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*Madness, Gender, and Ensekirite in Haiti in the Democratic Era*

Erica Caple James

When you see the state of the country, the state of your own life, sometimes your whole body hurts. You see that it's only God who is your consolation. I can't do anything. Sometimes you have to lie down and do nothing. You resign yourself. . . . A long time ago we didn't have this stuff—you didn't live in fear and you could eat. Now you can't. We couldn't have foreseen that this would happen.

Guitelle Mezidor, interview, spring 1999

Haiti, the first black republic in the world, achieved its independence from France in 1804 and entered its postcolonial era in the complex position of being both a pariah for colonizing and slaveholding nations, as well as a source of hope for the enslaved and colonized. Since its independence, the nation has been plagued domestically by political instability, economic stagnation, and environmental degradation, while suffering political nonrecognition, military occupation, and economic management and sanctions by the international community. Two hundred years after its independence, Haiti is infamous for being the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Statistics are often unreliable, but the *World Development Report 2000/2001* lists Haiti as a “low income” economy (170th out of 206 economies), with a GNP of only US\$460 per capita, per year. The CIA's *World Factbook* (2006) estimates life expectancy at 54.6 years for women and 51.89 years for men, and cites an HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of 5.6 percent for the entire population of Haiti.<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations Development Program's *Human Development Report 2000* states that 63 percent of the population lack access to safe water, 55 percent lack access to health services, and 75 percent lack access to basic sanitation. Adult illiteracy rates are at least 55 percent, but possibly higher. Twenty-eight percent of children under age five are below normal weight. Infant mortality rates are ninety-three per one thousand live births. Overall, at least 80 percent of the population lives in abject poverty (CIA 2006). At the time of this writing (August 2006), unemployment is estimated at nearly 70 percent.

In many respects Haiti is an archetype for the erratic path that many postcolonial, postdictatorial, and postsocialist nations are traversing toward democracy, human rights, economic justice, and the rule of law. In these “transitional” nations the state is in crisis or is failing and has limited capacity to protect the welfare of its citizens. The international governmental and nongovernmental humanitarian assistance and development apparatus often manages populations, the economy, and the institutions of security in place of the state, creating transnational apparatuses of governmentality (Foucault 1991) that resemble those of former colonial and imperial periods. These institutions of management continue to incorporate biopolitical categorization of populations within their techniques of governance (Foucault 1997; James 2003). Nonetheless, they cannot replace the state’s role to protect and promote the welfare of its citizens. In Haiti’s case, the government’s hands are bound.

The proposed means by which the international community envisions the development of Haiti and Haitians—export-led agricultural production, continued privatization of national industries, expansion of the industrial assembly sector, continued stabilization and structural adjustment efforts, among others—require that the nation and its economy once again open to the nearly unlimited global extraction of labor and resources while it finances these efforts through loans. For the most part, profits will accumulate in the hands of the elite or circulate outside of Haiti, rather than “trickle down” to build state infrastructure and improve the status of the poor majority.

Nonetheless, direct foreign assistance efforts have been suspended for years due to Haiti’s ongoing political crises, with emergency funds filtered through international nongovernmental humanitarian assistance and development agencies. Close to half a billion dollars in international aid has been withheld stemming from alleged presidential and parliamentary election irregularities from the May 2000 elections. This suspension continued after an escalation in Haiti’s sociopolitical instability<sup>2</sup>: on February 29, 2004, democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted from office and forced into exile for the second time under highly contested circumstances that had pro-democracy supporters of Haiti within the nation and abroad crying, “It’s déjà vu all over again.”<sup>3</sup> There is a widespread perception that the international community failed in its obligation to support Haiti’s democracy through an eventual transfer of power by constitutional elections. Rather, a virtual coup d’état occurred that former president Aristide and others describe as a “kidnapping” (Chomsky, Farmer, and Goodman 2004) that plunged the nation into another cycle of violence.

Haiti’s interim government had little legitimacy and was perceived as a tool of external powers. Fighting between Aristide supporters and those of the

opposition proliferated and the ongoing instability in the nation deepened.<sup>4</sup> In February 2006, René Préval, the former president who has been viewed as the twin (*marasa*) of President Aristide, was reelected despite challenges from opponents of Aristide supporters. Préval's inauguration of a cabinet viewed favorably by powers outside Haiti, however, resulted in the international community's commitment of US\$750 million to be disbursed between July 2006 and September 2007 (Joachim 2006). While the financial commitment has been made, a question that must be asked is at what cost will this aid be disbursed and who will ultimately benefit?

To some extent these ongoing domestic political and economic conflicts concern the process of representative democracy, social equality, and security, but to another degree they concern the protection of Haitian sovereignty against further international political, economic, and social interventions that come with restrictions. Given its recent period of dictatorship (1957–86), the extreme violence of a *de facto* regime (1991–94), and its fragile path toward democracy in the “neo-modern” era (James 2004), Haiti—state and nation—may not “recover” economically, politically, or socially on a timetable that will satisfy the international community, and it is clear that external powers will force this process either through direct or indirect action. Hanging in the balance are the needs of Haiti's poor citizens who continue to struggle for political and economic justice, security, the right to participation in government, and development assistance from the international community without shackles. While Haiti's case is particular within the arena of geopolitics, its example is one of relevance to many nations that are attempting “postconflict reconstructions.”

In this chapter I discuss some of the ways in which “transitions to democracy” can be perilous and unpredictable at the level of the individual, the community, and ultimately, the nation, through an exploration of a troubling case I encountered in Haiti. I conducted more than twenty-seven months of fieldwork in Port-au-Prince between 1995 and 2000—largely during President Préval's first tenure in office. During this time I followed *viktim*—self-ascribed “victims of organized violence” from the 1991–94 coup years<sup>5</sup>—as they sought healing, justice, and security from a plethora of domestic and international organizations that had disembarked or emerged in order to manage this population. Most of those whom I knew well reside in a *bidonvil* (squatter settlement or shantytown) in Martissant, a heavily populated section of southwest Port-au-Prince that was repeatedly targeted by the coup apparatus between 1991 and 1994. My initial contact with *viktim* occurred when I was invited to provide my services as a practitioner of the Trager Approach, a modality of manual therapy, for a women's clinic established in Martissant by a coalition of Haitian and US-based women's organizations. Among the general population of women clien-

tele, I provided physical therapy to rape survivors who also utilized the clinic's services. From my initial work with these women in the summer of 1996, I developed a multisite ethnographic research project that studied the international, national, and community-level responses to the needs of victims and their families (James 2003). I continued to work in the *bidonvil* in Martissant from this period through the end of my fieldwork in early 2000.

Throughout my research, it was abundantly clear that social, political, and economic transitions may not necessarily progress according to the rational technocratic plans of the international community and may appear as a state of paralysis or even chaos, rather than one of progress. In order to unravel what is occurring within Haiti's apparent cycles of instability, it is necessary to make more complex analyses of the uncertain geopolitical and cultural spaces of "postconflict transitions." In transitional nations like Haiti, "cultures of insecurity" are the norm, rather than the exception (Weldes et al. 1999). It is within this space of contradiction, ambiguity, and conflict that I want to examine Haiti's so-called culture of insecurity and the gendered effects of insecurity on the lives of individuals and families in the nation.

## ENSEKIRITE

In Haiti, "insecurity"—*ensekirite* in Haitian Creole—is the actual term that describes the social vulnerability that accompanies the crisis of the Haitian state. *Ensekirite* refers to the ongoing waves of political and criminal violence that have ebbed and flowed within the nation at critical moments of historical transition in the neomodern era. In common usage it signifies the proliferation of political and criminal violence since the fall of the Duvaliers in 1986.<sup>6</sup> Insecurity reached new heights of materiality or factuality (Scarry 1985) during the three years after the September 30, 1991, coup d'état against democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The coup regime overtly controlled and terrorized the pro-democracy sectors of Haiti—whether in the countryside or in the cities. The egregious "style" of violence (Das and Nandy 1985) deployed against the masses escalated in frequency and extremity that had not been imagined or conceived possible by the residents of these zones. Thousands of individuals were detained, tortured, systematically raped, disappeared, or murdered. Furthermore, the economic embargo imposed by the international community upon Haiti to protest the coup regime's usurpation of power worsened the plight of the citizens whom the sanctions were designed to protect (Gibbons 1999). These combined political and economic excesses resulted in the internal displacement of more than three hundred thousand people and the international flight of forty thousand Haitian refugees who attempted to

reach asylum in other Caribbean nations and the United States on rickety, overburdened boats.

Given the threat of Haitian refugees and the politically unstable nation to US national security, democracy was “restored” in Haiti on October 15, 1994, with the reinstatement of President Aristide by the multinational military and humanitarian intervention of the United States, United Nations, and Organization of American States (OAS). The restoration efforts included plans to restructure the Haitian state and economy, to dismantle and disarm the repressive military, to create a new civilian police force, to repatriate Haitian asylum seekers, and to consolidate the democratic process. Nevertheless, with the ongoing crisis in the state, this effort has been viewed as having very limited success. The disarmament process was voluntary and incomplete and the multinational forces were not mandated to enforce the law (Human Rights Watch and National Coalition for Haitian Refugees 1995). The Haitian National Police are still embattled internally as some members attempt to use the institution to control and direct the flow of contraband and narcotics, while others fight to establish it as a legitimate arm of democracy and justice. Given the state’s constraints and preoccupation with domestic and international political positioning, the needs of victims of human rights violations—a subset of the general poor population—are generally left to the assistance of international non-governmental organizations, or to the victims themselves.

In the post-1994 era of “democracy,” *ensekirite* refers to the proliferation of political, criminal, and gang violence—and more recently, kidnappings (Miami Herald 2006)—that has taken on the egregious style of the coup years. No one is immune. The Haitian elite, the middle-class intellectuals, the clergy, the poor, and their expatriate counterparts are all possible targets in both urban and rural areas. *Ensekirite* is both a material and ghostly presence: acts of violence are visible but complex—they simultaneously display motives of personal vengeance, economic profit, and political threat. The ambiguity of *ensekirite* is that it is difficult to categorize each act and to determine who is the author. This uncertainty adds to the climate of fear. Nonetheless, the visibility of the current state of affairs is only the surface manifestation of gaping wounds from the recent coup years and the thirty years of repressive Duvalier dictatorship between 1957 and 1986.

In the postcoup period there is a pervading sense of incredulity and incomprehension at the scale of the violence and economic uncertainty, which most individuals try their best to forget or push out of consciousness. The ongoing *ensekirite* in the nation makes the resumption of a “normal” life difficult, if not impossible. I have found that beyond its literal signification of political and criminal violence, the term *ensekirite* can be used as a trope for the experience of living at the nexus of multiple uncertainties and forms of violence—political, economic, domestic,

gendered, spiritual—and *ensekirite* is mediated through the body.<sup>7</sup> The ambiguity and uncertainty of *ensekirite* is experienced in varying degrees at all levels of society and leaves the entire social system “nervous” (Taussig 1992); however, those who were direct victims of organized violence are now disproportionately affected by the instability that *ensekirite* engenders. *Ensekirite* was and continues to be particularly acute, but also chronic, in Martissant.

## ENSEKIRITE IN MARTISSANT

Within the broader boundaries of the nation’s capital, Port-au-Prince, Martissant lies just southwest along the Carrefour road that leads westward on the southern peninsula. The majority of my clients and their families resided within thousands of homes in the geographic “block” delineated between the fifth avenue of the Bolosse section of town in the east to Martissant 17 in the west, and from the vast slum that has arisen on the landfill bordering the sea in the north to the highest group of squatter settlements on the southern mountain range. The population of this ethnographic block is difficult to determine, but six to twelve individuals, if not more, inhabit nearly every household, from the sea to the mountains. These homes are cramped one-room, corrugated tin roof houses whose haphazard arrangement lends the zone a mazelike appearance. The lack of proper drainage channels and waste management, combined with the extreme population density in some of these areas, yield pungent and fertile ground for the contamination of water, the proliferation of *Anopheles* mosquitoes, and greater risk for bacterial infections for those residing there. Apart from expansion of the Carrefour road to reduce the traffic jams at an intersection leading into the city, the state has done little to address the public health needs of the residents of these areas.

Indeed, much of Martissant is an enclave that has been neglected by the state since the restoration of democracy in 1994. The liberation of Haiti only temporarily decreased the violent immiseration of its residents. In late 1994, just after the restoration of democracy, Hurricane Gordon killed more than fifty residents of the mountainside *bidonvil*. Its eroded hillsides became avalanches of mud that suffocated entire families who were trapped inside their homes. The road that once connected this neighborhood to a more frequently traveled thoroughfare was washed out during the storm, making this part of the zone even more inaccessible to the civilian police force. In the fall of 1998 two hurricanes, Georges and Mitch, worsened the erosion of the hillsides and destroyed property and households in the area.

In addition to the environmental threats to security, many of my clients spoke of the need for me to leave the area by sunset because armed civilian

gangs, known as *kò* (corps) or *zenglèdo*, patrolled the zone and enforced a curfew within the enclave.<sup>8</sup> Payment—monetary or sexual—is required for safe passage. While I was able to leave the zone each day, its residents must take their children to and from school, continue to engage in petty trade, work in local construction or other trades, or travel to other places of employment in the city and return by nightfall. While the Haitian National Police made greater efforts to rid the area of organized gangs between 1997 and early 2000, their use of excessive force contributed to the ongoing experience of *ensekirite*; however, the irruptions of the police in the zone were also motivated by the desire to control and direct the criminal activity of some of its residents themselves.

The conditions under which residents of Martissant live are represented by the words of Guitelle, a woman in her middle forties who lived in the neighborhood of the clinic, cited at the opening of this chapter. In my Trager work and formal interview with Guitelle at the clinic,<sup>9</sup> she spoke of her resignation and frustration at not being able to live, in which all she could do is recline and pray for deliverance by God. This feeling of resignation is a form of impotence or “paralysis” that is imposed from the outside, where one can only wait in fear for the forces to change again and permit greater action. The uncertainty generated within this zone of insecurity—in its political, economic, criminal, gendered, and even environmental aspects—was unexpected and physically debilitating for its residents. As Guitelle states: “When you see the state of the country, the state of your own life, sometimes your whole body hurts. . . . A long time ago we didn’t have this stuff—you didn’t live in fear and you could eat. Now you can’t. We couldn’t have foreseen that this would happen.”

The climate of fear engendered by state-sponsored violence and the fragility of life under a failing state is but one aspect of a broader, collective sense of “ontological insecurity” (Giddens 1984) that characterizes the life of the poor in this nation. In his complex structuration theory Giddens defines “ontological security” as “confidence or trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity” (1984: 375). The fundamental ground of self and body, social action, and, ultimately, the reproduction of the structure of society is the sense of security provided by the routinization of daily life. The reality of *ensekirite* in Haiti, especially among the poor, is that there can be no presumption of stability, security, or trust for the individual or collective group. On the contrary, “ontological insecurity” (1984: 62) is the presumed state of day-to-day life in Haiti and many other countries undertaking political and economic transition, where disruptions and fluctuations in social institutions and practices may be the norm.

To some extent post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the new psychiatric diagnostic category recently exported to Haiti, has been useful in describing



the broader environment of *ensekirite* and can assist in defining what for many poor Haitians has been a paradigmatic shift in the mode of “being-in-the-world.” But PTSD still fails to capture the sequelae of ongoing uncertainty that is common within Haiti in the postcoup period of “democracy.” In my discussions and bodywork with women of Martissant, their suffering corresponded to continual stressors, rather than to a single etiological traumatic event from which there was now a “post”—as is commonly conceived of PTSD (Herman 1997; Basoglu 1992; van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth 1996; Marsella et al. 1996; Young 1995).

Furthermore, the conception of trauma or the traumatic memory as residing in the individual sufferer and originating in the past is belied by my experience of everyday life in the *bidonvil*. The ghosts of the past are very present in mundane reality and irrupt into conscious awareness from both within and without the individual. But the “landscape of memory” (Kirmayer 1996) is truly geographical in that the environment in which these people live is a constant reminder of the ontological insecurity of their lives. As in the cross-cultural evaluations of so many forms of suffering, the trauma of *ensekirite* is particular in the Haitian context.

States of *ensekirite* force us to ask the following questions: When ruptures in the fabric of social life are routine, and arise within overall climates of political and economic instability, how does this societal “nervousness” influence the experience of subjectivity and embodiment on both individual and collective levels? Of what use is a concept of post-traumatic stress? When ruptures become routine, what possibility is there for hope or for a sense of security? In what way are poor Haitians able to exercise agency in this environment? For the remainder of this chapter I will elucidate what I call “routines of rupture” and their influence on subjective and intersubjective experience in “democratic” Haiti.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF TRAUMA

In early October 1998, I’d arrived at the clinic somewhat later than I’d intended. Already there were several women waiting to either talk or arrange an appointment to receive a Trager session at a later date. Sylvie, my research assistant, waited patiently for me to finish, then we were going to take another of our walks through the neighborhood that surrounded the clinic. An activist in the community who was helping to organize *viktim*, Sylvie had been both a direct and indirect victim of organized violence after the fall of the Duvaliers in 1986. We had done a lot of work together to interview women and families in the community about their difficult experiences during the coup years. In our

lighter moments we had been discussing the ubiquitous issue of black women's hair care and she'd told me of a special plant that would help to strengthen the hair and soothe the scalp. I was excited to learn of anything that might be beneficial to my hair and asked where to find the plants. Sylvie said that we needed to get the herbs in the *rak*—the uninhabited wilds that lay above and west of the *bidonvil*—and we set off on what I'd anticipated would be a mundane journey.

I should have recognized that the hike from the clinic was going to be different from our usual walks when Sylvie led me along a different route to the mountains than I'd become accustomed to—one that avoided the eyes of the market women whom I'd come to know well in my work with them at the clinic. After bypassing the market we descended onto a path—not exactly a road—but the sunken remains of the thoroughfare that had been destroyed by Hurricane Gordon in late 1994. Alongside the path were dilapidated houses that appeared to teeter on small precipices where the road had washed away. Haphazardly placed market stalls had arisen on the once unoccupied road. As usual, the ground was wet from the running water that flowed from the public source and from the soiled water that had been discarded from each home earlier in the day. We had to dance somewhat to land on drier sections of the path, to avoid the pigs that lolled about in the slime, and to skirt the places where the rain had caused trash and garbage to collect in mounds. In the distance I could hear the roosters at the nearby *gagè* (the cockfight arena) as we continued along the well-trodden route.

Sylvie and I reached a point at which another decrepit road turned and rose up the mountain. It was a bit tricky to climb up onto the concrete from the muddy path from which we'd come. Again, the destructive legacy of Gordon and subsequent storms was apparent. This section of road was now an abrupt four feet above the path that we'd been traversing, where once they had been joined along a gradual slope. We proceeded to climb, and both of us commented upon the humidity and heat of the day, wishing that we'd brought some water with us. Another ten minutes of walking up this section of the neighborhood road brought us to a ridge overlooking the *siyon* (*sillon*), an open-walled Pentecostal church to which hundreds of the zone's residents went to fast and pray each week. Under a beautiful ancestral tree, the *siyon* had been a place of asylum—physical and spiritual—for many of the internally displaced people during the repression of the coup years. Sylvie had fled there in 1992 after barely surviving a brutal attack by the military upon her and her husband. Tragically, her husband was murdered in front of her and his body was taken by the soldiers, never to be recovered. Left behind by the torturers, Sylvie fled with her children to the *siyon* before finally escaping the city to her natal home in Jacmel.

We continued through yet another turn of the path that rose and wound around a section of the mountain that was not yet heavily inhabited. Here there were wild grasses and flowers on the edges of the footpath, and a lone wooden shack overlooked the *siyon* fifty feet below it. Another hundred feet above us an open encampment still remained—a sort of flimsy roof of grasses that was supported by poles—where many of the homeless residents of this zone lived. Sylvie and her children had once stayed there after they returned from Jacmel with the “restoration of democracy” in 1994. It was while residing in this place that one of her daughters had been caught walking alone in the neighborhood and had been gang-raped by a group of youths. As we passed the enclosure, I said to her that I remembered that this was where they used to live “back then.” She nodded and did not say more.

As we continued past the open enclosure there was a breeze that rustled the high grasses and I was certainly thankful. But then through the wind we began to hear the plaintive prayers of a man who begged God fervently to give him a job, to help his family, to have mercy on him. He was alone and somehow, under the heat of the late-morning sun and the blueness of the sky, my hearing his prayers made me feel like an intruder in a sacred space. Farther up the path we could also hear a small congregation at prayer. Sylvie informed me that it was another evangelical church that had formed recently, and that there was even another Masonic temple beyond it in the hills. She did not seem disconcerted in any way that they should be there; for me, however, a service in the middle of a weekday morning contradicted my experience of reluctant Sunday worship. Sunday mass had been something for me to endure in my childhood and was remarkable only in that it stood between me and breakfast, and made me faint from hunger in the hot summer. In this place, the words that reached my ears felt true, but they also underscored the reality of fear, poverty, and desperation in the zone. In this environment of *ensekirite*, faith, obedience, and love for God might be all that stood between living a moral life and falling into the “gray zone” of petty crime, lies, and betrayal of others for survival (Levi 1989). Finally, we reached an area where all we could see was a lone house at the end of another long path. Several hundred feet above and behind where we stood were the mansions of a posh residential area that overlooked the city below us. When looking off toward the city in the distance in front of us it was easy to see the large public cemetery downtown in the capital, and the harbor, in which a couple of large ships were docked. I thought to myself that this place was peaceful and beautiful, in contrast to what lay below us.

We’d reached our destination. Just off the path Sylvie pointed out the plants we had spoken of and I recognized them to be fresh rosemary. She explained that what I needed to do was boil the thin leaves and stalks in a pot of water for

half an hour or so, strain it, and then use it as a rinse after shampooing once it had cooled. After breaking off a few branches for me and taking some for herself, she pointed to a certain spot by some nearby shrubs. I then realized the true reason for this walk, to show me another site in which the horrors of the past were still manifest.

Sylvie explained to me that this was a place where a young man and his father had been hacked up with machetes and burned to death just a couple of years before in 1996. I was somewhat shaken by this revelation and asked her what had happened. At the time she told me that part of the conflict had been over land and a house whose ownership was disputed. I would not receive the full story—or as much of the truth that was possible to ascertain at the time—until a month later, when I was able to speak with the wife and mother of the deceased, Danielle Marcia, who was forty-two years old at the time of the interview. Sylvie had told me that among the people that she knew in the Martissant zone Danielle was one who continued to have serious emotional and economic difficulties as a result of the attack on her family. The story that followed only emphasized how formidable a task it would be for the new Haitian police force to establish itself as a respected institution in this fragile nation and for there to be true justice, democracy, and healing. It also demonstrated the way in which *ensekirite* discriminates against no one. However, the complexity of the narrative challenged my preconceptions of blame or morality.

Danielle, a mother of seven and wife to Joseph Marcia, is a *madanm sara*, a market woman who makes her living buying and selling goods (*fè konmès*).<sup>10</sup> She had gone on a selling trip to the provinces on the 16th of January in 1996. While she was away, her husband and second oldest son were executed. Sylvie had helped to document the facts of the crime and gave the following introduction of what happened in presenting Danielle to me at the clinic:

S: Yes. . . . The nineteenth of January 1996 at five o'clock. M. Robert, he called George Marcia and Joseph, they're father and son. He called them as friends and said, "Come on out with me." They were used to going out with him and so they went with him. Danielle Marcia, who is the wife of Joseph, went to the provinces. When she returned, she couldn't find either Joseph or George. She left the house and went to the hospital. She went to the morgue. She went to the police and after four days they went to the slope of the land that's called Mount Carmel and found where they'd cut up Joseph and the entire body of his son George with a machete. And one among them had taken the forearm and tongue of Joseph. They left and left the bodies there.

While we went to go testify what we had found, they set fire to the bodies. The clothes were ruined. There were journalists who'd come to report the case, but they didn't want to identify them. They were afraid that the ones

who'd killed them might threaten them. You know this zone. It's one where they are used to disarming justices of the peace [*jij de pe*] or police, so . . . anyway, they didn't want to identify them [the perpetrators], that's the job of the justice of the peace to get a warrant for the arrest. The justice of the peace prepared a police report [*pwosevèbal*] but I don't think Danielle has seen it.

The impunity with which crimes were committed in Haiti during the coup years and the inability to disarm paramilitary groups has hampered the processes of justice. Fear of retribution for attempting to follow the rule of law is very real. The fact that the two Marcia men were lured by an acquaintance to their death suggests that some sort of transgression had occurred for which they were being punished. The issue could be as simple as a dispute over property. Beyond this, however, the taking of the tongue and forearm of her husband marked these murders as much more complicated crimes. While at this time I cannot confirm that the acts were related to those of the secret societies known as *sampwèl* or *bizango*, there are elements of Danielle's testimony that suggest the crime had roots in the judiciary practices that these and other magico-paramilitary organizations have administered throughout Haitian history, but particularly during the Duvalier dictatorship (Larose 1977; Laguerre 1980; Diederich and Burt 1986; Davis 1988; Hurbon 1988).

In continuing her introduction of Danielle, Sylvie revealed yet another instance where tragedy struck the Marcia family:

Six months after that on the sixth of June 1996, at six o'clock in the morning, there were Sylvester, Charles, Anthony, and Eric who were looking for Mathieu Marcia [Danielle's older son], a police officer who served the government. They sent one of them to call him and say that they'd show him the person who'd killed his father and his brother. But it was a plot to kill Mathieu himself. Danielle was going to the market and went down with him. When they arrived at the intersection of St. Bernadette Street, Danielle continued on to the market and Mathieu went with the man who came for him. When they arrived at the appointed place the man told him, there's the one who killed your father. Mathieu went to grab him but the other men shot Mathieu, took his badge, his weapon, and left him on the ground. Like that his mother was left empty-handed. They [the police] invited Danielle to her son's funeral but they did nothing to those responsible.

After this introduction, Danielle told me of the many difficulties she'd had in trying to have the police pursue the case. She'd not found any sympathy or support from the bourgeois staff at the police station who she felt were biased against her as a poor resident of the shantytown.<sup>11</sup> But the local perpetrators

continued to persecute her in order to thwart her efforts to find justice. The impunity with which these crimes were committed has left her in fear and despair:

After, at the same time I had that problem, my house was burned to the ground [by the perpetrators]. . . . You, yourself, you see me, my body is weak [ba] . . . but I don't have money to get a treatment for my head . . . now, my head hurts and it reaches into my back and chest. It's an effort. . . . I don't have anyone except God, I don't have anyone but Jesus. . . . When I get to the point when I can't go on, it's time for me to go. The other [children], when you see the other young man and his big brother—he makes an effort but he's on the street. They're all abandoned. They don't go to school. I left them in the old house. I'm there, I'm struggling, and I do what I can, but I don't have the means to send them to school, I don't have the money to do anything.

At this point in Danielle's narrative I was certain that the pain she described in her head and body was a question of depression and "somatization" (Kleinman and Kleinman 1985: 430). I assumed that through idioms of physical weakness she was expressing her anguish and guilt at being unable to fulfill her role as mother, having abandoned her children to another home, and her inability to make up for the support provided by her deceased husband and sons. One could attribute her angst to a failure to fulfill her expected gender role as mother, but a fuller examination of her narrative in the context of Haitian traditional culture makes an interpretation of her experience and those of her family far more challenging. A brief exploration of local notions of personhood and the self, emotion, and illness is necessary in order to conduct a full exegesis of Danielle's lament.

## EMOTIONS, BODY, AND SPIRIT IN THE HAITIAN CULTURAL LEXICON

Throughout my field- and therapeutic work, my client base was most often derived from the poorest residents of Port-au-Prince and the provinces. Most often the language through which the subjective experience of emotion, illness, or suffering was articulated was the epistemology of Haitian Vodou, even though many of these individuals were active practitioners of the many evangelical denominations that are proliferating in Haiti.<sup>12</sup> In general, the person or individual, as conceived within Haitian Vodou, is situated in a nexus of relationships that not only includes the living, but also the ancestors and the divine spirits—the *lwa* (Brown 1989: 257; 1991). Within each relational web there are reciprocal sets of duties and obligations that maintain balance within the indi-

vidual, family, and larger community. For those who are ritual practitioners of Vodou, personhood and identity are indelibly tied to the *lwa* (Dayan 1991: 50):

Everyone has a personal *loa* as his protector; he is identified with the Catholic guardian angel. This protector is inherited either on the father's or the mother's side. Every family, the family (*fammi*) being a large bilateral group of kin, worships its own spirits. . . . The family is the group within which the spirits have power and exercise authority; they do this mainly by "catching" a member of the group, meaning causing him some kind of affliction. The *loas* act only within the family. They may manifest themselves in many ways; in dreams, by assuming a human or an animal form . . . and finally in a privileged manner by possessing a member of the family. (Larose 1977: 92)

The social relationships between the *lwa*, the ancestors, the family, and the individual are multifaceted and to some extent these links can be described as "embodied." However, the concept of the body and suffering that arises within the Haitian context challenges Western conceptions of trauma, and even of chronic pain.

Generally, the embodied "person" in traditional Haiti comprises multiple parts. The *gwo bonanj* (*gros bon ange*)—the big guardian angel—is a nonmaterial force, consciousness, or energy that is the "metaphysical double of the physical being" and is able to detach from the body during sleep (Deren 1970: 25–26; Dayan 1991: 51; Métraux 1972: 120, 303; Larose 1977: 92; Brown 1991: 351–52). It is also this part that detaches during the course of possession by the *lwa*, only to return after the *lwa* has completed its intended action (Bourguignon 1984: 247). Located in the head (*tèt*), the *gwo bonanj* is vulnerable to magical attacks and is especially vulnerable at death, when it may become a "disembodied force wandering here and there" known as a *zombi* (Larose 1977: 93).<sup>13</sup> The immaterial *zombi*, like the *lwa*, can possess the individual as a malevolent spirit who seeks a permanent home, until it is dispersed by ceremonial means. But before the ritual dispersal has occurred, it can also be sent by a relative to avenge a wrong or injustice (95). The *ti bonanj* (*petit bon ange*) is an energy or presence that is deeper than consciousness, but can enervate the individual in times of stress (Larose 1977: 94; Brown 1989: 265). The *kò kadav* (*corps cadavre*) is the material body that is separable from the spiritual essences and subject to decay and dissolution (Dayan 1991: 51; Brown 1989: 265–66). Finally, the *nann* is the animating force of the body that disappears after the death of the individual (Brown 1989: 264).

Conceptions of the emotions and their effect on health are also related to the notion of the individual's "head" or *tèt*—the repository of the *gwo bonanj* and the seat of the *lwa* who is its master. When an individual is emotionally distressed, he or she may describe that experience by saying that the "big guardian angel"

is upset (Brown 1989: 264). Furthermore, “When an individual is worried, his or her head is said to be ‘loaded.’ In excitement, the head heats up; when the head cools, the individual becomes calm, also sad” (Bourguignon 1984: 262). “Blood” (*san*) is the mechanism that regulates heating and cooling in the body. The balance of heat and cold in the body directly affects an individual’s susceptibility to illness (Laguerre 1987: 70). The state of equilibrium of heat and cold is determined by the foods that one eats, action on behalf of the individual, or environmental factors (70–71). The relationship between the interior and exterior of the body, the blood, and the emotions is dynamic. Thus, when one considers the impact of local behavioral ecologies on mental health, the bounds of the self must be viewed as extended or permeable.<sup>14</sup>

Subjectivity, in some respects, can be viewed as complex or unbounded, and we are presented with an image of an embodied subject whose social relationships and environment are also constitutive aspects of the person. However, the consequences of the complex self/soul mean that disruptions in the relational webs between the individual, community, ancestors, and the *lwa* may result in disorder, illness, or other material and spiritual problems, not only for the individual, but also for the extended family.<sup>15</sup> Danielle’s narrative began with complaints about individual head and body pain in the aftermath of terrible losses; however, her ongoing suffering extended far beyond her physical person and reveals the ruptures in relational webs amid the *ensekirite* of Martissant:

Listen to how people are living—especially the young men. If you’re a woman, you can do any sort of old trade [*vyè kommès*], but now the young men are abandoned. . . . I am telling you I don’t live. I’m in need of a lot of things. Why am I lacking so many things? Because I’ve come to a position that I cannot speak of—Sylvie knows the details. But when I see the children in the same condition as I am, sometimes boys or other friends humiliate them. They have some skills that can help them live, but they can’t read, and the second one—his mind is cracked. I have to just watch them like that and I can’t do anything. . . . They say I am not making an effort to send them to school, and I can’t see a way to send them to school. Now life is hard. It’s hard. We used to say before we’re hungry and that life is hard, but now, life is [really] hard. Whatever little money I have is money for the marketing and then I may not even make a sale. When I really think about this, I get so discouraged. I say, well, if I’ve only gotten to this point with all my children like this in Port-au-Prince, I’m going back to the provinces. Because when you know how you are slaving away, going up and down [the mountain in order to sell her wares], and they don’t even have an education, you want to just stop . . . I don’t have to carry on. That’s all I can say.



With the loss of her older sons and husband, Danielle and her family lost the financial and emotional support that they relied upon to struggle through the daily travails of life in Haiti. Returning to the provinces, where more than 75 percent of Haiti's population struggle in abject poverty, is seen as a better alternative to the misery her family endures on a daily basis. With the declining economy, petty trade is an uncertain and difficult endeavor. Having lost her home in the wake of the violence perpetrated against her family, having lost her husband and sons, her ongoing despair at being unable to provide for her remaining children in her weakened state is the cross that she bears.

For Danielle's younger sons, the possibilities for living are even more limited. Her older son Pierre, who was seventeen at the time of this interview, has been lost to the realms of madness. Sylvie reiterated Danielle's testimony for me about the aftermath of the ruptures she had faced:

After they finished slaying Mathieu, shooting Mathieu, slaying his brother and his father, they came to threaten Danielle at her own home. She had to flee and she and her children went to sleep in the wilds of a place they call Gerizim Mountain. She has a son who is so disturbed [*pote l'nan tèt*] . . . you know that men do not menstruate like women, each month. Now I can say that he's crazy because he walks around incessantly everywhere. But I had him see Dr. Catherine at Doctors of the World, with Danielle and all the rest. They gave a card in order to come back, but they set fire to her house while she wasn't there. They burned down the house and they lost everything completely. Now she's left empty-handed. Danielle doesn't have commerce; she doesn't have family who can help her. The kids who stay with her are the youngest. The one who's slightly older, he's crazy [*varye*]. That's how she has a double problem.

At the time of the interview, Pierre had disappeared. Danielle had tried to restrain him in the shack, but was unable to prevent him from escaping, removing his clothing, and walking naked in the neighborhood. Despite attempts to find assistance for them at one of the few NGOs that housed "victim assistance" programs, Danielle despaired of being able to make contact with such aid again outside the *ensekirite* of the zone and resigned herself to her tragic fate.

Sylvie provides an interesting psychobiological interpretation of the way in which individuals respond to trauma according to biological sex. Within the hermeneutics of embodiment and illness in Haiti, menstruation is one means by which the balance of blood, heat, and coolness is maintained in the body. In terms of the sex/gender ideology, menstruation is a powerful time of cleansing what is considered putrid or unnecessary in the blood. Furthermore, the

presence of menstrual blood was one agent that prevented some women from being raped during the coup years. Men, who do not have the capacity to regulate their systems in this way, remain *cho*, with “hot blood” that rises to the head (*tèt*). The stagnation of blood in the head can lead to madness, as in Pierre’s case. But the difficulty that many men faced in recovering from material, psychological, and physical losses was also related to the gendered division of labor.

In the previous two statements, Sylvie and Danielle mark the differences between how men and women are able to cope with the insecurities of life. At the very least, women may have some form of psychobiological “protection” and can resort to historical forms of commerce in order to survive; however, I didn’t understand the full truth of their message until later in the interview. I had asked Danielle a question meant to elicit whether or not she had intrusive memories of these traumatic events. Her answer actually addressed other features of PTSD: “In addition to that, the problem that I have, is that each person has their own way of treating you [*abitid li bay-ou*]. Understand? Each time I think about how people treat me, I had the right to have someone with me. When I meet someone, and he comes in the same form as them, my heart jumps! That, it’s become a domination [*dominasyon*] for me.” Danielle had spoken of having to resort to *vye komès* in order to survive. On one level this refers to the trade in crops that slaves were able to produce on small garden plots of land during the period of plantation slavery. On another level, the form of commerce to which she referred was one more elemental.

Within the ideal or historical sex/gender system in Haiti, women have been involved in commerce or small-scale trade. They have sold the produce of their male partner’s agricultural activities and have become proficient traders in both rural and urban areas. But women are also recognized as possessing wealth within their own physical bodies. According to Ira Lowenthal, the Haitian Creole aphorism “*Chak fanm fèt ak yon kawo tè—nan mitan janm-ni*” (each woman is born with a *kawo* of land—between her legs) reveals some measure of the resources women are viewed to possess innately: “Female sexuality is here revealed to be a woman’s most important economic resource, comparable in terms of its value to a relatively large tract of land. . . . The underlying notion here is of a resource that can be made to work to produce wealth, like land or capital, or that can be exchanged for desired goods and services, like money” (1984: 22).

Although the truth of Danielle’s situation remained unspoken, she was indicating that she’d needed to employ the survival strategy of “prostitution” in order to survive. It is an activity that still carries stigma in this community despite Lowenthal’s statement that sexual exchange is simply another form of alienated labor that can produce wealth. It was partially because of her need to

“meet someone” that she abandoned her children to the wreckage of the burnt out home, so that she might receive clients in the darkness of night in a shack that overlooked the *siyon*. Sometimes a client would seem to resemble either her husband or one of her deceased sons. The similarity was physically startling to her and would disturb her to the point where she could no longer eat. With the appearance of a client who resembled a family member, the memories of what had happened would irrupt into her conscious thought; but certainly it must also have been disturbing to engage in sexual relations with someone that resembled one of the deceased. In her testimony Danielle laments the loss of her former life, one in which there was greater social support and in which her family treated her well. Now, within the insecure zone of the *bidonvil* she is isolated and faces humiliation, shame, and disrespect from the neighbors who know of her plight. She has been taunted and teased by them and ridiculed for her fall in social and economic status, much like Primo Levi’s description of the physical and emotional persecution of the new arrivals within the Lagers (1989: 36–69).

Danielle’s statement has yet another layer: throughout my research, many *viktim* used the term *dominasyon* to describe the inability to stop intrusive memories of their victimization and ruminations or reflections on their suffering. Yet *dominasyon* has another sense of being persecuted or “ridden” by an outside, autonomous agent—somewhat like descriptions of possession by the *lwa* or affliction by the *zonbi* discussed above. Not only do her thoughts and memories intrude, she is also persecuted by other sources of distress. One of the CAPS questions asks if a person fears reexperiencing their victimization or suffers from flashbacks. Danielle answered by describing an experience of having been tormented by her deceased husband Joseph on one occasion during the course of a “dream.”<sup>16</sup> Joseph confronted her in this state and she struggled with him: “He charges at me. When he charges at me, I grab and pull him, grab and pull him, and I throw him to the ground. Then he had time to grab a rock and hit me in the temple and then I’m sick, sick, sick.” Upon “waking” Danielle had terrible, chronic headaches, to which she referred early in the interview.

Beyond carrying the stigmata of Joseph’s wrath, Danielle was also haunted by her son Mathieu, the police officer, whose apparition would appear to her when she felt she was fully awake. The *zonbi* of her son George would torment her at night. She was “persecuted” by them because she had not been able to fulfill her ritual obligations to them at the time of their deaths. Sylvie began the explanation of how this contact was possible:

- S: What can allow that is that they did not have the last prayers for the dead [*dènye priyè*].
- E: That’s what I don’t yet know about.

- S: The last prayers are for the *zonbi* of the person, which means the spirit while you're living. When you die, for it to not remain around [*mache*] in the house, for it to leave. When you don't do the last prayers for the person, the body is buried but the spirit [*namm*] is still in the house and is persecuting [*pèsekite*] you. It's because of the affair of the last rites that he's persecuting her in the house and making her sick. . . . For the last prayers you have to buy coffee, sugar, like when you have a wake, and you have to prepare food for the dead and pay for a *pè savann* [bush priest] to come say the mass for you in the house. They have a burial ceremony [*nevem*]. They pray for seven to eleven days, they chant the "Liberà" inside and after that the *pè* has another thing to do and then the *zonbi* of the person goes. It doesn't stay in the house.

After death: "A dead person will only harass the living if they neglect him, if they omit to wear mourning, if they fail to withdraw the *loa* from his head and finally if they show themselves dilatory in giving him a worthy burial-place. He shows himself in dreams and explains his disappointment; on those who pay no attention he calls down a 'chastisement'" (Métraux 1972: 258). In the quick succession of murders in the family, and her own persecution by the perpetrators of the crimes, Danielle had been unable to pay for the services of the *pè savann* that could contain and dispel the *zonbi* of the deceased in a timely manner. As Alfred Métraux states, the dead will continue their punishment and quest for justice owed by the family until proper restitution can be made, but Danielle did not have the resources to do so. Sylvie affirmed that the inability to properly bury the dead was the ultimate source of shame and stigma that marked Danielle as belonging to the lowest class of the poor within this desperately poor zone.

In sympathy with Danielle's plight, I had offered to help arrange for the services of the *pè savann*, but I was not able to contact Danielle again. The zone became increasingly dangerous in the weeks after this interview and my own life was threatened, requiring that I leave temporarily. When I finally returned to my work in Martissant in the early spring of 1999, I could not find Danielle again. I do not know if she and her family were able to locate her "mad" son Pierre, or if she still suffers from the frustration and anger of the dead. I do not know if Danielle was able to fulfill the burial ceremonies for Joseph, George, and Mathieu, or if she protects herself from the threat of AIDS and other STDs in her need to "meet men." Somehow, the acquisition of condoms seems to be the least of her worries in the face of these ghostly assaults on her person. In sharing her story with me, Danielle made me understand the traumas of Sylvie and others like her who had suffered during the years of the coup regime, had lost loved ones, had been unable to properly mourn them, and who continued to live with humiliation and shame. Such is the reality of *ensekirite*.

## POSTSCRIPT

Michael Taussig (1987) calls the intersubjective environment created by the culture of torture and terror “spaces of death.” They are “nourished by the intermingling of silence and myth in which the fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious flourishes by means of rumor woven finely into webs of magical realism” (1987: 8). Martissant is only one zone affected by the haunting legacy of past violences and the ongoing threat of ontological insecurity. In these environments it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain “a sense of trust in the continuity of the object-world and in the fabric of social activity” (Giddens 1984: 60), much less trust in one’s own bodily integrity. For those who’ve not yet resolved their relationships to family, the dead, the ancestors, and the social community—and the number of the dead and disappeared are in the thousands from 1991 to 1994 alone—there is little space that offers hope for recovery, restitution, and democracy. These sites are truly “gray zones,” haunted by the ghosts of the living and the dead and patrolled by those who would continue the magico-paramilitary structures of power. The embodied sense of uncertainty and fear that arises amid these desperate scrambles for power represents the reality of *ensekirite*: the routinization of ontological ruptures in everyday life. That ruptures have become routine can be no better demonstrated by a recent report of the massacre of twenty-two men, women, and children in the Martissant zone in which I used to work—“civilians” caught in the crossfire of the escalating struggle between gangs in the zone—whose security has not been provided by the UN peacekeeping mission (*Le Nouvelliste* 2006), just as it was not during the 1991–94 coup period. The failure of international efforts to provide security in Haiti when the state cannot and to support its fledgling efforts at democracy consistently raises troubling questions about the projects of humanitarian and political development assistance abroad.

As other nations move forward from the horrors of the past and attempt to reconstruct polities that accord with the ideals of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, the specter of insecurity and the complexities of local power politics may impede a “timely” progression along this path that is recognized as legitimate and transparent by the international community. The perception of “chaos,” “paralysis,” or “noncompliance” that those outside local spaces hold does not help to quell routinized ruptures in environments of insecurity—especially when external powers fail to provide security or foment its demise, while shadowy forces reap the benefit of the lacuna in order. Should assistance be withheld from nations that struggle with consolidating their democracies—nations that still bear the stigmata of centuries of haunting ghosts? It may be that only through “feeding” these *zombi* will they be laid to rest. But if the *ensekirite*

under President Préval's first tenure is any indication of what the future holds for poor Haitians, it may be a case of "déjà vu all over again."

## NOTES

1. These rates vary according to region and other factors: At a May 2002 talk at the Boston-based Management Sciences for Health (MSH), Dr. Georges Dubuche, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS advisor for the MSH/HS-2004 project, presented a rate as high as 13 percent in the Northwest Department (based upon a 1998 estimate).
2. International assistance was initially suspended in the spring of 1997 in protest against alleged irregularities in the April parliamentary elections; the disputed seats were up for reelection in May 2000 in order to resolve the long-standing crisis in the government.
3. The tragic period following Aristide's first removal from office on September 30, 1991, is discussed below.
4. Interestingly, the CIA's *World Factbook* 2006 reports 2005 as the first year of economic growth since 1999, despite manifest reports of increasing inflation and an escalation of violence at all levels.
5. Survivors of political violence in Haiti have embraced and appropriated the category of "victim" as a sociopolitical category of activism.
6. According to anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990) the practice of political violence in Haiti had a somewhat predictable character in earlier historical periods in which there was a clearer distinction between the political and civil realm of battle. The Duvalier dictatorships—"Papa Doc" François Duvalier (1957–71) to Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971–86)—were noted for the blurring of the political and civil domains, the specific targeting of civil society, women, the clergy, and other "innocents" with egregious forms of violence.
7. While it has become common to refer to the term "structural violence" in order to explain the pernicious effects of poverty, I have found that such a term tends to leave unexamined the complexity of situations of vulnerability that simultaneously involve international, national, and local relations of power, economy, politics, race, gender, and other factors. While labeling structural inequalities as "violence" can assist in drawing attention to the everyday misery of the disenfranchised individual, community, or nation, it may do more harm than good by crystallizing violence in a fetishistic manner. Attention to security, vulnerability, uncertainty, and complexity may assist with social analyses, but I also fear that my own approach can limit effective social interventions for change in Haiti and nations like it.
8. *Zenglendo* is a term that has its etymological roots in the Haitian Creole word *zenglen*, referring to shards of broken glass, and *do* which refers to the back. *Zenglen* was also the name given to the secret police force that served under President Faustin Soulouque (Emperor Faustin I) and that became the model for François Duvalier's

terrorist force, the *tonton makout*. During the coup years of 1991–94, the *zenglendo* were “criminals . . . recruited from groups ranging from the marginal social strata found in working-class districts to police officers themselves usually acting at night, in civilian clothes and with official weapons” (Human Rights Watch and National Coalition for Haitian Refugees 1994: 5).

9. I was testing a Haitian Creole version of the Clinician Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS) with my clients at the clinic.
10. *Madam sara* (or *madansara*) is the word for a weaverbird, known to destroy crops, but it is also a term to describe women who transport and sell merchandise. Market women are also referred to as *Madam Sara*.
11. It is also possible that her son’s murder implicated police involvement in the insecurity of the zone.
12. While none of my clients admitted to serving the spirits, the broad formulation of a sociocentric “self/body” (Becker 1991) that follows was commonly expressed regardless of my clients’ stated religious practice.
13. The *gwo bonanj* can also be captured by a sorcerer when a person is alive and is also called the *zombi*; however in this case, the *gwo bonanj* can be used to force the material person to whom it belongs—literally, the living dead—to labor for the sorcerer.
14. Karen Brown notes that these aspects of identity and body are such that “for the Vodou worshipper, each person is at the core of his or her being, a multiplicity of beings, a polymorphous entity and that it is only at the periphery of life, in areas less important to that person, that he or she adopts clearly definable, and consistent roles or modes of being” (1979: 23).
15. I want to emphasize that relational obligations are sometimes sources of threat to the self, even as they are also sources of blessing and healing. Failure to uphold these obligations can result in illness or misfortune for the person who is directly guilty (Métraux 1972: 256) or for others within the community. See also Boddy (1988), Brown (1991), Antze (1996), and Lambek (1996) for further discussions of how the expression of alternate selves through either spontaneous possession or MPD can be viewed as creative presentations of self in everyday life regardless of the “willed” nature of the occurrence.
16. I hesitate to label the state in which this event occurred a dream in that Danielle emphasized that it occurred when she had just lain down to rest. I am going to call such a state “imaginal”—following the work of Csordas (1994) and Nordstrom (1997). This particular space—somewhere between waking and sleeping, but a space of encounter, vision, and action—is another “reality” in which both illness and healing can occur.

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