

THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE: MUSIC, POSITIONALITY, AND TRANSCENDENCE AMONG HAITIAN PENTECOSTALS

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ABSTRACT

In the twenty-first century's first decade, Pentecostal Christian congregations are now a significant cultural force in Haiti and its diaspora. Those who self-identify as *Pannkotis* (Pentecostal) comprise a striking variety—from independent “heavenly armies” to mainline congregations closely modeled after those in the United States. As Haitian Pentecostals face ongoing socioeconomic strife, they engage in exuberant praise and worship while deploying an arsenal of musical “weapons” to fight for survival, defend their theological turf, and articulate who they are and hope to become. Foregrounding the interplay of positionality and faith, I argue that embodied musical practice is, for two distinct Pentecostal groups, something of a two-edged sword: It slices through oppressive spiritual barriers to attack a common “satanic” enemy, but it also guards the social and theological walls separating them. This paradox of Pentecostal music making—its spiritually amalgamative but socially divisive potential—lies at the heart of my discussion.

Keywords: music, Pentecostalism, Haiti, positionality, cultural identity, militarism

RESUMEN

En la primera década del siglo XXI, las congregaciones cristianas pentecostales son una importante fuerza cultural en Haití y su diáspora. Aquéllos que se identifican a sí mismos como *Pannkotis* (pentecostales) componen una sorprendente variedad de iglesias, incluyendo los “ejércitos celestiales”, así como las congregaciones tradicionales que se asemejan a las de los Estados Unidos. A la vez que los creyentes pentecostales haitianos confrontan las luchas socioeconómicas en curso y defienden su territorio espiritual, practican la alabanza y adoración a Dios con exuberancia haciendo uso de “armas” musicales que les permiten luchar por la supervivencia, defender su territorio espiritual y expresar quiénes son y lo que esperan ser. Haciendo hincapié en la interacción de las posiciones y la fe, propongo que la práctica musical corporal es un arma de doble filo para dos grupos pentecostales distintos: Penetra las barreras espirituales para atacar un enemigo “satánico” común, pero también protege a los muros sociales y teológicos que

los separan. La discusión central de este trabajo es la paradoja de la música pentecostal —su potencial para unir espiritualmente y dividir socialmente.

Palabras clave: música, pentecostalismo, Haití, posicionalidad, identidad cultural, militarismo

RÉSUMÉ

Durant la première décennie du XXI^e siècle, les congrégations chrétiennes pentecôtistes représentent une importante force culturelle en Haïti et dans sa diaspora. Ceux qui s'identifient comme «Pannkotis» (pentecôtistes) comprennent une variété remarquable d'églises allant des «armées célestes» jusqu'à celles construites sur la base des congrégations américaines traditionnelles. Tandis qu'ils sont en proie à des difficultés socio-économiques, les croyants pentecôtistes louent et adorent Dieu avec exubérance, disposent d'un arsenal «d'armes» musicales pour assurer leur survie, défendre leur espace spirituel, et articuler leur identité et espérance religieuse. Considérant l'interaction de leur position et leur foi, je crois que la pratique musicale dont il est question ici représente pour les deux groupes distincts une épée à double tranchant. Elle pénètre les obstacles spirituels nuisibles et attaque un ennemi commun satanique, mais crée également des murs sociaux et religieux séparant les deux groupes. C'est justement ce côté paradoxal de la musique pentecôtiste – son habileté à unir spirituellement et à diviser socialement – qui est l'objet de ma réflexion.

Mots-clés: musique, pentecôtisme, Haïti, posicionalité, identité culturelle, militarisme

Received: 6 May 2008 Revision received: 16 December 2008 Accepted: 17 December 2008.

In the twenty-first century's first decade, Caribbean religious landscapes are undergoing transformations worthy of ethnomusicological attention. United by their use of ritual to invoke the Holy Spirit and wage spiritual warfare, Pentecostal Christian congregations are now a significant cultural force in Haiti. Yet there are fervent disagreements regarding the appropriate role of musical practice in accessing spiritual power. Tensions derive, in part, from the fact that Haitians who self-identify as *Pannkotis* (Pentecostal) comprise a striking variety—from independent “heavenly armies” to mainline congregations closely modeled after those in the United States.¹ As Pentecostals face ongoing socioeconomic strife, they deploy an arsenal of musical “weapons” to fight for survival, defend their theological turf, and articulate who

they are and hope to become. A politics of Haitian identity intensifies a hard fought “war of position” (Gramsci 1971:243) in which spiritual and cultural legitimacy is at stake. Foregrounding the interplay of positionality and transcendence, I argue that embodied musical practice is something of a two-edged sword: It slices through oppressive spiritual barriers to attack a common “satanic” enemy, but it also guards the social and theological walls separating them. It is this paradox of Pentecostal musicking—its spiritually amalgamative but socially divisive potential—that lies at the heart of my discussion.

Positionality refers to an ongoing process of self-situating. It is, quite simply, the performance of position; and the term encapsulates the multiple ways of strategically constructing identities in relation to a host of social, historical, political, and spiritual others. Drawing on my background as an ethnographer and Pentecostal practitioner, I use the term transcendence more narrowly to denote a phenomenology of divine encounter (cf. Hinson 2000). This encounter occurs as Pentecostal believers sing and dance their way across a boundary between earthly and spiritual realms, transcending the self to bring mind and body in contact with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit may spark any number of behaviors: one person may stand and lift their hands, while another sits and weeps softly; another may cry out words of praise such as “*Alelouya!*” (“Hallelujah!”) or “*Mèsi Jezi!*” (“Thank you, Jesus”); someone else may hop up and down, run around the ritual space or dance as they feel compelled by the Spirit; another may spurt out ecstatic or glossolalic utterances (i.e., a practice known as “speaking in tongues”). Just as spiritual manifestations take many forms even within a single congregation, there are multiple ways in which a feeling of transcendence is obtained through musical expression.²

Even as Pentecostals groups carry on their own internal debates, they collectively articulate a theological orientation that is explicitly anti-Vodou. In fact, the divisions within Haiti’s religious sphere are probably best known as they pertain to the anti-Vodou campaigns that have been launched in the past and the ongoing campaigns that continue on an ideological level. Given the complexity of Haitian society and the multiplicity of discourses surrounding Haitian spiritual practices, it seems prudent to begin this essay by situating it, along with the Pentecostal practices I discuss, in relation to lived experience and the scholarly literature on Vodou. I then recount the events surrounding my fieldwork as they relate to an ethos of militarism in Haitian culture (Averill and Yih 2000, McAlister 2002). The role of music in spiritual warfare is most explicit at Church of Salvation, so this “heavenly army” congregation in Port-au-Prince is the focus of my first case study. I then turn to Greater Love Tabernacle, a “mainline” congregation for whom a disavowal of

Haitian music facilitates the construction of an oppositional Pentecostal identity. In these assemblies, the connection between positionality and transcendence is experienced through remarkably different types of musical praise inviting a divine response to human situations.³ Music provides an excellent window into Haitian Pentecostal ways of positioning and transcending, and through ethnomusicological analysis of lyrics and style, I hope to elucidate the performative dimensions of these interrelated practices.

Positioning Vodou in Spiritual and Scholarly Arenas

“*G’on gè de relijyon annayiti*” (“There’s a war of religions in Haiti”). With this one sentence, a Pentecostal believer I interviewed summed up his perceptions of Haiti’s complex spiritual arena. And he was just getting started. Mino went on to share his thoughts on a variety of religious topics, ranging from the role of Vodou in the Haitian countryside to the “bizarre” (“biza”) practices of some Pentecostal groups. I believe the religious war he and many other Haitians have in mind is fought ideologically as clergy and laity debate theological positions and battle for moral-spiritual supremacy in the minds of their listeners. Pentecostals such as Mino understand this to be a war fought on several fronts. On one major front, they join forces to wrestle under the broad banner of Christianity against the dominion of Vodou. On others, they close ranks to fight an intra-Christian or even intra-Pentecostal battle. Like many Haitians with whom I have spoken, Mino enjoyed generalizing and philosophizing about religion. But I was really hoping to hear how he rhetorically positioned himself and his congregation, a mainline, mission-oriented church in Port-au-Prince, in relation to other discourses and practices of spirituality. I couldn’t resist the urge to nudge him back onto the conversational track I had started to lay. “Okay, but for you *personally*,” I implored, “what do *you* think of Vodou—those who serve the *lwa*?” As Alfred Métraux (1972) defines it, Vodou is “a conglomeration of beliefs and rites of African origin, which, having been closely mixed with Catholic practice, has come to be the religion of the greater part of the peasants and the urban proletariat of the black republic of Haiti” (15). The *lwa* are the spirits Vodou adherents serve, and their timely appeasement is believed crucial to obtaining the luck (*chans*) necessary to work through life’s inherent problems. Often affiliated with Catholic saints, the *lwa* are not, however, always the gentle, benevolent entities depicted in stained glass. On the contrary, they display the full range of human characteristics. As Karen Brown (1991) writes,

The Vodou spirits are not models of the well-lived life; rather, they mirror the full range of possibilities inherent in the particular slice of

life over which they preside. Failure to understand this has led observers to portray the Vodou spirits as demonic or even to conclude that Vodou is a religion without morality—a serious misconception. (6)

Not surprisingly, many Pentecostals in the United States and Haiti express a belief that Vodou is immoral and “Satanic,” mapping a Christian framework onto an enormously diverse set of spiritual practices. In Haiti, I found that Pentecostal preachers vary greatly in the extent to which they make “Satan worship” the topic of Sunday morning sermons. As my conversation with Mino proceeded, he explained,

In our church, they don't really put much emphasis on those things. But there are other Pentecostal churches where the pastor might have a problem—let's say for example, if there are some church members who have just converted. And if you have some who used to go to see a Vodou priest or priestess, that's why [pastors] preach against it. But you don't often hear that at my church.⁴

Although Mino continued to distance himself from the sentiments he expressed—referring to what “they” do instead of using the first person, he clearly seemed eager to defend the Christian integrity of his congregation. His comments also confirmed for me some of the different approaches Pentecostal believers take to the presence of Vodou. I had already visited churches in which an anti-Vodou rhetoric was prominent. For example, one Bible study teacher used the apostle Paul's sermon against idolatry (Acts 17) as a springboard to condemn service to the *lwa*. Such homiletic applications of scripture—comparing the worship to “false gods” to Vodou—are commonplace in many mainline assemblies originally founded by missionaries from U.S.-based Protestant and Pentecostal organizations. I had also frequented Pentecostal churches where Vodou was never directly mentioned while I was present. Congregants were left relatively free to interpret and apply scriptural passages to their personal circumstances as they saw fit, without hearing a direct assault on those who serve the *lwa*. For the most part, however, Haitian Pentecostals strive to avoid any semblance of double dipping into practices perceived as antithetical; and in this regard they consciously distinguish themselves from those who self-identify as Catholic (*katolik*). Pentecostals often view *katolik* as the default status of those who have not yet converted (*poko konvèti*) into a more authentic and vibrant Christian faith. This view is sometimes expressed along with the notion that “there are no pure Catholics in Haiti” (“pa gen fran katolik annayiti”), suggesting that Haitian Catholicism is irreversibly infused with Vodou elements that will always render it but a corruption of its Italian counterpart.

In a fascinating overview of the historical dialectic between Roman

Catholicism and Vodou, Leslie Desmangles (1992) points out that ultimately the connection between the two is “merely superficial” (113). While Vodou adherents may appropriate the symbols and images of Catholic liturgy, they tend to interpret these symbols, such as those found on lithographs, through a distinctly African frame of reference. Desmangles also comments on the everyday practice of Vodou and the extent to which it is seen to conflict with the practice of Catholicism. While the two belief systems differ on the surface,

these differences do not prevent them from practicing both religions simultaneously with no attempt to resolve whatever paradoxes may exist between them. Religiously, they venerate the saints of the church and the Vodou *lwas* simultaneously. They will attend a Vodou meeting that begins on a Saturday evening and lasts throughout the night; and while their clothes are still wet with the perspiration caused by the exhausting contortions of their sacred dances, they will walk directly from the *oufò* [Vodou temple] to their four o'clock Mass on Sunday morning. (5-6)

When Haitian Pentecostals tell me that Catholicism in Haiti is impure, they are likely conflating two distinct but overlapping perceptions. The apparent connection between the Catholic saints and the Vodou *lwa* merely adds weight to the suspicion that supposed Catholics are Vodou practitioners in secret (*an kachet*). But it is not as though similar accusations are not also levied toward Pentecostals and Protestants. Indeed, the deliberate arousal of such suspicions seems to constitute one of the weapons of Pentecostal warfare against rival assemblies. Scholars have not merely sat on the sidelines in this war of position. Many express unapologetic skepticism of Haitian “conversions” to Pentecostal Christianity. For example, Karen Richman (2005b) makes a valid point that “conversion to the religion which has long signified Americanization unequivocally represents an appropriation of American capitalist culture” (165). Her subsequent assertion strikes me as more contentious: “Yet underneath the modern, ascetic cloak worn by the new converts, spiritual healing, sorcery, and magic remain at the heart of their syncretic practices” (*ibid*). From my perspective, Pentecostals in Haiti and its diaspora work through prayer, preaching, and music making to attack what they perceive to be a Vodou-Catholic stronghold on Haitian society.

Haitians with whom I have spoken express a keen awareness of the differences between Pentecostal worship and service to the *lwa*; and music is understood to be a major distinguishing element. In a previous article (Butler 2002), I recounted a story told to me by a Pentecostal man who described what happened when a newly converted *Vodouisian* was asked to sing a solo during a morning worship service:

Having no prior experience in church, the man began to sing the only

thing that he could recall, which was a song used to evoke one of the *lwa* during a Vodou ceremony. The pastor, evidently caught off guard, had forgotten about the man's past involvement with Vodou and stood up in alarm after hearing the first few words of the song. He quickly motioned for the man to stop singing, after which the bewildered new convert was hurriedly escorted back to his seat. (110)

I find such stories wonderfully illustrative of the nervousness that often surrounds musical performance in Pentecostal settings and the marked apprehension felt by those who “serve God” (“*sèvi Bondye*”) toward those who “serve the spirits” (“*sèvi lwa yo*”). Members of the latter group may find such Pentecostal anxieties entertaining and comically absurd; but Pentecostals experience very real differences between their faith and the beliefs of Vodouisan. For Pentecostals, *Bondye* is the omniscient Creator of the universe who was manifested in the past through Jesus Christ and who fills believers in the form of the Holy Spirit. *Bondye* thus operates from both outside of, and within individual human bodies—acting on and through believers to accomplish his will. By contrast, *Vodouisan* believe *Bondye* is “too busy” to concern himself in mundane affairs. (Brown 1991, 6). He is neither the sole object of worship nor the infiller of human beings that Pentecostals experience.⁵ As Desmangles (1992) puts it, *Bondye* “cannot possess anyone; he is too transcendent to be immanent” (162). In most cases, there is no theological space in Pentecostalism for additional infilling entities—except those emanating from Satan, the chief spiritual adversary. It would seem, then, that the existence of *lwa* poses an interesting problem for the Pentecostal believer insofar as these entities must either be dismissed as the imaginary product of superstition or be relegated to a strict moral dichotomy with no obvious neutral ground. But I have met Pentecostals who simply opt to live with an apparent contradiction by readily acknowledging the existence of both “good” and “bad” *lwa*. Such an acknowledgement requires Pentecostals to maintain that the *lwa* occupy a space within Haiti's cultural sphere of practice but outside of a Christian cosmology that is, at least for Haitians, only ostensibly universal.

I think it is a fear of this type of theocultural collision—an unwanted rendezvous between Vodou belief and biblical doctrine—that prompts Haitian Pentecostal pastors to be extra vigilant in their safeguarding of ritual boundaries. They are sensitive to music's propensity to evoke spiritual manifestations and careful to sustain a ritual atmosphere in which only the right *kind* of transcendence takes place. Church leaders may understand that musical performances are, as Edward Schiefelin explains, “inherently risky. There is always something aesthetically and/or practically at stake in them, and something can always go wrong” (1996, 60). In *Performing the Nation* (2002), Kelly Askew cites

Schieffelin's work to highlight the embeddedness of power within performance. Askew's book is helpful in understanding how a nation's leaders may appropriate expressive culture to "smooth over the inconsistencies and present a unified national front that blankets dissension and masks diversity" (6). Performance is, as she defines it, "as a mode of social interaction that is contingent, emergent, undetermined, and susceptible to unrehearsed actions" (14). It is this slippery, unpredictable nature of performance that renders it a powerful tool for the socially marginalized as well. Across Haiti's political and religious landscape, individuals and groups strategically employ musical and rhetorical performances of faith to reposition themselves positively in relation to spiritual, social, and national others.

Haiti is continually repositioned in global media and in scholarly literature. Mimi Sheller (2003) comments insightfully on how the Caribbean is consumed through various forms of media, and stereotypes about Haitians certainly abound. Haitians "at home" and in the U.S. have, on numerous occasions, expressed to me their frustration at outsiders' faulty assumptions about their religious affiliation, financial status, or educational level. As a scholarly fascination with Vodou serves to demystify many aspects of Haitian cosmology and ritual, stereotypes have maintained a foothold in the imaginations of many non-Caribbean and Caribbean folk alike. Any ethnographer of Caribbean culture is bound to encounter deeply ingrained preconceptions, many of which influence the kinds of questions researchers choose to ask and the specific forms of knowledge privileged in academia. Certainly, this is the case in Haitianist ethnomusicology. There is, for example, a noticeable scarcity of research on music in Protestant and Pentecostal Christian contexts in Haiti—a gap likely stemming at least in part from a perception that Christianity is best understood as an imported and imposed religion rather than an "authentic" expression of individual or collective identity. It is perhaps ironic that scholars' attempts to counter the negative portrayals of the past work against a healthier multifaceted portrayal of Haitian culture. There remains in the Western academy a pressure to dig up spiritual phenomenon thought to be "deep" and "culturally rich," and I believe this contributes to a muting of spiritual voices in Haiti. However, ethnomusicologists are now beginning to offer critical meta-discourses that shed light on Vodou as it pertains to mediated constructions of Haitian identity.

Michael Largey's *Vodou Nation: Haitian Art Music and Cultural Nationalism* (2006) draws important attention to the role of Vodou in promoting visions of Haiti in the Caribbean and the United States. Largey chronicles several politicized treatments of Vodou, which has often been portrayed as a pagan ritual or a dangerously chaotic peasant

religion linked to a “primitive” and superstitious “African” past (36). As a cultural and compositional tool, Vodou is fascinating because of “its capacity to instill revulsion in Haitian elites and fear in foreigners while providing a potential rallying point for Haitians wanting to distinguish themselves from outsiders” (13). Constrained in some ways by a North American thirst for the “exotic,” Haitian composers attempted to create pieces that reflected local sensibilities while appealing to a global audience. Largey explains that Vodou’s image was, in a sense, revamped by Haitian intellectuals, such as Jean Price-Mars, who embraced an ethnological movement largely in response to abuses suffered during the U.S. occupation (1915-1934). Haitian composers often constructed national identities and expressed patriotic sentiments in response to foreign intervention. Attempting to “recast Vodou as a religious practice with roots in a powerful culture respected by Europeans” (124), composers sought to promote Haitian cultural identities through the use of musical devices meant to evoke images of a glorious Egyptian past.⁶

Studies of music in Vodou have sometimes presented meticulous investigations of rhythmic and melodic texts. Lois Wilcken’s and Frisner Augustin’s *The Drums of Vodou* (1992) provides detailed analyses of rhythmic patterns used during ceremonies. David Yih’s dissertation (1995) is an analytical tour de force that looks regionally at distinctions and commonalities within Vodou. Yih scrutinizes over 230 pieces to gain insights into song form, the use of melodic and textual repetition, call-and-response techniques, and the musical interaction between soloists and groups. Gerdes Fleurant (1996) also analyzes rhythmic patterns while providing a broad discussion of social and ritual contexts. Drawing on the work of Michel Laguerre (1980), Fleurant states that the songs of the Rada rite have a crucial “educative function,” serving as “one of the main mechanisms for transmitting...religious dogma and principles” (76). With its focus on classifying and interpreting Vodou songs, Fleurant’s book builds on the scholarship of anthropologist Harold Courlander (1960). Several transcriptions and analyses of drum rhythms and song lyrics are provided throughout Fleurant’s book, and his appendix contains approximately eighty songs transcribed into Western notation for the reader’s benefit. This analytical rigor is coupled nicely with the author’s reflexive discussion of how he is positioned in relation to his topic of study. In his introduction, Fleurant reflects on his middle-class Haitian upbringing, his decision to leave Haiti in 1964 to study music in the United States, and his return “home” eighteen years later to immerse himself in the musical components of Vodou, which he had once seen as “a form of atavism that weighed heavily on the material progress of the Haitian people” (2).

Other literature on Vodou ritual continues to examine it as a

dynamic practice that defies easy categorization. Karen Richman's *Migration and Vodou* (2005a) explores how transnational communities of Vodou adherents sustain ritual practices. The author focuses primarily on the role of condensations of spiritual power known as *pwen* (points) in musical-verbal expressions. These *pwen*, which I discuss in greater detail below, can travel across the boundaries of nation-states to critique those who are in positions of political and/or economic power over subaltern Haitians. Discussions of *pwen* have become commonplace in literature on Haitian expressive culture. Karen McCarthy Brown's vivid ethnography, *Mama Lola* (1991), and Gage Averill's *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey* (1996) both discuss the role of *chante pwen* (point songs) as they pertain to evocations of spiritual power. Richman's work also resonates quite well with Elizabeth McAlister's book, *Rara!: Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (2003), which devotes considerable space to the ways in which Haitians use musical practice to solidify and reconstruct oppositional identities in transnational spaces. My own writing on Haitian Pentecostal music constitutes a response to constructions of Haitian cultural and religious identities that pervade both sociopolitical and academic spheres.

Reclaiming Haiti: Militarism in Social and Spiritual Contexts

In April 2003, Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide issued an executive order in which he referred to Vodou as "an essential part of [Haitian] national identity." Throughout the following months, the remark was picked up by the Associate Press and published by several newspapers in North America (e.g., Norton 2003:1). This notion that Vodou is emblematic of the Haitian people has historically been reinforced by many well-respected scholars, including Roger Bastide, who writes that Vodou is Haiti's "national creed," serving as a spiritual expression of "the sum of all that is specifically and originally Haitian" (1971:138). Vodou is thus viewed unproblematically as the *sine qua non* of "authentic" Haitian culture. In the wake of the Haitian government's official sanctioning of Vodou as a national religion, and with the celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of Haitian independence, many Haitian Christians have asserted a Pentecostal brand of cultural nationalism by redefining, in their own terms, what it means to be Haitian. To counter the state-sanctioned bicentennial celebrations in 2004, evangelical Protestants and Pentecostals both in Haiti and its diaspora held a series of revival crusades geared toward "reclaiming" Haiti for Jesus Christ (see McAlister 2000).

In February 2004, just months before I was to return to Haiti,⁷ the Caribbean nation made international headlines, as Aristide's presidency

began to crumble and the country's political climate became increasingly volatile. Hundreds of Haitian Americans marched through Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in support of Aristide and in protest of the Bush administration's opportunistic attempt to pressure the leftist leader to resign. Cable news reporters described how violent gangs of Aristide loyalists, known as *chimères*, clashed with "opposition" forces made up of disgruntled ex-convicts and military veterans who began a gradual takeover of the country. By the end of the month, the opposition was threatening to capture the capital, and, under intense pressure from the United States and France, Aristide was flown into exile, first to the Central African Republic, then to Jamaica, and eventually to South Africa. Despite a *New York Times* report (Marquis 2004) that Aristide voluntarily left Haiti after "meekly ask[ing] the American ambassador...whether his resignation would help the country," many Aristide supporters were outraged by what they, and even Aristide himself, claimed had been a calculated kidnapping by the United States government. The Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) called for the United Nations to investigate the matter and worried that the use of excessive coercion precipitating the Haitian president's departure "set a dangerous precedent for democratically elected governments everywhere, as it promotes the unconstitutional removal of duly elected persons from office" (Polgreen and Marquis 2004). Despite the arrival of over one thousand United States Marines and several hundred peacekeeping troops from Europe and South America (*ibid*), the international press reported escalating violence and disorder in Haiti over the next few weeks. On March 8, 2004, the *New York Times* noted that the country was "awash in weapons," describing the disarmament of Haitians who "nurse deep grudges" on both sides of the *mêlée* as a "daunting and crucial task" (Polgreen 2004).

As I studied the news reports during the spring months, it seemed unlikely that my summer trip to Haiti would happen. Although I was looking forward to renewing contacts from my previous visits, conducting some final interviews, and videotaping Pentecostal church services, I resigned myself to finishing my dissertation without the benefit of experiencing Haiti during its year of bicentennial celebrations.⁸ However, by late July, the violence in Port-au-Prince decreased to the point where my family and I no longer feared for my safety, and I was able to go forward with my initial plan to spend five weeks in Haiti. I was also able to make video recordings in all of the churches I had previously frequented, with the exception of those in the most depressed areas of the capital, where the threat of sporadic gun violence was much too severe to permit a nighttime outing.

In light of the notorious fragility of Haiti's political arena, I could

hardly have been surprised by the turn of events that had placed my summer travel plans in jeopardy. History had taught me, for example, that Aristide, a former Catholic priest and proponent of liberation theology, had already been ousted by a *coup d'état* in 1991, only months after becoming Haiti's first elected president.⁹ Although he was returned to power three years later by a U.S.-led military intervention, Aristide was portrayed negatively by the U.S. media (Farmer 1994:351-374). The former charismatic priest never seemed to win the trust of the United States government, which refused to intervene in 2004 to prevent his ouster (Polgreen and Weiner 2004). Providing a historical summary of the post-Duvalier years, including the first election of Aristide, Averill notes that Aristide was "considered anti-American by the U.S. State Department," and that "his sermons were taped and analyzed for years by the U.S. Embassy in Haiti" (1997:168).¹⁰

It was personal experience, rather than historical knowledge, that most effectively prepared me for a possible disruption of research opportunities in Haiti during 2004. After returning from a three-month stay during summer 2000, I learned of a decision by the international community, led by the United States, to freeze millions of dollars of aid to Haiti because of "flawed" legislative elections early that year. The U.S. State Department in turn became skittish about supporting American researchers in Haiti, and, hence, granting agencies balked at funding the longer period of fieldwork I was enthusiastically planning for 2001-2002. "If you could choose another country," one polite administrator hinted, "there may be something we can do." After returning to Haiti in summer 2001, I opted to spend most of 2002 in Jamaica, where I begin thinking about how I would examine both locales within the confines of a single monograph (Butler 2005).

What's interesting is that while this turn of events nearly pushed me away from Haiti, it also piqued my curiosity about the relation between Haiti's sociopolitical scene and the Pentecostals who are embedded within it. More determined than ever to maintain my connections to Haiti, I found myself increasingly drawn towards a line of inquiry that would guide my ethnomusicological research among heavenly army congregations: How might this history of military violence and political upheaval be affecting present-day Haitian Pentecostals and their music making? To what extent is the exercise of music and faith constituting a creative response to the threats of devastating poverty and indiscriminate gunfire? In what ways does musical praise help Pentecostals to construct anti-stereotypical identities, battle evil spirits (*movèz espri*), and contest sources of social misery?

I think Katherine Hagedorn is exactly right when she states, "Talk about music reveals deeply embedded ideologies about identity and ter-

ritoriality—literally one’s place in the world” (2006:36). Her “theology of sound” refers to “how the function of sound is theorized by musicians and adherents within a religious context, such that ‘divinely targeted sound,’ as well as discourse about that sound, maps the experience of divine transcendence onto a human grid” (2006:35). As I kept abreast of the opposition forces’ slow and deliberate takeover of the Haitian government, I also thought, although not in these terms, about the ways in which a sociospiritual war of position seemed to be raging on a micro-level, among Pentecostal congregations. This was a war waged not with bullets or machetes, but, rather, with the creative weapons of musical praise and the embodiment of oppositional theologies of sound and Spirit. I’ve picked up on these theologies by observing and participating in Pentecostal praise and worship, and by listening closely to the ways in which believers talk about the function of music in ritual, relating enactments of their faith to its sociopolitical and historical contexts.

When I finally made it back to Port-au-Prince in early August 2004, five months after Aristide’s departure, a foreign military presence was more noticeable to me than on any of my previous trips. During sweltering afternoons in the capital, the choppy sound of overhead aircraft often interrupted my thoughts. From time to time, I would look up to see a United Nations helicopter circling, presumably surveying the Champs-de-Mars area near the National Palace, or keeping an eye on some pro-Aristide demonstration unfolding in La Saline, Bel-Air, or another one of the ousted leader’s zones of support. Foreign troops, particularly those from the United States, aroused the suspicions of some Haitian Pentecostals, who saw U.S. efforts to restore order as less than genuine. Other Pentecostals to whom I spoke disliked the presence of foreign military, but gave them the benefit of the doubt, remarking, “Most of them are good” (“*Pi fò nan yo bon*”). I also talked with many Pentecostals who were not only appreciative of the security offered by the troops, but also very relieved that Aristide was no longer in power.¹¹

It is not at all surprising that Haitian Pentecostals express a wide range of sentiments about the role of foreign troops in Haiti. Those in civil society have had historical basis to view even Haiti’s own military with some degree of unease. Describing the role of the military in nineteenth-century Haiti, Laguerre notes, “Because of the power that the local military leaders wielded, the temptation to use and abuse their authority was always present. Corruption soon became part of the standard army operation” (1993:54). Laguerre also highlights the military’s marginalization of civil society and the ubiquity of military forces in government activities. What thus remains clear is that both past and present military activity in Haiti has heightened the relevance of terms such as “coup d’état,” “*lame*” (“army”), “*lagè*” (“war”), “*batay*” (“battle”), “*zanm*”

("gun"), "tira" ("shoot"), and "atake" ("attack"). These words of warfare have long been an indispensable part of the everyday vocabulary of many Haitians.¹²

Spiritual Work and Warfare at Church of Salvation

The notion of music as spiritual warfare is commonly expressed in many Christian contexts in Haiti and around the world. Preachers and musicians often cite biblical passages reminding congregants that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4). Other verses of scripture exhort believers to "put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11) and "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). Many Pentecostals highlight the sixth chapter of Ephesians, which identifies the believer's chief adversary as spiritual, rather than physical, in character. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood," the apostle Paul writes, "but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).¹³ Although European-American hymns such as "Onward Christian Soldiers" also make reference to spiritual warfare, the musical practices of Haiti's Pentecostal churches reveal a more intense warfare waged through song and dance. Through various forms of Pentecostal practice, Haiti's churchgoers use music both to implore God to intervene on their behalf and also to fight battles in which their individual and national welfare is understood to be at stake. This type of fighting is demonstrated most clearly in heavenly army churches such as Church of Salvation.

It was around 8:30 on an especially muggy night when I first visited. Delinwa, my friend and guide, led me there through a series of back alleys and short-cuts. We zipped along, pausing every few minutes so that he could chat with a few "kouzen" ("cousins") he saw. On each occasion he giddily explained to them that he was taking me to "Pastor Cool." Pastor Cool was evidently something of a superstar in the congested zones surrounding the church. I was amused that the mention of his name seemed to call to mind not just a person, but, rather, an event. Many of Delinwa's *kouzen* had, themselves, visited from time to time. None of their remarks had prepared me, however, for the jam packed space in which women, girls, and a smattering of men lay relaxing on blankets draping a concrete floor. Only a handful of rickety wooden chairs were visible, and these were strewn along the back wall near the entrance where I now stood strategizing about the most efficient way to make my way forward. Tip-toeing gingerly over the precariously outstretched limbs of sleeping infants and mothers, I navigated toward

a coveted spot against the wall near the front. A woman kindly offered to share a piece of her blanket, and I accepted, taking position next to a shy-looking girl I assumed was her daughter. Surveying the space, I noticed that four vertical posts supported the edifice. A rope stretched from each one, creating a square that resembled a makeshift boxing ring. I would soon grow accustomed to the way in which this ring transformed into a sacred arena of ritual action where fighting of a spiritual sort took place. I smiled at the painfully cute eight-year-old sitting beside me. Her eyes reminded me of extra-large white marbles; and her stare told me she knew I was a visitor—perhaps another *blan* from the United States.¹⁴ So much for my illusions of fitting in, I smirked to myself. I wanted the child to return my smile, but she did not. Instead, she simply offered, “Lame ap travay asweya” (“The army is working tonight”).

Located in San Fil, one of the poorest and most politically turbulent areas of Port-au-Prince, Church of Salvation is among the city’s best-known heavenly army assemblies. The church is often host to other congregations, which come from around the country to participate in all-night services known as *jenn* or *veydenwit*. Some Haitians use the term *lame selès*, or heavenly army, to refer to any of the country’s independent charismatic congregations whose practices they view as unorthodox or out of the ordinary *vis-à-vis* what takes place in mainline churches. However, “heavenly army” most often denotes a distinctive subset of an independent Pentecostal church—those specially chosen members of a congregation who are endowed with spiritual “gifts” and therefore divinely commissioned to wage spiritual warfare through intense singing and dancing. They are, in a sense, Christ’s “police”—what Vonarx refers to as “une police du Christ” (2007:117)—enforcing God’s will on earth and protecting the larger aggregation of believers through their spiritual duties. Spiritual manifestations referred to as “gifts” (“*don*”) or “angels” (“*zani*”) infill these human representatives, empowering them to heal, prophesy in tongues, and perform feats of strength and endurance.

Heavenly army members position themselves in relation not only to biblical narratives, but also to the practices of televangelists, foreign missionaries, and mission-oriented Haitian pastors, all of whom are viewed with disdain by many heavenly army leaders. Pastor Cool often expressed his strong desire to remain independent (*endepandan*)—free from the liturgical strictures outsiders would likely attempt to impose upon his congregation. Nevertheless, heavenly armies express Pentecostal solidarity in a fight against “Satan” and the *lwa* (Vodou spirits). They perform their faith within an identifiable Christian framework, even as they appear to stretch it by engaging in practices that mainline leaders deem heretical: promoting unconventional biblical interpretations, practicing folk-derived healing techniques, and dancing themselves into a state of

heightened spiritual awareness.

Those whom the pastor feels have been chosen by God to be army members almost always wear a special robe during the portion of service in which they “work the Spirit” (Murphy 1994).¹⁵ The robes vary in appearance but are usually long, colorful, and loose fitting, bearing resemblance to those worn by some North American clergy and choristers. These garments are often worn with a belt, and men wear pants underneath, such that the ensemble reminds me of a martial arts uniform. From a visual standpoint, these robes, along with women’s head wraps, set heavenly armies apart from mainline congregations. The latter, wishing to distance themselves from accusations that they condone army rituals, avoid robes and head wraps altogether and often critique their use. In answer to my queries regarding the robes, Pastor Cool drew a comparison to the Old Testament prophet Elijah, whose robe symbolized spiritual power. The pastor also stressed the importance of his being obedient to God in making decisions about ritual apparel. “It’s the Holy Spirit who tells me what to put on,” he stated. “If God wants me to wear red then that’s what I wear. Anything he tells me, I must do it.” While such comments recognize divine instruction as a motivating factor, it is at least arguable that a type of mimicry is occurring here as well—if only in the form of what Homi Bhabha calls an “ironic compromise.” Ritual elements such as the donning of the robes may instantiate “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce slippage, its excess, its difference.” Mimicry then becomes “the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.” It is thus “the sign of a double articulation... which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (1984:126).

Another bone of contention with mainline Christians involves the dancing and singing employed during heavenly army services and the ways in which these practices tap into and deploy spiritual power(s). With the heightened spiritual awareness produced through dance comes a deep *unawareness* of physical surroundings, such that heavenly army members afterwards claim not to have recognized friends or family members while “working.” This type of dancing is but one of the elements that tempts some observers to closely compare Pentecostal practices with the rituals of Vodou (see, for example, Metraux 1972:357 and Rey and Stepick 2006:3). Many Haitians with whom I spoke dismissed heavenly army churches as nothing more than Vodou temples operating with a Protestant flavor. For the most culturally conservative mainline Christians, heavenly armies are spiritually dangerous collectives that make up a “Vodou church,” wherein rhetorical and liturgical performances of

Pentecostalism disingenuously mask efforts to appease the *lwa*.

Although mainline Pentecostals acknowledge the legitimacy of “gifts of the Spirit” as outlined in scripture (I Corinthians 12), they also frown upon heavenly army lyrics that sometimes focus on a plurality of gifts rather than on the Holy Spirit as a single entity. Heavenly army songs may also portray gifts as spiritual beings with agency to “work miracles” and “descend” upon believers. This theological perspective is demonstrated in the following lyrics from two short choruses featured at Church of Salvation, “Gift from Above” (“*Don sòt anwo*”) and “Here’s the Gift Descending” (“*Men don an desann sou mwen*”).

“Gift from Above”

Gift from above. It works miracles, O. (four times)
 Brothers and sisters, if you need a gift you’ll go up into the desert.
 You’ll pray; you’ll fast.
 You’ll pray; you’ll find a gift.

Don sòt anwo. Li fè mirak, O. (four times)
Frèzèse, si w bezwen yon don w’a monte nan dezè a.
W’a priye; w’a jene.
W’a priye; w’a jwenn yon don.

“Here’s the Gift Descending”

Here’s the gift descending on me, Lord. (three times)
 Here’s the gift descending on me.

Men don an ap desann sou mwen, Lesenyè. (three times)
Men don an ap desann sou mwen.

I should point out that these two songs stress contrasting but complementary senses of directionality. “Gift from Above” is sung in the second person, directed horizontally toward fellow worshipers who are encouraged to fast and pray in order to “find a gift” (“*jwenn yon don*”). Moreover, it is the believer who is active—she goes up (*monte*) to obtain the gift, positioning herself through acts of self-denial and consecration in a metaphorical desert. In “Here’s the Gift Descending,” it is the gift itself that is most active, “descending” on the believer who embodies the lyrics and attests to their truthfulness through exuberant song and dance. This song is directed vertically, employing the first person to address God personally and affirm faith in his reality.

Songs such as these become most powerful when they “heat up” (“*chofe*”) the space. Heating up occurs as worshippers use joyously energetic worship to invite the Holy Spirit into their midst. Pastor Cool frequently mentioned the importance of music to the success of a service. I once heard him devote an entire sermon to music, after which he spent twenty minutes collecting an offering and explaining why the congre-

gants needed to give money to support the musicians and purchase new instruments. During a service at another church, I heard a pastor repeatedly beckon a group of instrumentalists who were annoyingly late taking their positions: "Where are the music leaders? If we don't have music, we can't dance!" ("*Kote maystwo yo? Si nou pa gen mizik, nou pa ka danse!*")¹⁶ One church member explained to me that dancing worshippers will often move toward musical instruments such as the *senbal* and *graj* to gain strength (*fòs*), as though to refuel before continuing. I have noticed that they also tend to intensify their movements when instruments join in. As implied by the annoyed pastor's remarks, heavenly army members sometimes feel their work is ineffective without instrumental accompaniment.

In heavenly army assemblies, it is usually in the center of the ritual space that the army's dancing occurs. At Church of Salvation, this space is cordoned off with a rope and thus quite literally distinguished from the area outside of the ring. And even without such a visible marker outlining the sacred inner square, congregants would know that the center space is off limits to all but the *manm solda*—the army authorized by the Spirit to wage musicospiritual warfare. This type of boundary setting in performance is also akin to the type of "framing" highlighted by sociologically oriented scholars such as Erving Goffman (1974). In a helpful rehearsal of his work, Victor and Edith Turner explain that to frame "is to discriminate a sector of sociocultural action from the general ongoing process of a community's life" They add that "it is often *reflexive*, in that, to 'frame,' a group must cut out a piece of itself for inspection (and retrospection). To do this it must create—by rules of exclusion and inclusion—a bordered space and a privileged time within which images and symbols of what has been sectioned off can be 'relived,' scrutinized, assessed, revalued, and, if need be, remodeled and rearranged" (1982:34). It isn't difficult to identify what the authors refer to as a "hierarchical nesting of frames" that become increasingly exclusive, moving from the perimeter of the church building to its open interior space, to the inner square, and finally, to the individual accessing the divine through music and psychically positioning herself in the presence of the Holy Spirit. In this respect, framing and positioning represent conscious and complementary acts of Pentecostal performance.

Pastor Cool's skillful singing voice is an effective aspect of his ministry, helping to attract growing numbers of congregants who learn from him a vast repertoire of spiritual songs. Short choruses such as "Gifts from Above" and "Here's the Gift Descending" are usually featured during lively portions of congregational worship. However, in many instances, Pastor Cool gravitated toward slower, more somber pieces to usher himself and other army members into transcendence. Some of the most powerful songs I heard in Haiti are those performed just as these

“soldiers” (*solda*) are preparing to work. Singing begins without instrumental accompaniment in order to convey a plaintive mood and offer general congregants the opportunity to communicate to God feelings of utter dependency as they pray for the army to be filled (*ranpli*) with the gifts that will empower them. That night at Church of Salvation, Pastor Cool began lined out a slow chorus while leading the other five *solda* in an unhurried counterclockwise saunter around the center space. “*Men nou devan ’w Lesechè!*” he intoned loudly, after which the congregation echoed the lyrics. This was a lament song, known as a *plent*, in which each phrase is sung four times—once by the pastor and three times by the rest of the congregation.

“Here We Are Before You, Lord”

Here we are before you, Lord.	<i>Men nou devan ’w, Lesechè.</i>
We are unable, Lord.	<i>Nou pa kapab, Lesechè.</i>
We have need of you, Lord.	<i>Nou gen bezwen ’w, Lesechè.</i>
We are not employed, Lord.	<i>Nou pap travay, Lesechè.</i>
I am persecuted, Lord.	<i>M pèsekite, Lesechè.</i>
Evil spirits challenge me, Lord.	<i>Djab ban ’m defì, Lesechè.</i>
Meet their challenges, Lord.	<i>Leve defì yo, Senyè.</i>
I’ve been suffering for a long time, Lord.	<i>Map souffri lontan, Lesechè.</i>
I’ve been sick for a long time, Lord.	<i>M malad lontan, Lesechè.</i>
You are my good doctor, Lord.	<i>Ou se bon doktè m, Lesechè.</i>
I am around the army, Lord.	<i>M devan lame, Lesechè.</i>
I am around evildoers, Lord.	<i>M devan mechan yo, Senyè.</i>
Don’t leave me alone, Lord.	<i>Pa kite ’m sel, Lesechè.</i>
My arms are raised, Lord.	<i>De men ’m anlè, Lesechè.</i>
I need something, Lord.	<i>M bezwen yon bagay, Lesechè.</i>
Here is my family, Lord.	<i>Ala fanmi ’m, Lesechè.</i>
Here are my children, Lord.	<i>Ala pitit mwen, Senyè.</i>
Go to the hospital, Lord.	<i>Al lopital, Lesechè.</i>

This piece is a strong example of how believers position themselves “before the Lord” (*devan Lesechè*), directing their song toward God in a lyrical and physical display of vulnerability. Believers sing a litany of sufferings, such as being unemployed, persecuted, and sick; and the uplifted arms index a pose of surrender. Ultimately, this surrender is what provides a means of rescue, as *Lesechè* is called upon to deliver them from evildoers (*mechan yo*). I read the lyrics “I am around [or before] the

army” (*M devan lame*) as a cry to God for recognition that his spiritual fighters have been properly deployed to grant the believer’s petitions. All that’s needed is for the Holy Spirit to descend with power and “meet the challenges” (“*leve defi yo*”) of the evil spirits (*djab*).

Heavenly army songs sometimes employ the “telephone” as a metaphor for prayer. Congregants who sing these “phone choruses” often do not have the financial means to own a telephone, which is a marker of economic privilege and a coveted means of local and transnational communication.¹⁷ The metaphorical use of the telephone as a means of direct communication with God underscores for congregants the freedom they have to “come boldly before the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16) and gain access to spiritual power deemed much more efficacious than the riches of nonbelievers. “It’s Time for Me to Talk to My Father” seeks a return “phone call” from God; and “Never Busy” celebrates the Father’s constant availability.

“It’s Time for Me to Talk to My Father”

God, O, I’m talking to you. When I call on the phone you do not answer. (twice)

You are the one, Father, who gave me a call. It’s to pray, it’s to pray, it’s to pray.

It’s time, O, it’s time. (twice)

It’s time, O, it’s time for me to talk to my Father.

Letènèl, O, se ave’w m’ap pale. Lè m’rele’w nan telefon nan ou pa reponn.
(twice)

Se ou menm, Papa, ki voye rele’m. Se priye, se priye, se priye.

Li lè, O, li lè. (twice)

Li lè, O, li lè pou’m pale ak Papa’m.

“Never Busy”

When I speak to you, you hear.

When I call you on the phone, you answer me.

Papa, your telephone is never busy.

Lè m’pale ave’w, ou tande.

Lè m’telfone’w, ou reponn mwen.

Telefon ou, Papa, pa janm okipe.

The apparent contradiction between these two phone choruses—between a God who answers in the latter case, but not the former—

speaks to the slipperiness of lyrically constructed notions of the divine. Resolving the contradiction requires an understanding that believers appropriate songs to suit their specific sociospiritual circumstances. Thus, “It’s Time for Me to Talk” represents a plea, a request for relief from an ongoing trial; while “Never Busy” constitutes a praise, a celebration of God’s always accessible nature. By faith, believers accept that although God’s response to their “phone call” may not arrive at the desired moment, it is only a matter of time. Worshipers lyrically position themselves as children standing before a heavenly “Papa” who protects and provides for those he loves. The urgency of musical worship sometimes stems precisely from the apparent contradictory aspects of God. He never lacks the power to act (i.e., he is never busy), but he may, at a given moment, lack the will (i.e., he does not answer). It is the understanding that pleading one’s case could move God to answer that pushes believers to seek the highest states of transcendence through heartfelt worship. Congregationally sung lyrics become contextually meaningful as they are applied at individual and collective levels

Heavenly army Pentecostals often make musical pleas for protection and blessings that a spiritual adversary is attempting to hinder. Such pleas are exemplified in the songs “Untie the Rope” and “Tie Up the Devil for Me.” In Vodou, the metaphor of tying or binding (*mare*) refers to the act of spiritually blocking or preventing something from taking place in the natural realm. In a Pentecostal context, the words “untie the rope” are a request for God to open up opportunities and perhaps undo the negative spiritual work that may be the cause of present suffering. By asking God to “tie up the devil,” singers hope to stymie the work of those who have deployed evil spirits against them.

“Untie the Rope”

There is a rope that’s tied. [three times] Father God, please untie the rope.

G’on kòd ki mare. [three times] *Letènèl Papa, lage kòd la souple.*

“Tie Up the Devil for Me”

Tie up the devil for me, O Jehovah. (three times)

There is power for me to put the devil out.

Mare djab la pou mwen, O Jeova. (three times)

Gen pouvwa pou’m mete djab la deyò a.

Although I translate the Creole term “djab” variously as “evil spirit” or “devil,” it can also mean “lwa.” This latter translation would add a layer of complexity to army songs, perhaps making transparent a way in which these Pentecostals (re)position themselves within a spiritual

realm shared by *Vodouisian*. More often than not, however, “*djab*” is deliberately left ambiguous, as church leaders realize that the term can and will be defined according to circumstance. Laennec Hurbon writes that “in certain parts of the country where the *lwa* are called *djab*, or devils, it means only that the voodoo followers have absorbed the Christian vocabulary, without for a moment believing in the Christian devil. There is even a Petro *lwa* known as Lucifer” (Hurbon 1995:80-81). The author does not speculate about Pentecostal Christians, but it would be a huge mistake to assume that meanings are fixed or that absorptive membranes allow only for one-way passage. It is more likely that heavenly army lyrics retain a contextual multivalence as songs become “positional performatives” used to situate worshipers in the interstices of ostensibly antithetical belief systems. Thus, “*Jeova*” (another name for God) has power to put the *djab* out, whether it is experienced as the biblical Satan, one of the *lwa*, or a more vaguely defined “evil spirit.”

Songs such as “Untie the Rope” and “Tie Up the Devil for Me” reveal some of the differences between heavenly army Pentecostals and their mainline counterparts. Although the latter are sometimes surprisingly willing to acknowledge the existence of *lwa* rather than simply conflating them with Satan, mainline Pentecostals put considerably less sermonic and lyrical emphasis on *djab* as entities whom they or God must directly confront. Heavenly armies often contend directly with spiritual adversaries and indirectly with the humans believed to be under their negative influence. Indirect signification is a well-known feature of African diasporic expressive cultures,¹⁸ and in Haitian contexts this is done through the sung or spoken transmission of spiritual power known as *pwen* (points).¹⁹ A number of scholars have recently explored fascinating uses of *pwen* by Haitian subalterns. (See, for example, Averill 1997, Brown 1987, Dirksen 2006, McAlister 2002, Richman 2005a). Drawing on Karen Brown’s broad definition of *pwen* as “anything that captures the essence or pith of a complex situation” (Brown 1987:151-152, Richman 2005a:15), Richman even examines the “*pwenification*” of people who are “sent” across national boundaries to embody and deliver messages that are “collected” (*ranmase*) by the intended recipients. Because *pwen* are also “a class of ‘magical’ spells whose power works over distances” (Averill 1997:15), they are not accepted by mainline Pentecostals who see such uses of music as wholly unchristian.

When heavenly army church members send points (*voye pwen*), they direct the power of a song against an unseen adversary. A striking example of this type of point song is the short chorus “Papa, Papa, Papa.”

“Papa, Papa, Papa”

Papa, Papa, Papa

Attack those who despise me.
Fight against those who make war with me.

Papa, Papa, Papa
Atake moun ki pa vle wè'm yo.
Goumen ak moun k'ap fè'm lage yo.

The song is a liberal translation of Psalms 35:1, which, in its Haitian Creole translation, implores God to “attack” those who despise (or literally, “don’t want to see”) the singers.²⁰ Sung during some of the most intensely demonstrative moments of the service, it is often repeated with increasing volume as congregants may imagine specific recipients whom they hope will collect the point and, consequently, be hindered in their efforts to harm the heavenly army and those who support it.

Like many point songs, the chorus “Rock, Here We Are Before You” makes reference to an unspecified “they,” implying trouble for individuals who dare to test (*sonde*) the army’s invincibility by secretly scorning it.

“Rock, Here We Are Before You”

Rock, here we are before you. (three times)
They test the army. (twice)
Look how the people talk! Let them talk. (four times)
The people gossip about the army, but that doesn’t surprise the army.

Wochè, men nou devan’w. (three times)
Yo sonde ame a. (twice)
Ala kote moun yo pale. Kite yo pale. (four times)
Moun yo pale sou do ame a; sa pa etone ame a.

Finally, the lyrics below are to a longer point song broadly aimed at the rich. Based on the biblical story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), “Bury Me on the Old Mat” humorously targets those who mistake material prosperity for moral value.

“Bury Me on the Old Mat”

Verse 1: Lazarus was poor, but he had Jesus.
The rich man was celebrating, but he didn’t have Jesus.
The rich man died and Lazarus died too.
Lazarus ascended to heaven; the rich man stayed on earth.

Laza te nan mize men li te genyen Jezi.
Nonm rich la tap rejwi men li pat genyen Jezi.
Nonm rich la vin mouri è Laza te mouri tou.
Laza te monte nan syèl; nonm rich la te ret atè.

Verse 2: There are many people who think that because they have money

They don't want to become Christians; they don't want to serve God.

When those people die they have the most beautiful funerals.

All that is worth nothing; it's just a beautiful trip to hell.

*Gòn anpil moun ki konprann paske yo genyen lajan
Yo pa vlè konvèti; yo pa vlè sèvi Bondye.
Lè moun sa yo mouri yo gen pi bel anteman.
Tout sa pa itil anyen; se bel vwayaj pou lanfè.*

Verse 3: Today I may be a "big shot"; tomorrow I may die.

My funeral costs ten thousand dollars; everyone will talk about me.

Tonight at midnight, evil doers come and take my soul
[make me a zombi]

Tie my hands behind my back, make me cry out,
"Here I am passing by!"

*Jodi a pou'm "gran neg"; demen pou'm ta mouri.
Anteman m di mil dola; tout moun ap pale de mwen.
Aswe kou'l fe minwi, malfekte vin pran zombi m.
Minote'm de bra deye, rele, di "Men map pase!"*

Chorus: Wrap me. Tie me up. Bury me on the old mat.

Wrap me. Tie me up with Jesus.

Because if I should have a beautiful funeral,
I might die without Jesus.

Wrap me. Tie me up. Bury me on the old mat.

*Vlope'm. Mare'm. Antere m'nan vye nat la.
Vlope'm. Mare'm avek Jezi.
Paské pou'm ta gen bel anteman pou'm ta mouri san Jezi.
Vlope'm. Mare'm. Antere'm nan vye nat la.*

While the lyrics of songs such as these are biblically based, most mainline Pentecostals vociferously object to the sending of *pwen* through musical practice. Already stigmatized by some denominational Protestants (e.g., Baptists, Methodists) as *Vodouisan* worshipping beneath a translucent façade of Christianity, mainline Pentecostals work hard to position themselves rhetorically and performatively (through musical worship) as close as possible to the "respectable" side of a Vodou-Pentecostal dichotomy.

Some Pentecostals feel that the *konpa* rhythm with which heavenly army songs are often sung makes them unworthy vehicles for transcen-

dence. Those who strongly hold this belief tend to take up membership in congregations where ecstatic praise and transcendent worship are experienced through a different musical style. Recognizable most easily by its characteristic five-note syncopated rhythm on the high hat cymbal, the *konpa* rhythm performed by popular dance bands such as Tabou Combo, Skah-Shah, Tropicana, T-Vice, and Sweet Mickey is a continual source of controversy among Pentecostal congregations and their leaders. The use of gospel lyrics has led some Haitians to use the term *konpa-Jezi* when referring to the use of this rhythm in a Christian church. But even in its Christianized context, some Pentecostals argue that *konpa* is too “hot” to handle, considering it taboo because of its worldly associations with nightclubs and popular dance bands, along with the fact that it promotes what they believe to be sexually suggestive use of the body in worship.

A refusal to embrace *konpa* is, in some cases, understood to be a matter of one’s eternal life or death. For example, within congregations that self-identify solely as “Body of Christ” assemblies (*legliz “kodeKris”*), *konpa* is strictly forbidden. It is not, they say, “*yon rit kò a*” (“a rhythm of the Body”), suggesting that those who worship to a *konpa* beat are inauthentic practitioners of the faith, or possibly even hell-bound victims of Satan’s deception, in the worst-case scenario. Body of Christ Pentecostals are thus distinguished by the fact that they avoid *konpa* altogether in favor of North American styles of church music. Songs that might otherwise be acceptable are passed over in favor of those less likely to imply a *konpa* accompaniment.

In any event, performing *konpa* and sending *pwen* are not the only methods through which heavenly armies and other Pentecostals seek to oppose adversarial forces. They also use other types of lyrics and musical accompaniment to wage spiritual warfare. Discussions of musical preferences often lead to fierce debates among Haitian Christians over cultural national identity as various groups strive to frame their worship style as legitimate and nationally relevant. As is the case with heavenly armies, mainline Pentecostals embrace distinct theologies of sound and Spirit that are revealed through positional performance and the choices they make regarding musical style.

“The Lord Will Make a Way”: Power and Identity at Greater Love Tabernacle

“Brother Butler feels at home tonight because he feels the Spirit!” Halfway through a sermon during which my mind had begun to drift, the mention of my name caught my attention. I perked up to hear the leader of Greater Love Tabernacle, Pastor Wilkens, preaching about the universality and efficacy of the Holy Spirit. “It’s the Spirit of God,” he

declared, “that gives us our identity in the Body of Christ!” [*“Se lespri Bondye ki ba nou idantite nou nan kò de Kris!”*]. During the previous segment of the service, Pastor Wilkens had asked me to say a few words. I conveyed my appreciation to the congregation by telling them, “I really feel at home here. The way you sing and praise God—it makes me feel as though I’m in my own church. It is not always easy to be away from the United States for so long,” I added, “but I thank God that I have a place where I can come and worship with my brothers and sisters who love the Lord.”²¹ I meant what I said, but what I didn’t say was that I was very uncomfortable with the pastor’s more controversial views concerning musical style.

With a congregation numbering over five hundred, Greater Love Tabernacle is probably the largest Body of Christ church in Haiti. According to Pastor Wilkens, an American missionary named Nick Greek, an American of Yugoslavian heritage, founded it in the 1960s. Before he returned permanently to the United States where he died, “Pastor Nick” established a loose fellowship of churches whose Haitian leaders continued to demand an ascetic lifestyle, involving strict dress codes and restrictions on earthly pleasures. Many types of Christians in Haiti embrace this type of holiness mandate, but members of the Body of Christ fellowship are distinct in their ascription of a negative moral-spiritual value to music with a perceived local color; therefore, only so-called “American” music is allowed in their worship services.²² Although they always sing in Haitian Creole, most of the pieces I heard were translations of English-language hymns and choruses brought by missionaries from the United States. Greater Love Tabernacle did feature some original pieces composed by Haitians, but except for their use of Haitian Creole lyrics, these seemed indistinguishable from North American church songs. My knowledge of this fact had initially discouraged me from visiting any Body of Christ churches. I assumed there would be very little to find in terms of Haitian musical genres and, consequently, heated praise and worship. But when I eventually attended a service, I was indeed impressed with both the sincerity of the worship and also the highly demonstrative manner in which it took place. In terms of the intensity of musical praise, I found Greater Love Tabernacle to be even hotter than what I’d experienced at other mainline Pentecostal churches.

My mind settled again on Pastor Wilkens as he developed his motif. “It’s the Spirit of God that lets us know, wherever we go, that we are the people of God! It’s the Spirit of God that empowers us to attack Satan’s kingdom!” [*“Se lespri de Dye ki fè nou konnen, nenpòt kote n’ale, ke se pèp Bondye nou ye! Se lespri Bondye ki ba nou pouvwa atake wayomm Satan!”*]. Almost instinctively I responded, “Amen!” along with several

in the congregation. Like the musical praise and worship I had enjoyed a few minutes prior, the sermon touched on themes of spiritual power and identity familiar to me and to a variety of Pentecostals in Haiti. The pastor's discourse on spiritual power was intended to connect, in the minds of congregants, with what had been sung. From time to time, he quoted song lyrics verbatim, reminding us that God possessed the power to "make a way" (*fè yon wout*) through any mountain-like problem. What Haiti needed, he declared, was to turn away from "Satan" and look to Jesus Christ, the only source of deliverance for the nation. Music is both a personal and collective experience at Greater Love, as worshipers apply lyrical meanings to their own lives, the lives of their families, and the life of the nation. Let us therefore take a closer look at the songs employed in this Body of Christ church.

The evening service at Greater Love had begun around 4:30 p.m. with the congregants kneeling in prayer while the rhythm section and *fanfa* (wind band) members prepared themselves for praise and worship. After fifteen minutes of congregational prayer, the band began softly playing the traditional gospel chorus, "Mwen konnen Dye va fè yon wout" ("I Know God Will Make a Way"). The chorus had a flowing, waltz-like quality accentuated by the trumpets and trombones, which swelled into each measure with a slight crescendo before each downbeat.

"I Know God Will Make a Way for Me"

I know that God will make a way for me. (twice)

If I live a life that's holy, hate evil and do what is right,

I know that God will make a way for me.

Mwen konnen Dye va fè yon wout pou mwen. (twice)

Si mwen viv yon vi ki sen, rayi le mal, è fè le byen,

Mwen konnen Dye va fè yon wout pou mwen.

The lyrics, which stress a link between holiness and empowerment, were displayed on an overhead projector, but nearly all the congregants sang from memory. Some lifted their hands or swayed in their seats while singing or humming the melody. As the song neared completion, a group of five praise singers took the podium and prepared to sing. The transition between songs was, as usual, guided by a *dirijan* (music leader) who encouraged the congregants to lift their hands and praise. The congregation hardly needed prodding, however, as many seemed to find their own inspiration through the lyrics they sang and continued praising as though the chorus had never ended.

Amid the sounds of corporate praise and worship, the praise singers launched into another waltz-like selection. Soon afterwards, the pastor stood from his chair on the pulpit, signaling the congregants to rise and come forward for prayer if they so desired. The chorus was entitled,

“Monte pi wo” (“Climb Higher”), and its message of victory and healing went hand-in-hand with what took place while it was sung. First a man came forward and received prayer by the laying on of hands. The “laying on of hands” is usually done by church elders who pray for an individual by touching her or him on the forehead while asking God to impart the Holy Spirit or bring about healing. Human beings thus become physical channels through which power flows and divine healing occurs (See James 5:14-15 and I Timothy 1:6).

Next, the floodgates seemed to open as dozens of congregants poured into the open space just in front of the pulpit. Soon the area was filled with people singing, dancing, and receiving prayer for various physical and spiritual afflictions. After about ten minutes, the praise singers, all of whom were women, began singing a Haitian Creole translation of the chorus, “Lift Me Up Above the Shadows.” This piece was faster, and it ushered in a more celebratory atmosphere. The congregants in front of the pulpit and those near their seats began clapping, swaying, and singing more intensely than before. A group of about twelve young women interlocked their arms as they danced, forming a long human chain that reminded me of a chorus line, each member lifting their legs together in a powerfully graceful two-step. Church members understand these dance formations to represent unity and power in worship. They are, as one young woman explained to me in French, “*un signe de solidarité.*” Another stressed chain dancing as a kind of “testimony” (“*temwenaj*”) that provides embodied proof, first to God whose approval is sought through worship, and then to the unconverted attendees, of the joy and power of the Holy Spirit.

A few minutes later, the tempo picked up again with a new song entitled, “Mwen vle di kote m pase” (“Wherever I Go I Want to Tell”), which I did not recognize. However, the style of the piece was certainly familiar to me. The sound made me think of the country-and-western-influenced gospel pieces sung in both black and white Protestant and Pentecostal churches in the United States. Through the lyrics, singers testify and give thanks to God for having “made a way” (“*fè yon wout*”) for them.

“Wherever I Go I Want to Tell”

Wherever I go I want to tell what God has done for me.

Wherever I go I want to tell how great God is.

Many years ago my life was nearly ended.

My eyes were blinded and I couldn't see.

But in his infinite grace, he made a way for me.

And today I can see.

Mwen vle di kote m'pase sa Bondye fè pou mwen.

*Mwen vle di kote m'pase ki jan Bondye a gran.
 Anpil ane pase mwen te pre fini.
 Je mwen te bouche mwen pat kab wè.
 Men nan gras enfini li, li fè yon wout pou mwen.
 E jodi a mwen wè.*

The lyrical difference in tense between “I Know God Will Make a Way” and “Wherever I Go I Want to Tell” merits comment here. In the latter piece, the lyrics celebrate what God has done in the past; whereas the former song obviously expresses confidence in what God will do if the conditions of holiness are met. Perhaps this ritual sequence is not insignificant: The initial affirmation of hope simply finds its justification in the musical testimony of how God has *already* made a way, opening blinded eyes and applying his infinite grace (*gras enfini*). Such testimonies are, in fact, intended to “spark thought and meditation, prompting hearers to ponder the points of experiential resonance, to consider how the messages conveyed apply to their own lives and speak to their souls” (Hinson 2000:16). Songs in this context serve as powerful “testified truths” that reveal “individual and community canons of significance, offering an exegesis of experience that is simulatenously subjective and shared” (Hinson 2000:329).

As the music grew livelier, the women’s chain groups continued to form, and there were now several scattered among the congregation. Some of the chains consisted of only three members and the two outside women supported the one in the middle, who could engage in holy dancing without fear of injury from falling or bumping into others. Compared to other Pentecostal churches, Greater Love had a large number of men, who made up about forty percent of the congregation. Many of them had also joined the crowd in front of pulpit and were dancing or jumping vigorously in rhythm with the music. This relatively high percentage of men is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Body of Christ churches. It may be partly due to the fact that only men are allowed to preach or teach from the Bible. Women may lead the congregation in song or teach music, but they are forbidden to exhort from the Word of God. Pentecostals are not unanimous in this belief. Even those who agree on other points often disagree vehemently over the proper interpretation of biblical texts used to support the silencing of women (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:11-13).

The final song of the praise and worship segment was entitled, “M’pap janm sispann loue non li” (“I Will Never Stop Praising His Name”). Not surprisingly, the emotional climax of the song seemed to correspond to the highest pitches in the melody, where the congregants sang, “Mwen te malad, Jezi geri mwen” (“I was sick, Jesus healed me”). When these lyrics were sung, the voices were at their loudest and many

congregants waved their arms as though personalizing each word that came forth.

“I Will Never Stop Praising His Name”

I will never stop praising his name. I will never stop blessing his name.

I will never stop exalting his name for all he has done for me.

I was sick, Jesus healed me. I was in prison, he delivered me.

I will never stop praising his name.

M'pap janm sispann loue non li. M'pap janm sispann beni non li.

M'pap janm sispann egzalte non li pou tout sa li fè pou mwen.

Mwen te malad, Jezi geri mwen. M'te nan prison, li delivre mwen.

M'pap janm sispann loue non li.

The song ended after a few repetitions, but the praise continued for the next six minutes, as worshippers continued to cry out words of adoration: “Hallelujah!” “Thank you, Lord!” “We give you glory!” “Jesus, you’re wonderful!” [*“Alelouya!” “Mèsi, Jezi!” “Nou bay’w glwa!” “Jezi, ou mèveye!”*] The voices mingled together creating an impressive sea of sound, the ebb and flow of which was far beyond the control of any one person. As the keyboardist began sustaining some soft chords, glossolalic utterances fell from the lips of some worshippers, while others wept or trembled under the influence of the Holy Spirit. During the subsequent cooling down period, the pastor sat and intently observed. This was not unusual because, as spiritual overseers, pastors often want to watch the move of the Spirit and witness those under their spiritual care who may be receiving an infilling. Little by little, the volume decreased and worshippers began to regain their composure. Finally, the *dirijan* took the podium once more, offering some quiet praise phrases before making a brief reference to the chorus they had just finished singing. Speaking the lyrics, he reinforced the message of the song, which elicited an “Amen” from the congregation. After making a few brief announcements, he introduced the pastor, who would guide the remainder of the service.

While songs at Greater Love draw on biblical narratives of healing for individuals, believers also see themselves as uniquely positioned to pray on behalf of their country. They sing and dance to gain entry into a spiritual zone of power in which the Holy Spirit lifts them above the cares of the world. Their real-world problems often remain, but they leave worship service with a fresh sense of encouragement to persevere and a renewed faith that better days lie ahead, not only for them and their immediate family, but also for members of the Body of Christ empowered to make a difference in Haiti through musical prayer and praise. Believers are, as Pastor Wilkens explained to me in English,

“intercessors” who can “stand in the gap” between God and those outside of “the Body” or “in the world” of the unsaved. This aspect of positionality—the way in which Pentecostals at Greater Love Tabernacle situate themselves in the confrontational space between a world deemed hostile and a God believed to be all-powerful—is key to understanding their disavowal of Haitian musical genres. If God was to “make a way,” to provide deliverance from the social ills of disease, poverty, and violence, they needed to keep themselves unspotted from worldly pleasures that might prevent them from accessing the Holy Spirit during times of need. Musical practice reveals a fascinating link between the commitment to lead a holy lifestyle and the hope that God will work for the good of those who serve him.

Conclusion: Transcendence, Power, and Positionality

While I have focused on only two types of Pentecostal congregations, there is clearly a range of “Pentecostalism” practiced on Haiti’s transnational terrain. These practices are distinguished by musical styles and ritual goals often felt to be mutually incompatible. Choices regarding performance style and function often distinguish Pentecostal groups and underscore remarkably different phenomenologies of transcendence and power. Music as embodied practice marks experiential boundaries for the two types of Pentecostal groups I have discussed; but I believe music also does much more than that. Musical practice serves as a means of enacting identities that stand in opposition to a host of social and spiritual adversaries. As I have sought to demonstrate, Pentecostals “work” hard to worship God while also winning a war of perception in which divine approval will translate to social success. In his often-cited juxtaposition of the phrases “war of movement” and “war of position,” Antonio Gramsci (1971, 243, cited in Fontana 2008, 93) describes the latter as more accurately characterizing the class struggles of industrialized, Western societies. He posits a positional war as a strategically helpful tool against the hegemonic forces of state capitalism and the Roman Catholic Church. The Church, as Alastair Davidson explains, “was presented as particularly significant in the maintenance of consent...because of its ability to organize popular world-views. In effect, the object of Catholicism was not to raise the people’s understanding but to lower it, to render them not more critical but less critical” (2008:66). Perhaps it would be easiest to extend Gramsci’s critique of Catholicism, which he saw as an agent of conformity to an exploitative economic system, to all forms of “organized religion” practiced by aggrieved peoples. However, I discern in the spirit of Gramsci’s critique an invitation to a broader and more useful concern with “making silences speak” (Davidson 2008:71).

As religious practices in Haiti are discursively situated on hierarchies of cultural authenticity, social respectability, and spiritual legitimacy, it makes sense to tease out some of the power plays that are musically enacted by various types of churchgoers.

Collectively, Pentecostals in Haiti fight not to seize state power, but rather, to undermine discourses of national identity that render them invisible or terminally marginal. They oppose the Catholic Church for many reasons, one of which is that it seems to serve as the “default” religion of those who have not “converted” (*konvèti*) into a Protestant or Pentecostal fellowship, and conversion is the primary mechanism by which struggling congregations achieve sustainable growth.²³ Most Pentecostals to whom I spoke also understand there to be an inextricable link between Catholic *katolik* (Catholic) and *Vodouisan*—and this gives their cultural opposition to Catholic hegemony a spiritual rationale: The Holy Spirit is more powerful and (usually) less demanding than the *lwa*, who should be abandoned because they lock those who serve them into intense relationships of social obligation and ritual reciprocity.²⁴ However, all self-described Pentecostals would not put forth this rationale in the same way. While many express a belief that *lwa* are real spiritual entities, a considerable number denounce all *lwa* as either imaginary or manifestations of Satan. Others relegate them to a mysteriously neutral spiritual realm or assign them good or bad moral value. *Pannkotis* are undoubtedly a diverse bunch—and awareness of this fact moves them to jockey for spiritual position as they race with hope and with Bibles in hand toward a better future for their families and their country.

Gramsci’s theoretical perspective also applies to Haitian Pentecostals insofar as the “war” among them must necessarily be more like a spiritual chess match than a flurry of attacks aimed at sudden transformation of the national or spiritual terrain. Within their sphere of practice, heavenly armies and mainline Pentecostals hope to exert influence on each other through moral-educative leadership, always striving to win over new believers by proving the superior efficacy of their musical and spiritual gifts. They commit themselves to a protracted ideological struggle that is spiritual, in the sense that it is inspired by faith in God, who is revered as the most powerful source of healing and deliverance from otherworldly evil forces. But the struggle is also social, in the sense that Pentecostal groups are keenly aware of each others’ presence and “work” in a very physical sense—through sermonizing, testifying, witnessing, and musicking—to portray their brand of Pentecostal faith in a comparatively positively light. And the struggle is also experienced as political and cultural, in the sense that constructions of Haitian national identity are felt to be at stake (cf. Gupta 1995:393-394). Pentecostals thus take seriously an evangelical mission to spread *their particular version* of

the gospel, even as they are collectively marginalized by Haitian elites who either dismiss Pentecostalism as culturally shallow *vis-à-vis* more “authentic” Vodou culture, or simply regard Pentecostalism as another unrefined, heathenish form of worship befitting of the poor masses.

To conduct research on and in the African Caribbean is to confront a geographical region in which all sorts of boundaries are transcended. Haiti is part of an often exoticized, always politicized network of spaces that have been described as “pre-postmodern” (Olwig 1993:9)—a reference to the fluid cultural and national boundaries that have historically characterized the Caribbean—particularly via the establishment of plantation-based economies supported by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Present-day Haitian religious practices must certainly be seen as an integral component of African diasporic expressive culture; and Haitian music is but one of an array of cultural products that are thought, theorized, and experienced in both national and African diasporic terms. But there are other—perhaps more exciting ways to frame Haitian Pentecostal faith and the music that stems from it. One way is to posit a “global charismatic habitus”—as does Simon Coleman in his book, *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity* (2000). For analysts of Haitian Pentecostal culture, both the African diaspora and “the world as whole” may be useful conceptual frames. However, I maintain that the latter frame, in which Pentecostals are seen as connected to a more extensive, worldwide community of Christian believers, is more relevant to the Haitian churchgoers I’ve encountered. I found a discourse of African diasporic consciousness hard to pin down during my fieldwork, as Haitian national self-identifications seemed always to trump ideas of a unifying transnational blackness. However, the notion of a *Haitian* diaspora resonates quite powerfully in the lives of Pentecostals who have proved themselves adept at crossing over into translocal spaces through musico-spiritual participation. Ultimately, the notions of transcendence and positionality may prove useful as we continue to think and write about how Pentecostals situate themselves within national, diasporic, global, and spiritual arenas of practice.

Notes

- ¹ North American-based Pentecostal organizations such as the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), Church of God of Prophecy (Cleveland, TN) established a presence in Haiti during the 1930s. The Assemblies of God (Springfield, MO) and United Pentecostal Church (Hazelwood, MO) arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, respectively. It is likely that Pentecostals now comprise over one-fourth of the country's population (Bundy 2002:81-83; cited in Anderson 2004:79-80). Although it is difficult to estimate the number of small independent churches in Haiti, I have spoken to Haitians who recall witnessing heavenly army services from their childhood days in the 1950s. Citing Corten's work (1998), Vonarx (2007:117) states that the term "armée céleste" first became common in Port-au-Prince during the 1960s, when group of Haitian preachers were discussing the establishment of a heavenly army to fight the devil ("combattre le diable"). More research needs to be done on the historical development of Haiti's independent Protestant and Pentecostal churches.
- ² For the most part, I prefer "transcendence" to terms such as "possession" and "trance." Although the latter have widespread currency (e.g., Rouget 1985, Becker 2004), they seem to "medicalize" spiritual experiences or relegate them to "altered states of consciousness." In addition to my own Pentecostal experiences, I draw from anthropologist Glenn Hinson's descriptions (2000:3) of the "holy touch" of transcendence.
- ³ In contrasting these two congregations, it is not my intention to reify them or suggest that they are internally homogeneous units. I doubt that any church member would express an unconditional allegiance to every theological point put forth by his or her pastor. Occasionally, some mainline Pentecostals told me that they disagreed with certain viewpoints (e.g., a ban on female preachers) they knew some leaders espoused.
- ⁴ "Nan legliz nou an, yo pa telman mete anfaz sou bagay sa yo. Men gen lòt legliz Pannkotis kote pastè ka gen yon pwoblem—annou di pa egzanzp, si gen detwa manm ki fek konvèti. Epi si'w gen kek nan yo ki te konn al kay oungan oubyen kay manbo, se poutet sa yo preche kont sa. Men ou pa tande sa souvan nan legliz pa m."
- ⁵ See also McAlister's captivating discussion of Jesus understood by Vodou practitioners as the first *zonbi*—"a soul that has been captured and sold in order to work for its owner" (2002, 128).

- ⁶ Robert Grenier's article, "La Melodie Vaudoo—Voodoo Arts Songs: The Genesis of a Nationalist Music in the Republic of Haiti" (2001), also examines the role of Haitian art music in constructing national identity.
- ⁷ Due in part to political strife, my fieldwork in Haiti was conducted primarily during the summer months between 2000 and 2008.
- ⁸ A slave revolt in 1791 sparked a thirteen-year struggle leading first to Haitian autonomy and then to Haitian Independence from France. In 1804, Haiti became the first black-led independent nation in the Western Hemisphere.
- ⁹ Numerous works on Haiti discuss the rise of Aristide. See, for example, Averill (1997:161-207), Farmer (1994:143-176), Greene (1993:245-246), and Heintz and Heintz (1996:712-735).
- ¹⁰ Averill and Yih (2000) have argued quite persuasively that Haiti's historical legacy of political upheaval contributes to an ethos of militarism in Haitian culture. Elizabeth McAlister (2000) points out that "evangelical language centering on the advancing of Christ's army and Christ's eventual victory could be understood in the military terms already at work in the culture" (2000:1). This military ethos may help to explain the ongoing success that Haiti's heavenly army churches experience.
- ¹¹ I admit to being surprised initially by the lack of outrage expressed by most of the Haitians I met—Pentecostal and otherwise—concerning what some observers in the United States characterized as an involuntary resignation or condemned as an unjust coup d'état of Aristide. I encountered only a handful of Haitian Pentecostals who expressed regret concerning the Haitian leader's departure, but I am not sure how my American identity may have been influencing the ways in which many Haitians communicated to me their political opinions.
- ¹² Laguerre writes,
- The successive military regimes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries succeeded partially in marginalizing civil society in more than one way. The machinery of government was in the hands of the military, and even local agencies were headed by military men. The Parliament, comprising both the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives, was overcrowded with military men. The leaders of these chambers were military officers. Even the political parties that emerged during the second part of the nineteenth century were

headed by military men or found their unity behind a military leader. The military was almost everywhere in the republic (*ibid*, 57).

- ¹³ Ephesians 6:11-17 provides an often-cited description of the weapons and “armor” used by the believer to wage spiritual warfare. All scriptural quotations in this essay are taken from the King James (Authorized) Version of the Holy Bible.
- ¹⁴ The Haitian Creole term “*blan*” means both “white person” and “foreigner” although it is sometimes applied to anyone in Haiti who speaks English. Even educated Haitians, especially those who have lived abroad are sometimes often labeled this way. African Americans such as myself are sometimes referred to “*blan nwa*”—that is, “black foreigners.”
- ¹⁵ Murphy (1994) uses the phrase “working the spirit” to capture the myriad forms of service to the divine that are enacted throughout the African diaspora. Drawing on the work of Abrahams and Szwed (1983), McAlister’s illuminating book on Haitian *rara* (2002) distinguishes European- and African-derived concepts of “work” and “play” as they have applied historically to expressive cultures. The experiential connection between music making and transcendent worship of the Spirit or spirits has clearly been established over centuries. I believe the centrality of music as a means of doing spiritual work is reinforced by an African-derived spiritual orientation within Haiti’s evolving cultural landscape.
- ¹⁶ Such direct verbalizations of a causal link between musical sound and ritual action are less commonly expressed in African American Pentecostal churches I’ve attended where statements often celebrate the ability to worship *without* instrumentation and imply a critique of over-reliance (e.g., “I don’t need no music to praise God!”).
- ¹⁷ Since 2000, when I began fieldwork in Haiti, cell phones (*selilè*) have grown tremendously in popularity as regional mobile phone providers such as Digicel and Cable & Wireless target the Caribbean. Still, the use of cell phones is less noticeable among heavenly army groups than among Pentecostals with clear ties to U.S. organizations. It will be interesting to observe how the spread of digital phone technologies impacts Pentecostal musical repertoires.
- ¹⁸ See, for example, Henry Louis Gates’s (1988) seminal study of African and African American signifying practices, as well the work of Samuel Floyd, who discusses the African American use of humor as “armament in a culture in which they had little control” (1995:52, cited in Smith 2004:117).

- ¹⁹ Jennie Smith (2004) provides an enlightening discussion of *chan pwen*, stressing the importance of sociopolitical context in determining the ways in which a *pwen* is received by listeners. Smith interviewed a couple being held, along with numerous other Haitian refugees, at the United States Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba during the period of Aristide's first exile (1991-1993). Their story is indicative of the ways in which seemingly apolitical Christian hymns can take on an oppositional character.

This husband and wife reported that they had been forced to flee Haiti after a brutal attack on a Protestant church service they were attending. Aware of Haitian Protestantism's traditionally conservative, pro-establishment politics and the fact that it was generally exempt from political repression, I was surprised by this. "Why on earth did they attack your church?" I asked. They replied that the assault came just as the congregation was finishing up the final stanza of a popular hymn. Glancing nervously from side to side and singing in whispered voices, they offered me the chorus, which repeated the line, "Look, up there, he's coming back." While the original intent of this song was to celebrate the second coming of Christ, the couple reported that following the 1991 coup, it had become a means for Protestant Haitians to express their discontent with the ruling junta and voice their faith that Aristide would return. (Smith 2004:114-115)

Smith reports that in the deteriorating environment of Guantánamo, the hymn, "Men anlè a lap vini" ("Look, up there, He's Coming Back"), became "an increasingly popular tool for also protesting the conditions of their confinement and, as one refugee put it, 'call[ing] for the Grace of God, 'show[ing] them [their American captors] we won't give up hope,' and insisting on 'the return of our *papa* [President Aristide]'" (2004:115).

- ²⁰ Haitian Creole Bibles use the verb "*atake*" ("to attack"), whereas English language translations use milder verbs such as "to plead (one's cause)" or "to contend." I also discuss this in a previous work (Butler 2002:90).
- ²¹ I see reflexive writing as a necessary means of elucidating the ways in which we, as scholars, position ourselves in relation to our units of study. Earlier in my career, I made the decision to be forthright about my religious persuasion in my scholarly work (see Butler 2000). Consequently, my research topics have always seemed to demand reflexivity and that I at least wrestle with some uneasy but exciting questions: In what ways does my own Pentecostal identity shape

the representational frames I use to (re)present those I study to my readers? What's at stake for someone positioned as I am—situated in the racial, musical, religious interstices of African American and Haitian ways of being in the world—in writing ethnographically about Haitian Pentecostals? Put another way, how does a politics of positionality (Awkward 1995) inform the questions I choose to ask and not to ask of the Haitians I encounter in sacred and secular contexts?

- ²² Although many Christians use the term “Body of Christ” in reference to all who profess belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, its use here denotes a subset of Christendom who belong to this antidenominational fellowship of congregations and espouse their teachings. The ascription of negative moral value to local musical genres is not unique to Pentecostals in Haiti. See Timothy Rommen's discussion (2007:72-94) of the ethics of style and the negotiation of proximity among Protestant and Pentecostal congregants in Trinidad.
- ²³ Scholars have commented quite extensively on the dialectical relation between Haitian Catholicism and Vodou (e.g., Desmangles 1992). There is also a growing body of work on Haitian Protestants and Pentecostals (e.g., Brodwin 2003, Conway 1978; 1980, Richman 2005b, Romain 1986, Vonarx 2007). What has been missing, however, is a careful look at the ways in which those who self-identify as *Pwotestan* and *Pannkotis* distinguish themselves musically and theologically from one another. I hope this essay takes an important step toward filling this gap.
- ²⁴ Karen Brown (1991) provides a fascinating and in-depth discussion of how reciprocity operates between Vodou practitioners and the spirits, as well as between the author and Mama Lola herself.

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