood. Choosing such a genre employs a malleable style that increases its international appeal. House music originated in Chicago, Illinois in the early 1980s and spread through major cosmopolitan cities in the United States soon after. It then spread

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<sup>69</sup> Guillaume and Josué recorded the song in August 2007, but the single was not officially released until September 1, 2011.

<sup>70</sup> House music has many different sub-genres that may be associated with a region, but that are performed and produced worldwide. They included deep-house, acid-house, tech-house, witch-house, glitch-house, any many more.

internationally, adapted to regional trends and led to innovations in electronic music and styles. The artist embraced the symbolic transnationalism of the house music genre and viewed it as a signifier of contemporary cross-cultural dialogue in which Haitians undoubtedly participated.

The song “Twa Fey” (Three Leaves) is an important one in the Haitian repertoire. The “leaves” in the song can refer to the objects used in ceremonial cleansing and healing rituals, but can also serve as a metaphor for loss, mourning, and remembrance for many Haitians. “Twa Fey,” as historian Laurent Dubois describes it, is “a kind of charter that describes exile, survival, and remembrance.”<sup>71</sup> It can be sung in circumstances exacerbated by the longing for one’s home country in the Diaspora. For Josué, it captures the experience of exile caused by an unstable political environment that leaves him feeling “so dry” and needing a reconnection with his home country.

He begins the song by announcing in an assertive voice an improvised reworking of the lyrics, beginning with *twa fey tombe ladan’n* (“three leaves fall in my basin”). The leaves reference the memory Josué has of Haiti in the Diaspora and also the integral part the leaves play for his spiritual cleansing and physical relief. The symbol of the basin also reinforces a connection shared among those in the Diaspora. To express feelings of kinship, one might say “we’ve shared the same basin,” an intimate connection with another and one that is enhanced away from one’s home in Haiti. To reference this shared basin of water and leaves, Josué expresses a longing for a community of Haitians that varies in size in certain parts of the Tenth Department. Performance of the song in this style shows Josué’s ability to remain closely connected to the cultural legacies of his

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<sup>71</sup> Sasha Frere-Jones, “Roundtable: Haitian Music,” *New Yorker*, March 24, 2009. <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/sashafreerejones/2009/03/roundtable-hait.html> (accessed December 19, 2011).

country at home and in the Diaspora. At the same time, it informs a wider-audience that its perceptions of his country are antiquated.

*Twa fey, twa rasin O*  
*Jete bliye, ramase sonje*

*Mwen gen basin mwen*  
*Twa fey tombe ladan'n*  
*Jete bliye, ramase sonje*

Three leaves, three roots O  
To throw down is to forget, to gather up is  
to remember  
I have my basin (bath)  
Three leaves fall in  
To throw down is to forget, to gather up is  
to remember

The three leaves are integral to one's physical and spiritual cleansing, and also symbolize the comfort provided by one's familiar surroundings at home. After living abroad for seven years and experiencing what he calls the "dryness" of his exile, Josué returned to Haiti in 1999. His family welcomed him back home with a bath of leaves, which they drew for him upon his arrival. The water, leaves, and familiarity of Haiti provided him with an instant relief through reclaiming his *rasin-s* (roots). Because Josué's main objective was to advance his culture through performance, his "gathering up" of roots expressed his connection to his country and showed his innovation in the Haitian repertoire. His cosmopolitan world beat arrangement of this traditional Haitian song provides a multi-layered narrative that ultimately fit into his mission statement as an artist.

In "Twa Fey," Josué sings the lyrics with multiple meanings over a progressive house rhythm, intending to engage his listeners with provocative but unfamiliar lyrics over a familiar house beat. Though the song is in Kreyòl, world beat and dance music audiences are open to music in unfamiliar languages. This language barrier does not deter world beat or electronic music listeners. Indeed, Josué suggests that the use of Kreyòl is tactically a means to arouse curiosity in a new listenership that does not focus

strictly on the meaning of the songs. His music's presence in international markets is therefore enough to serve as a means to counter pre-conceived notions of the "field recording" references in press releases and reviews. He ultimately seeks journalistic focus on his performance and not an attempt to explain his unfamiliar music. The production of "Twa Fey" demonstrates that when Josué performs a style outside the traditional Haitian repertoire, he can cull from Vodou practices to advance Haitian music in modern electronic forms. Moreover, even though the song is sung in Kreyòl and is not understood by a world beat listenership, fans can both have their curiosities aroused and ascribe a certain spiritual element to Josué's music. These elements together make his electro-Vodou style more attractive to an unfamiliar listenership. This performance appeals to a demographic of world beat fans and helps dispel the limitations imposed on his music by label agencies.

On an international scale, Josué feels his music represents something that is specific to Haitian culture and that has elements of the electronic music he experienced in the Diaspora. His presence as a performer is perhaps more effective in changing commonly held beliefs about the country and he utilizes the strategy of *voye pwen* (sending a point) to make a challenging impact. Often times, *pwen* are employed to criticize or mock specifically with poetic wordplay in a language that sidesteps conventional criticism. For Josué, music allows him to confront the issues of misrepresentation that affect Haitians on a global level, often impacting their lives in extreme ways on local levels.

## Chapter 2:

### Counternarratives of Haitian Musicians and Artists in South Florida

With just a few hundred miles of ocean between us and a long history that binds us together, Haitians are neighbors of the Americas and here at home.<sup>72</sup>

— President Barack Obama

Negative global perceptions of Haitians have real-life effects for newly arrived Haitians in the United States, specifically in South Florida and Miami. Prior to entry into a neighbor's home in Haiti, one must greet the host audibly with the word, "Honor," and in return, one receives the response, "Respect." This formal acknowledgement of reception confirms an understanding that that the visitor is welcome and reinforces these important values in Haitian society. Edwidge Danticat's memoir *Brother, I'm Dying* describes her Uncle Joseph's haunting experience in the custody of immigration officials following a series of traumatic interactions that finally led to his death while chained to a hospital bed. This account reveals an ongoing cultural conflict between neighbors who struggle to co-exist within a clearly unbalanced power structure that is based on misunderstandings and that have real effects on individual well-being. Danticat's memoir focuses on the harsh realities caused by this tenuous neighbor-relationship by her retelling of the cultural differences in terms of policy decisions that affect medical ethics and official reception of Haitians in Miami. As the memoir describes, the horrible reception her Uncle Joseph faced upon his arrival shows that policy against Haitians

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<sup>72</sup> Barack Obama, *Remarks by the President on Rescue Efforts in Haiti*, official press release, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-rescue-efforts-haiti> (accessed November 11, 2011).

affects the lives of those who are on the periphery. This treatment results from inaccurate global projections that can affect the local experience in extreme ways.

In 2004, Danticat's Uncle Joseph found himself detained by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement officers in Miami. He made the mistake of honestly declaring that he planned on staying longer than his 30-day visa allowed by asking for sanctuary due to his health conditions and the violent climate at home. The ICE representatives noted that his medicine appeared to be a "voodooish potion" and was confiscated. Far from a perceived "voodoo" medicine, it was a mix of herbs that probably impacted Uncle Joseph (a non-practitioner of Vodou) positively in some way. The US immigration officials substituted another medicine Uncle Joseph had never before ingested and that they forced him to take. This substitution led to a vomiting spell that medical personnel deemed phony and accused him of faking. Despite living an "honorable life" according to the commonly held understanding of the term in Haiti, Uncle Joseph was considered a criminal and detained in the Krome Detention Center in Miami, breathing his last breaths chained to a hospital bed. His tragic death was caused by unfortunate projections of his culture at the global level that had dire consequences in his local situation.

Due to an extreme disjuncture of cultural understanding impacted by global media and perpetuated by government policy, these dominant narratives have extremely dangerous effects to Haitian lives. The purpose of this second chapter is to focus on how South Floridian artists use their artistic platforms to provide clarity to the misunderstanding of Haitian culture in the Diaspora. It is important to note that they want to counter the imagery of the mass media throughout the world because it has affected their lives on a local level. Noting this, I sought to interview these artists in



South Florida due to its location as a key area in the Tenth Department. As I have noted through the comments by Minister of Diaspora Daniel Supplice, the Haitian community outside of the country's geographic borders are playing a larger influence in the nation's affairs than ever before and these artists remain extremely connected in this transnational outpost in South Florida.

I will focus on Jean-Michel Daudier and Aldore "Empress Addi" Casseus in the localized study of artists who use artistic narratives in response to negative representations. I carried out oral histories with each of them and noticed the consistent message of promoting favorable depictions of Haitian in their work. These two artists present different strategies for achieving these goals through their own artistic expressions that capture the experience of cultural production in the Diaspora. These three case studies will focus on the artists' creative outputs, mission statements, and testimonies that attest to their desire to promote Haitian culture in Miami.

South Florida hosts approximately 100,000 Haitians, a population second to only New York City in the United States. Neighborhoods like Little Haiti, North Miami, Delray Beach, and several other places throughout South Florida host significant numbers of Haitian Americans. Beginning in 1977, those who wished to leave the island sought out this geographically convenient location to re-establish themselves due to increasingly more difficult conditions for citizens under Jean-Claude Duvalier. Over the course of four years, nearly 50,000 Haitians arrived on the shores of South Florida and many died en route.<sup>73</sup> These migrants who sought exile from the tyranny of the Duvalier regime arrived in the United States and were accused of carrying tuberculosis among other

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<sup>73</sup> Alex Stepick III, "The Refugees Nobody Wants: Haitians in Miami," *Miami Immigration, Ethnicity, and Social Change*, ed. Guillermo J. Grenier (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 58.

diseases, which barred them from enjoying the comfort of citizenship in their new home. These stigmas because of their alleged infections carried real life consequences. Alex Stepick III suggests that these perceptions not only affected the “boat people,” who were thought to be uneducated and unskilled, but middle-class Haitians who pursued other channels to gain citizenship.<sup>74</sup> Because the majority of U.S. citizens believed these unfounded accusations, official policies of immediate deportation for all newly arrived Haitians were put in place. This policy offers a contrast to the open door policy extended to Cuban refugees during the Mariel Boat Lift in 1980, making the issue racialized even further. The following year, official policy called for the detention of undocumented Haitians at the Krome Detention Center in the Everglades. Through advocacy of local civil rights groups, such policies of interception and deportation abated temporarily. Democratic State Senator for South Florida’s Fourth, Twelfth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Districts, Dante B. Fascell commented: “We can’t keep moving these tent communities around or civil rights groups will start squawking.”<sup>75</sup> In addition, the Center for Disease Control accused Haitians of being “at-risk” carriers for HIV/AIDS. Although, as Paul Farmer demonstrated in *AIDS and Accusation*, such charges were patently untrue, they created enormously negative perceptions of Haitians within the city, socially stigmatizing them upon arrival.

The contemporary situation in the city is much different today. Cultural advocacy groups like the Rhythm Foundation put on a monthly Big Night in Little Haiti that features Haitian performers for a world-beat audience demographic. Nonetheless, the

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<sup>74</sup> Stepick, 28.

<sup>75</sup> Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida. Box 2653, folder 36.

Haitians whom I interviewed recall a recent time when people joked that HBO stood for “Haitian Body Odor” and such media projected accusations had real effects for their local livelihoods. In the second large chapter of this thesis, I focus on case studies of two Haitian artists based in South Florida who share similar goals of dispelling myths and offer alternative narratives to that of Josué on a smaller, more localized level. These musical testimonies emerge as a result of the overarching problem of disjuncture. The artists differ in listenership, consumer market appeal, and musical style, but share the common mission to have their work reflect personal narratives of Haiti that are more positive than general media perceptions.

The two musical artists in this section, Jean-Michel Daudier and Aldore “Empress Addi” Casseus, employ styles of world beat that allow them to perform music largely influenced by Haiti as well as the familiar sounds they grew to love in the Diaspora. As a byproduct of the mixture of styles, they strategically extend their appeal to a wider audience and introduce many people to Haitian music with familiar elements that make it more accessible for first-time listeners. Just as Josué utilizes the pastiche sounds of other cultural music styles, so do Daudier and Rara Rock call upon world beat performance to express a vision of that Haiti is modern, adaptable, upwardly mobile, and indeed proud of its ancestral inheritance. Such performances seek to engage a community of like-minded Haitians based in South Florida, as well as a non- Kreyòl speaking audience. In this style, these artists seek to create a version that counters dominant media narratives in non-Haitian audiences. They also utilize the Haitian community to advance their culture as a means to challenge dominant narratives that have actual impacts on their lives.

Most troublesome for Daudier is the trope that Haiti is the “poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere,” a recurring positioning that does not in any way represent him as an artist or middle-class Haitian. He is an accountant by trade, but performs weekly at several venues and records frequently with several other well-known Haitian artists in South Florida. Empress “Addi” Casseus, who fronts a group called Rara Rock, seeks to counter media tales of hopelessness and depravity in media stories following the reconstruction effort. Her style is summarized by the band’s name: *rara* is a popular carnival marching style that is rhythmically adapted for guitar by Patrick Dorce, a Haitian musician who performed in *rara* bands when he lived in Haiti. Elizabeth McAlister writes: “Rara is the yearly festival in Haiti that, even more than Carnival, belongs to the so-called peasant classes and the urban poor.”<sup>76</sup>

Rara Rock’s sound consists of standard alternative rock orchestration of guitar, bass, and drum kit, along with influences ranging from 60s psychedelic and modern rock, to spoken word and Haitian *rasin* (roots) music. Casseus too employs world beat as a means to challenge the pre-conceived notions that specifically were illustrated by earthquake relief imagery of hopelessness. The foundation of performance to oppose this is to provide relief through celebration of culture instead of images of pity.

### **Jean-Michel Daudier and “The Haiti You Don’t See”**

This section will focus on Jean-Michel Daudier’s performance of a “Haiti You Don’t See,” which is rooted in Haitian popular *konpa* music that has dominated the country’s commercial industry since 1960 and the traditional style of *twoubadou* with the inclusion of bossa nova rhythms that he experienced while living in New York and

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<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara!: Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 3.

Miami. Such a sound is a style of Haitian Tropical music, as performed on his latest album *Tropical Paradise*, which is a pastiche blend of traditional Haitian styles with the musical influences that capture a middle-class experience in the Diaspora. The “unseen Haiti” is the nation’s middle-class population whose presence contradicts the media tropes of poverty that are always projected onto the country. Daudier utilizes his platform as an artist to express the cosmopolitan values that shape the multi-influenced sound of his music. Through weekly community performances, he provides a stage for other Haitian artists during his weekly performances at Casa Champet in Pembroke Pines, Florida. He has recorded four full-length albums that make up his set lists on a weekly basis. The focus of this section will be on Daudier’s performances at Casa Champet, a large restaurant and performance space, where he performed weekly from March 2010 until February 2012.<sup>77</sup>

Daudier is well known for the song “Lè m Pa Wè Soley La” (When I Can’t See the Sun) that became a rallying cry during the popular mobilization to unseat former President Jean-Claude Duvalier that occurred on February 7, 1986. The song focused on the closure of the popular Catholic station Radio Soleil on December 7, 1985. Radio Soleil broadcasters denounced the killings of three students in the northern city of Gonaïves the week before and the Duvalier regime smashed the station’s equipment in response. When the station re-opened three weeks later, popular DJ Papa Djo played the song for the first time and introduced it to a wider public. Daudier wrote the song in response to the closings and the Radio Soleil DJs spread it throughout the country. The song transformed into an anthem and remained a symbol of hope for many Haitians

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<sup>77</sup> Daudier announced on his fan page that he would be taking a break after two years on February 19<sup>th</sup> on his Facebook. *Facebook*, <http://www.facebook.com/jeanmicheldaudier> (accessed March 1, 2012).

today: many attendees at Casa Champet drive long distances to hear Daudier and many cry or express emotion during his performance colloquially known as “Soley La.”

Connecting the transnational nature of the Tenth Department even further, Radio Soleil in New York plays the song as its re-connecting broadcast following any technical difficulties. The New York station is not affiliated with the original Radio Soleil in Haiti, but station director Ricot Dupuy suggests that the name symbolizes a triumphant time for Haiti that unifies its people in the Diaspora.<sup>78</sup>

Following Jean-Claude Duvalier’s exit in 1986, Daudier gained popularity in Haiti because of the impact the song made. He performed weekly at Petionville’s Badoufou Club and recorded a full-length LP *Soley La* with Raoul Denis Jr. and Mushi Widmaier, well known Port-au-Prince musicians from the jazz-funk influenced *konpa* group Zèklè (Lightning).<sup>79</sup> Included on the album were optimistic songs sung in French like: “A Quand le Prochain Soleil?” (When Will the Next Sun Come?) and “Je veux être un Artiste” (I Want to Be an Artist). Specifically for the singer, it seemed like a brighter time that would certainly lead to change in the country.

After increased success that led to his more public presence, the military government that inherited power would also accost the singer after his performances when curfews were frequently implemented. After several unwanted encounters with military police, Daudier made the decision to move Queens Village, NY in 1989 after not seeing the progress that was promised by the expulsion of Duvalier. In New York, he continued to perform as a solo artist and enjoyed being in a new environment with a large

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<sup>78</sup> Ricot Dupuy, Director of Radio Soleil, phone interview with author, October 25, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 123.

Haitian community. Beginning in the 1960s, the Haitian middle class began moving to areas of New York, Brooklyn, and Queens and created a market for the popular *konpa* and *mini-djaz* styles there. Averill cites the “comparatively wealthy” Haitian community in New York that could support musicians with better wages and also the existence of a large commercial record industry that helped develop the scene there. Daudier’s community experience in New York reminded him of his experience in Haiti and he maintained a social life with other middle-class Haitians in small, but active musical circles. Daudier relocated to South Florida in 1998 for work as an accountant and to develop his career there.

The projections of poverty, although affecting a large part of the population, do not seem relevant to Daudier and the community of Haitians in the Diaspora who are directly tied to the Haiti’s constructed image. Daudier says much of his audience is college educated and has professional careers in South Florida, a projection of Haitian mobility that does not normally garner media attention. Nonetheless, his Haitian fans and listeners often feel the same stigma attached to the designation of “poorest nation in the Western hemisphere.”<sup>80</sup> To challenge the idea that Haiti must rely on outsiders for assistance, Daudier also uses his Sunday performances as a way to support local causes in Haiti that highlight the strong transnational connection that largely fuels the economy there. In the Diaspora, members of Daudier’s community can effect local change without relying on foreign aid, which is often difficult to track and monitor once in Haiti. On October 16, 2011, Daudier partnered with the *Fondation pour le developement de Bainet* to collect goods specifically for 150 Students in Bainet, a southern city about two hours

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<sup>80</sup> "Dealing with Haiti's Recent Disaster," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, Jan 16, 2010, A-6; Central Intelligence Agency, "Central America and Caribbean: Haiti," in *CIA – The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ha.html> (accessed February 2, 2011).

west of Jacmel on the coast of the Caribbean Sea. Even far away, Haitians remain connected and address concerns on local levels by uniting around cultural events. Such a deep connection for Haitians living in Miami makes negative media projections much more powerful, especially when they are wholly irrelevant to the middle-class demographic that counters stereotypes of poverty as a uniquely Haitian phenomenon in North American media.

Every Sunday, Daudier opens the stage to weekly guests who perform between his sets. Case Champet is a music venue and a restaurant located in a strip mall in Pembroke Pines. The restaurant offers traditional Haitian and Dominican cuisine with a full bar set-up. The performance stage is at the front of the sizable dance floor that can accommodate about fifty couples slow dancing there. Daudier draws in the large crowd and grants access to smaller performers to present their work as well. He observes that the performers he introduces every week are often omitted from the dialogue of the Haitian cultural discussions. As I learned in my fieldwork at the venue from September 2010 until February 2012, some fans often drove from suburbs of Orlando, about 225 miles north, to be part of an often unseen version of Haiti and the transnational community network in the Diaspora. For Daudier, providing a space for these artists to express an alternative narrative is the fulfillment of his desire to project an unseen version of Haiti. The evening began when Daudier greeted his audience while they dined and he performed a slower set of *twoubadou* music influenced by bossa nova rhythms for the crowd. He frequently had guest performances there, with recurring members of Women Writers of Haitian Descent, Haitian sax player Karl Fontaine, singer Beethova Obas who is well known for his song "Nwel Anmé" (Bitter Christmas), alongside poets and school



dance troupes. Michele Jessica Fievre is a frequent guest and a part of the Women Writers of Haitian Descent group, as well as a founder of the popular web-based literary magazine *Sliver of Stone*.

After his guests' performances, Daudier and his band perform more upbeat styles of *konpa* in the second set. Some couples choose to eat during this time around 9 pm, but others take to the dance floor in couples or sing along in their seats. Everyone there dresses according to the restaurant's code: collared shirts and dress shoes for men and skirts or dresses for the women. Shorts or sneakers are not allowed. The smart casual attire blends well with the atmosphere that reveals an understanding of class-specific values and codes that were similar to those in Haiti for them. One attendee who I met there in August 2011 said that Casa Champet reminded him of the nightclubs he frequented in Petionville, an affluent suburb of Port-au-Prince, in the 1970s.<sup>81</sup>

Daudier believes the middle-class Haitian community or its positive relief efforts are not represented in dominant media narratives. What is "seen" in media coverage of Haiti is the repeated accusation that it is the "poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere," a recurring accusation that does not apply to the singer nor the Haitian community that he is part of in South Florida. Geographer Amy Potter's study "Voodoo, Mermaids and Zombies" surveyed newspapers for repeated phrases that were printed in articles about Haiti from January-December 2004. In her study, the phrase "poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere" appeared with the highest frequency among the search terms, with

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<sup>81</sup> When I asked Daudier if he agreed with this statement, he said: "I can see the similarities."

a secondarily high occurrence of the words “poverty” and “poor.”<sup>82</sup> This dominant accusation specifically focuses on Haiti and omits the similarities it has with other Third World and surrounding nations. Repeated projections of “poorest nation in the Western hemisphere” strike the Haitian middle-class presence from the historical record.<sup>83</sup>

Other Caribbean nations, as geographer Bonham C. Richardson suggests, have also been subjected to “externally imposed underdevelopment” through foreign and economic policies. Problems in Haiti, including unemployment, high poverty rates, and malnutrition are also common in the Third World and throughout developing nations in the Caribbean. Frequent charges, however, suggest that poverty is a phenomenon only unique to Haiti, even though it has many shared traits with other developing nations.<sup>84</sup> Reinforcing that Haiti is poor is a catchall accusation for any crisis the country may face. Haiti, however, is the only nation that must carry this stigma in the media consistently, limiting the likelihood of any positive news stories. If there are indeed favorable reports, they tend to focus on how Haitians are “faithful” and “resilient” in times of adversity, but stories of Haitian prosperity that do not fulfill consumer expectations are ignored.<sup>85</sup> This is also a challenge for Daudier in expanding his audience.

Although Daudier is Haitian, he is not considered part of the dominant discussion in news media because of his his middle-class status, which limits his access to a larger

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<sup>82</sup> Potter, “Voodoo, Zombies and Mermaids,” 218. Potter surveys 711 newspaper articles and observes 90 mentions of “poorest nation in the Western hemisphere,” 70 mentions of “poverty,” and 58 mentions of “poor” or “impoverished” country.

<sup>83</sup> “Dealing with Haiti’s Recent Disaster.” *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, Jan 16, 2010, A-6.

<sup>84</sup> Bonham C. Richardson, *Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492-1992: A Regional Geography*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>85</sup> UN News Centre, “Secretary-General Praises Faith, Resilience of Haitian People Amid Tragedy,” United Nations. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=33542&Cr=haiti&Cr1=> (accessed January 10, 2012).

audience. He feels his performance of world beat music is another example of showing a “Haiti you don’t see,” but has challenges expanding his audience because of language barriers and the lack of journalistic coverage. The performer points to the influence of Haitian *twoubadou* and *konpa* singers that have shaped his sound, but also cites Brazilian bossa nova guitarist Tom Jobim as having a style that has also shaped the rhythmic foundation of his music.<sup>86</sup> Daudier performs a repertoire of mostly original songs spanning from his debut album, *Soley La* in 1986 to his most recent recording, *Tropical Paradise* in 2009. He calls the latest release “Haitian Tropical” music, a specific style that middle-aged and middle-class demographics seem to prefer. The style is informed by the market categories of reggae and R&B that are popular in South Florida with influences pulled from many cultures. *Tropical Paradise* also has traces of Brazilian styled guitar harmonies that appeal to a more cosmopolitan world beat audience. The album combines elements of the unfamiliar with a studio quality production that audiences know well. Radio Haiti Tropical in Orlando, Florida states that its mission is to “better serve the Haitian American community, which continues to grow rapidly as a positive force in this cosmopolitan city.”<sup>87</sup> The station appeals to a demographic that represents a middle-class listenership in the “Haiti you don’t see,” so there is a specific effort to highlight the positive influence of this group in the cosmopolitan community in which it resides. Daudier’s performance style also fits into the world beat genre that blends several different sounds, expresses cosmopolitan values that draw on the traces of

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<sup>86</sup> Bossa nova gained international success with the album *Getz/Gilberto*, a collaboration between American sax player Stan Getz and Brazilian guitarist João Gilberto that featured the compositions of Jobim. The album won four Grammy Awards in 1964 and is considered one of the earliest most successful cross-cultural commercially popular successes.

<sup>87</sup> Rossener Jean Pierre, “Radio Tropical Haiti,” *Radio Tropical* [http://www.radiohaititropical.com/about\\_us.htm](http://www.radiohaititropical.com/about_us.htm) (accessed February 12, 2012).

many different cultural systems, and appeals to new audiences that *konpa* simply does not reach in market appeal.

Daudier's self-positioning as a musician offers a narrative of a Haitian counterstory and also highlights the limitations of his music's reception in world beat. In world markets, the exoticized elements of the music are usually marketed and Daudier has limited appeal in this regard aside from the language of his material. In his case, the language creates a barrier to reaching new local audiences, which is not a problem for artists in global markets. Because Daudier performs Haitian Tropical music with percussive jazz and harmonic bossa nova arrangements, he considers it a world beat style. Yet because these two styles entered the musical mainstream almost fifty years ago and do not have the same exotic appeal of electro-Vodou music, they have less market appeal among world audiences. These audiences seek a prescribed image of Haiti that Daudier's middle-aged demographic and use of more established musical styles fail to conform with exaggerated accounts of Haitian adversity. The middle-class presence of Haitian-Americans is omitted from media discourses and is therefore not commercially viable in the dominant international industry.

Daudier faces a unique dilemma: just as he struggles to engage with a broader international listenership, his music lacks a linguistic connection to non-Haitian audiences in South Florida. His singing in French and Kreyòl is a barrier to reaching a non-Haitian population in the dominantly Spanish speaking community of South Florida and limits his performance opportunities relative to other Spanish-speaking world beat audiences who reach a larger market in the area through language alone. Because of limited French or Kreyòl news reportage in the area, Daudier feels that his work goes

unrecognized for a large music listenership. On a more localized level, the language barrier seems to be more of a hindrance than on a global sphere where the language is an intriguing feature of the work that can actually be marketed. South Florida provides a steady Haitian listenership, but Daudier is considering a future move to Montreal or Paris where his music could reach a larger audience through a shared language. His affairs at home in South Florida, his work as an accountant, and his family ties limit his ability to move at the moment, but he would like to expand into more relevant markets in the future. In January 2012, Daudier began working with new distribution agencies that have outlets throughout the French-speaking Caribbean, Europe, and West Africa. There are areas that he believes would be new audiences for his version of Tropical Haitian music. For him, the performance of this informed style expresses values deeply rooted in Haiti and reveals cosmopolitan influences. This is the fulfillment of projecting an unseen version of Haiti.

### **Empress Addi and Cultural Advancement in the Lakou**

Aldore Casseus, who performs as Empress Addi, is the lead singer for the Miami-based band, Rara Rock. The group's name describes its style of modern rock influenced by Haitian roots music. The band performs at event spaces that cater to Haitian and non-Haitian crowds, appealing to different demographics with its style that is shaped by the rhythms of Haitian *rara* music, as adapted by the guitarist Patrick Dorce, who was originally a drummer with *rara* bands in Haiti. The band's performance in this style shows its own versions of Haitian culture that embrace similar ideals as those of wider audiences to whom it appeals. Because the genre is versatile, Rara Rock harmoniously

performs with musical acts of different styles and across various platforms, including dancers, poets, and DJs at its appearances in South Florida to show a malleable form of Haitian music that draws on the influences of its surroundings.

To counter what Amy Potter<sup>88</sup> has described as an unexamined view of the role that outsiders have played in Haitian history, Casseus writes material that informs listeners about a version of Haiti that was once the most profitable island in the region, not the “poorest nation in the Western hemisphere.” In the band’s song “Haiti, My Country,” the US-born singer points to the natural resources that allowed the nation to provide the developing world with resources in the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

I know a place  
Blessed with green mountains  
Blessed with deep fountains  
Down low...  
I know a place  
With fields of sugarcane  
and the most fertile of all lands

Because media coverage rarely explores the origins of Haiti’s current condition, Empress Addi writes songs that fill in this missing narrative to a wider audience. Here she counters the notion that poverty has been embedded in the history of Haiti throughout time, which, she explains, is because of French exploitation and depletion of the resources the colonizing nation once relied on for trade. Though she does not detail the indemnity that the French demanded of Haiti in 1825, her lyrics convey that Haiti has indeed been wronged and exploited by outsiders who have had only financial stakes in the country:

I’m in this place, yeah  
They’ve robbed her of all (her) gold

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<sup>88</sup> Potter, 218.

With the fiercest stronghold  
 They've robbed my people so  
 And have turned my country cold  
 Have turned my people cold

The lyrics are sung over a I-IV-V-ii progression written by guitarist Patrick Dorce. With a full band, Rara Rock has up to five members with standard rock instrumentation of drum kit, electric bass, keyboards, and the addition of a conga player. Rhythmically, Dorce pulls from the *rara* repertoire he learned as a percussionist in the *Rada* and *Petwo* drumming styles during Lenten festivals in Haiti which influences his strumming patterns on the rhythm guitar. Casseus sees music as an opportunity to offer positive versions of Haiti that can help reduce the negative overall treatment of Haitians in the future. Dorce suggests that the band's style has a foundation in the rhythms of *rara* with the addition of rock harmonies and vocals that has been hard to describe for some audiences. Many people expect Haitians to play *konpa* or variations of reggae, he explains, and the group's world-beat style might be hard to categorize for some audiences. "But they can't say it's not good," he suggests, and cites the positive audience interaction he has always had with non-Haitian fans. This engaged audience is also experiencing a Haitian narrative that it would not have heard otherwise through negotiations between familiar and new cultural capital.

Casseus sees the non-Haitian audience as receptive to the group's music and utilizes this opportunity to raise funds for the country through positive cultural arts promotion. She utilizes world beat music in two ways: to reach non-Haitian crowds and to fund Haitian relief efforts geared toward specific through communal artistic performances. Such positive projections of stability and community organization are not

conveyed in newspaper coverage, as Potter discovers and are assumed to be non-existent by the consumer market.

Media officials consciously choose to show images of misery or desperation that appeal to consumer expectations and actually generate significant amounts of money that go to non-profit government organizations (NGOs) of varying levels of effectiveness and accountability. The Hope For Haiti Now: A Global Benefit for Earthquake Relief broadcast on MTV and other cable networks brought over 130 entertainment personalities together to take part in the relief event that was organized by actor and celebrity George Clooney. The event was lauded as a success by many news outlets as it reached 650 million homes and generated \$57 million dollars for Haitian relief.<sup>89</sup>

Though financially a great success, it relied on images of Haiti as desperate to generate the maximum amount of money. Viewers of the telethon are immediately struck by the image of bed-ridden Haitians in scenes of chaos.<sup>90</sup> The startling picture that begins the slideshow is that of an emaciated Haitian person whose gender is not clear due to malnourishment. Two pictures of crying children then blend into the backdrop of the stage and other pictures show other young Haitians either wailing in pain or in a somber state.<sup>91</sup> Performers like Beyonce, Madonna, Bono, Jay-Z and Bruce Springsteen performed well-known hits and collaborated for the cause of Haiti. They performed on a stage in front of the slideshow of rotating images that depict Haitians exclusively in states

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<sup>89</sup> Radar Online. "George Clooney's Hope For Haiti Telethon Smash Hit Success," Exclusives. <http://www.radaronline.com/exclusives/2010/01/george-clooneys-hope-haiti-telethon-smash-hit-success> (accessed January 14, 2012).

<sup>90</sup> A Haitian friend of mine said the most bothersome feature about the event was viewers "had no choice" but to observe the images of desperation.

<sup>91</sup> Associated Press, "Highlights of 'Hope for Haiti Now' Concert," Youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pFSe2ALUN> (accessed January 14, 2012).



of despair to generate more money for Haitian relief. Money raised went to Haitian singer Wyclef Jean's Yele Haiti foundation and the American Red Cross. Both organizations have faced criticism and accusations of misallocating or withholding funds ever since. Of the \$16 million generated by Yele in 2010, less than a third went directly to relief efforts in the country and several other millions were unaccounted for or paid to businesses in which Jean had financial stakes.<sup>92</sup> Critics have accused the Red Cross of withholding supplies or not spending enough of the money pledged by millions of people across the world. Elizabeth McAlister views the imagery of desperation and destruction used in the Hope For Haiti telethon as a way to generate significantly more money for the NGOs.<sup>93</sup> Reports show that NGOs have often sidestepped national jurisdictions,<sup>94</sup> violating the sovereignty of the nation and creating a further rift between outsider and the State.

From 2010-2012, Casseus and Dorce hosted monthly events called *Lakou-s* or Backyards where they performed, hosted other artists, and raised funds to send to Haiti. This approach of cultural celebration of Haitian-generated cultural production is one that stands in stark contrast to strategic media images of Haiti that seek to generate relief money through associations of hopelessness and poverty. The approach employed by Rara Rock in the *Lakou-s* challenges the harmful, albeit financially successful marketing tropes of misery as used in the Hope for Haiti telethon. Instead of generating revenue for

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<sup>92</sup> Isabel Vincent and Melissa Klein, "Questions dog Wyclef's Haiti fund," *International*, *New York Post*, November 17, 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth McAlister, "Singing, Religion, and the Quake in Haiti: From the Rubble to the Telethon," Was this a lecture? Indicate the format here. Casa Bacardi, University of Miami, October 20, 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Te-Ping Chen, "International NGOs Keep Haiti's Health Ministry in the Dark," *Change.org*, March 16, 2010, <http://news.change.org/stories/international-ngos-keep-haitis-health-ministry-in-the-dark> (accessed January 23, 2012).

Haitian relief through associations with poverty and helplessness, its non-profit organization, Organic Roots, generates localized aid to assist with specific projects through its community performance and cultural presence in South Florida. Casseus and Rara Rock thematically draw from the nation's history to inform an unknowing audience about the context for Haiti's current situation while testifying that images of despair do not benefit the country. The image that Haiti is helpless or dependent on foreign aid is one of many constructed narratives that have affected the country and its citizens in the Diaspora.

Growing up as a Haitian American in Miami during the 1980s was difficult for Casseus because of the negative stereotypes that others ascribed to her. U.S. reception of Haitians in the 1980s impacted how they were perceived in their daily lives. The singer was a child in Miami at the same time period when Edwidge Danticat's uncle was wrongfully detained and left to die in the Krome Detention Center. Despite their presence as a cultural capital in the Tenth Department, Haitians were bullied in schools because of negative media coverage that provided much of the subject material for peer bullying. Non-Haitian children taunted new arrivals from the island with accusations of AIDS and the charge of having "HBO," a pun on the popular television network at the time. Though hesitant to call it outright discrimination, Casseus describes the treatment as bullying that mostly prevailed because stereotypes in the media have negatively affected the treatment of young Haitian Americans in Miami. Amy Potter suggests that the way media consumers construct images of place affect and "legitimize social inequalities" against Haitians.<sup>95</sup> This observation of place construction of one's own

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<sup>95</sup> Potter, 210.

experience away from home lends to a new talking point that changes the discussion from discrimination (a system that limits one's livelihood), and advances it to bullying (a psychologically menacing act of violence inflicted on school-aged young people). This frame can provide a more nuanced discussion to analyze the difficulty faced by Haitians in the Diaspora. The rise of "cyber-bullying" in the United States has been covered extensively in media reports, which affects pop culture dialogue and public policy. Such media coverage led to the U.S. Department of Justice to generate a public service campaign against cyber-bullying for commercial media outlets through partnership with the Advertising Council in March 2007.

The style of *rara* that the band is now cultivates has not always been accessible for its members. Casseus grew up in a religious Christian household in Miami's Wynwood district and could only indulge in the pop music of the 1980s she loved when her parents were not around. At home, her family listened to Haitian Gospel music exclusively. Her parents frowned on secular music, and outright prohibited listening to or discussing *rara* in the home. Following weekly Kreyòl news broadcasts on WLRN, the South Florida affiliate for NPR, Casseus' mother would immediately switch the radio off when sounds of *rara* music closed the show. For young Aldore Cassues, that was the segment of the show when it livened up. Her mother associated the music with the uneducated rural population that practiced Vodou, a practice she believed was ungodly. Empress Addi's interest in drums and the music of *rara* was considered a forbidden pursuit for many Haitians, especially for young girls, because of its association with Vodou. Since Cassues's ventures in music have become more serious, however, her

father has expressed support and pride about her music despite early reservations about having his Haitian daughter play music in a secular style.

In a similar upbringing in Haiti, Patrick Dorce was also forbidden to take part in the processional music that he now has come to love and perform. When a *rara* passed, some Haitian adults would make the children go inside the house or hide their eyes from the passing crowd. The lyrics can be bawdy in the style of *betiz*, a style of speech that invokes profane and comical situations in song, and festive drinking of *klerin*, a popular grain alcohol or rum during the passing of the *rara*. With these elements, as well as the associations of Vodou that were necessarily attached to the style, Christian Haitians limited their children's exposure to it. Dorce, however, did not observe the alleged evil nature of *rara* in his short, shielded glimpses of the procession when it passed his house. As a musician with curiosity about the forbidden style, he began playing drums with groups in his teens away from the watch of his parents. Both he and Casseus attest to the spiritually somatic experience present in *rara* and they both say they are moved by the *lwa-s*. Dorce explains he can feel a different presence take over his body when performing in this style. Casseus suggests that when performing *rara* for new audiences, she has a physical feeling that her ancestors are happy. By performing the style in a world beat pastiche style, the band has had success re-introducing *rara* music to Haitian audiences and countering even its own misconceptions about the music. For a wider audience, Casseus presents lyrical content that demands contextualization of the Haitian situation, providing the counternarrative, and a correction for misconstrued interpretations in the media.

The idea that music is a transformational vehicle across cultures is the foundation for the *Lakou*-s that the band hosted for two years in Dorce's large backyard in North Miami. Through performance, the band attracted non-Haitian crowds at many cross-cultural events in Miami. Its testimony eschews the need for charity that is often steeped in unbalanced power dynamics and frustratingly misallocated. Instead, Organic Roots organizes cross-community charitable events that focus on positive projections of Haitian culture that are also effective in raising money for specific causes. Initially, some of the materials sent following the earthquake were held at a port in Haiti and sold to the citizens. After re-assessing the most effective strategy to send aid to Haiti, the group abandoned fundraising efforts for some charities that they did not mention by name. They then focused on small-scale projects in Haiti and only partnered with smaller organizations that could provide traceable aid that was indeed going to its intended destination.

Casseus and the group's community cultural celebration with the objective of raising funds led to partnerships with other local organizations that also seek to effect visible change in Haiti and counter media strategies of fundraising through showing images of Haitians in tragic scenarios. With the non-profit cultural advocacy group PurForce, Rara Rock extends the tradition of the *lakou* in luxurious gala-settings at upscale venues in Miami. Like a *lakou* presented by Rara Rock, the events presented by PurForce called "Tropic Nights" focus on positive cultural elements of Haiti to generate relief money for meeting tangible goals. Like "the Haiti you don't see" that Jean-Michel Daudier projects through his performance of middle-class tastes, aesthetics, and lifestyles, so is the extravagance at these financially successful fundraisers a way to

counter accusations of hopelessness. Rara Rock headlined the formal-attire Tropic Nights gala on December 10, 2011 at the Photopia Studios in Little Haiti.<sup>96</sup> Casseus described the event space in great detail, comparing the extravagance to fairy tale palaces and even to some places she visited in Haiti. Through the band's performance of world beat music, it effectively reached a new demographic with a message of Haiti's full story through promotion of a culture that counters stereotypes caused by media disjuncture.

### **Conclusion**

Across musical styles, Haitian artists use their performance platforms to offer counternarratives that correct negative media projections about their culture, which are formulated through channels of disjuncture. In the transnational experience of modern Haitians, these artists are affected by fragmented flows of information that have real effects on their lives. The artists in this thesis feel a need to use their positions to respond to these global projections on international and local stages. The stereotypes that apply to Haitians come across as misunderstood and irrelevant to these artists and their communities to whom these projections do not apply. Patricia L. Price suggests in "At the Crossroads: Critical Race Theory and Critical Geographies of Race" that people in these positions of attenuated power want to provide corrections because they are directly affected by inaccurate tropes. They use many strategies to counter dominant projections because simple, verbal denunciations of these inaccurate tropes are not as effective to challenging the effect of these platforms. These projections weigh on the artists enough to cause them to address these challenges through musical performance. Their audiences

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<sup>96</sup> Pictures from the gala show attendees dressed in tuxedos, suits, gowns, and other formal attire walking a red carpet for photo opportunities in the luxurious all-white backdrop provided by the Photopia Studios.

hold their performance of cosmopolitan aesthetics as valuable. Their experiences convey an assertion that those perceptions are baseless and not applicable to their specific cases. The opportunities provided by world-beat performance allow artists to express the blending of styles and also expand their music to new listener demographics, thereby showing a version of Haiti that counters dominant discussion on the country.

The three case studies of Erol Josué, Jean-Michel Daudier, and Rara Rock provide narrative situations for application of theory on disjuncture, transnationalism, and world music. These market depictions of Josué are based on stereotypes created through disjuncture and perpetuated for financial gain of the record industry. Disjuncture is the concept that information flows are fractured and thereby elements of agency for those affected. Record labels feel pressured to sell a product and do not seek to educate audiences about the music, relying on listener understandings of the subject material to determine how to present it to them. Because consumer knowledge is largely created through inaccurate perceptions of Haiti based in news media, the pathways of disjuncture affect information about Haiti. Projections of Josué as a “Voodoo Man” dominate because it is a marketable image of consumer fantasy and will improve the overall goal of increased record sales. The label also reinforces these concepts through press releases that are reprinted in journalist coverage seeking out the more exotic elements of the work.

Though outside the periphery of the dominant commercial music industries, the local experiences of Jean-Michel Daudier and Rara Rock provide local understandings of how global disjunctures have effects on local situations. Daudier performs music that showcases a “Haiti you don’t see.” Media focus is otherwise placed on dominantly negative stories that only cover the polarized rural masses and holding classes. This

disjuncture has also motivated Daudier to use his weekly performances at Casa Champet to showcase artists who also share the same artistic and cultural values. This environment that Daudier creates is not a version of Haiti normally projected in the media. It instead shows a Haiti represented by stability, cosmopolitan tastes, and a thriving community. For Rara Rock, disjuncture causes projections that need to be corrected by confronting the dominant use of images that show Haitians in hopeless situations. Western media consumers expect these projections, and fundraising efforts often employ visuals that show very little self-sufficiency for Haitians. The *Lakou-s* they organized, however, offered a different way to impact local aid through cultural celebration for local causes in South Florida and Haiti. During these performances, Casseus sings corrective narratives about Haiti to audiences that have only received news of Haiti largely through disjunctures perpetuated by the media. “Haiti, My Country” seeks to raise awareness that Haiti has historical origins that foreground the present-day situation, one that has been tarnished by outsiders.

The transnational experience of the South Florida Haitian community is one constructed by shared connections with the affairs at home. Because of this solidarity, projections of the nation as extremely poor omit the voice of Haitian middle-class musicians on local levels. Daudier’s music is largely supported by the Haitian Diaspora in the area who make up his audience at Casa Champet. This community also attends to affairs at home because of the Diaspora’s increasing role in the contemporary life of Haiti. Localized aid is also a feature of the transnational experience for Rara Rock, which seek to project uplifting images. For Rara Rock, led by American-born Aldore Casseus, the transnational element seeks cultural preservation and advancement in new



communities. Because she identified as a Haitian-American child whose parents were involved in her school activities, she describes frequent bullying that resulted from her classmates' stigmatization of Haitian people. Although these stereotypes did not apply to her because of her family's middle-class status, they most certainly affected how she was treated. For this reason, a presentation of arts and community fundraising that is positive is employed to counter the stereotypes that have real effects for Haitians in transnational situations.

The musicians in these three case studies share the strategy of using world-beat music to reach new audiences as a testimony that Haiti is modern and able to adapt to a new environment. Their performances reflect the transnational cosmopolitan qualities of their work and also serve as entry points into new demographics. Erol Josué utilizes world beat music to counter the charge that Vodou is unable to be modernized. His act of *voye pwen* challenges these notions through showing that Vodou is cosmopolitan and that its repertoire is adapted to contemporary sounds. This platform offers Josué a "passport" to cross borders and introduce new audiences to the music of Vodou. For Daudier, the performance of world beat allows him to show the cross-cultural influences of his music that reflect middle-class values not considered in common discourse about Haiti. His culture is one that is modern and influenced by trends, not the helpless victim that "poorest nation in the Western hemisphere" perpetuates. Casseus and Rara Rock draw on styles of American rock and blues with a firm foundation in Haitian *rara*. They cite a large non-Haitian following as evidence for their success in winning general acceptance of Haitian culture in new forms. By depicting a version of Haiti that is self-sufficient, the band uses the malleability of the genre with new elements to gain the attention of non-

Haitians audiences who likely hold perceptions of Haiti because of disjuncture in large media outlets.

### **Suggestions for further research**

In my research with Haitian musicians in South Florida, I also conducted interviews with several visual artists, poets, playwrights and other types of creative artists. Outside the realm of music, these artists showed very conscious decisions to project versions of Haiti that defy dominant narratives. Acting with similar motivations as other musicians covered in this thesis, several visual artists from South Florida respond to the disjunctures created through the dominant flow of negative information.

Haitian artists across disciplines engage with a dialogue about Haiti that has largely been one-sided. These artists feel the negative projections leveled against the their country, which they are tied to through an intense network of connections, and they believe it is necessary to respond however they can. The platform of performance opens the possibility to challenge these ideas on a grander scale and is often a mission statement of the artists. The projections that depict Haiti as impoverished or helpless do not apply to many of the artists, but they are nonetheless charged and treated as they are, limiting the full capacity of their rights as transnational citizens of Haiti.

To challenge and prevent further perpetuation of Haitian misrepresentation, academic and journalistic coverage of the “Haiti you don’t see” must be investigated further. To further challenge dominant mindsets that have been formulated by channels of disjuncture, promotion of narratives that discredit negative myths of Haiti are implemented by affected artists. From here, Haitian artists will enjoy a more creative and

engaging musical community without having to use their creative platforms to confront non-musical images facing Haiti.

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