To ye Matriarchs!
This work is yours,
Of you and for you,
Courageous laborers
Seamstresses of all ceremonies
Who have for so long sewn the sacred
Into bundles and stitched them to the hearts of Man
That wherever they may go
There you are
As crows, as coyotes, as jackals
Bringing Them into the world
And
Ushering Them to the land of the dead
You guard the beginning and the end and
Not in some struggle that They say
“You ought to bear in silence”
But in the triumph of hope which you are birthing still
In blood.
In shrieking
Pushing,
Pulsing strength.
In chafed breasts full with story.
In words that give wings to the stars
In daughters that rise again and again
To gather the ashes of your burning bones.
So that one day you just might
Teach Them to finally look at the world
And their pretty fancies will raze it no longer
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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Kay lwa
Also called peristil, hounfò. Ritual structures constructed by Vodou practitioners to serve the lwa. They have a poto mitan (central pole), typically covered by leaves or corrugated iron, where healings, treatments, and performances take place. They usually have small satellite structures or rooms for housing individual lwa or congenial pairings of lwa.

Poto mitan
A central pole holding up the roof of the kay lwa. It is a sacred site, described as an axis mundi---or the cosmological axis of the world---by authors including McCarthy Brown (1991). Typically, offerings to the lwa will be made at or near the base of the poto mitan, and lwa will descend through it and embrace it.

Petwo
Formally, Petwo refers to a particular nation of lwa, which in the sites at hand included Ezili Dantor, Simbi Makaya, Brav Gede, Bossou Twa Grenn, Twa Marassa, Bawon Simitye, Ezili Jè Wouj, Manbo Zila, Manbo Lala, Bossou Twa Kowònn, Mèt Kafou, Bawon Lakwa, Kriminèl, and so forth. However, as it concerns this study, Petwo is more commonly used as a term to refer to a style of Vodou in both the material and abstract senses, namely a particular style of ritual practice for relating to the lwa and crafting medicines, divination, and medicines in consort with them.

Zonbi
A particular sort of nanm, or a fragment of the same, present in both living bodies and, unless otherwise managed, remaining in the bones and bodies of the dead for some time. This nanm can be embottled in life or after death for various purposes, or it can be commanded in order to perform various tasks after death. Zonbi is also a term attached to wild, inedible versions of more common plants in Haiti and may also point to an underlying material semiotics of fragmentation and diminishment.

Oungan
Courtyard leader and ritual specialist; a maker of medicines and magic in consort with the lwa, either male or female. Capable of reciting Lapriyè, calling the lwa, and remaining in communication with them throughout life. Keeper of songs and ritual memories.

Manbo
Female courtyard leader, counselor and ritual specialist. A maker of medicines, often specializing in herbal knowledge. Keeper of songs and ritual memories.

Badji
The back room of a kay lwa devoted to the work of the keeper of the kay lwa, whether Manbo, Oungan, or otherwise. Substances are stored here, often on altars or small tables, magic is crafted and
hung, counseling sessions take place within. Often magically protected.

Lougarou  Literally, werewolf: from the original French lougarou (following Price-Mars 1945: 38) and in the regions of study exclusively referring to females, often neighbors, hence the use of “werewomen” in the dissertation. Across Haiti, and other Afro-Creole French colonies, the term refers to a species of human shapeshifters which can assume a number of forms (most of which are not wolves). In this dissertation the term is used to describe a particular sort of magical skin-changing phenomena whereby a human woman can transform into an animal in order to suck the nanm from an infant.

Nanm  Vital force of being/becoming. Present in the living, in the landscape, in the lwa, and in nearly everything which is a “being.” It is differentiated and individuated at various levels. Capable of being fragmented, dispersed, enhanced.

Malfektè  Evildoer, especially referring to human thieves and human enemies who use magic to destroy the speaker/subject.

Lakou a  Literally, courtyard. In use, the term is broad and refers to a boundaries demarcating one’s closest relations in the present moment (e.g. those who one eats with).

Bitasyon  Also called zòn. Broadly meaning a given dwelling place; a neighborhood; zone; collection of persons and beings and substances that occupy a given territory.
ATLAS OF NANM: SHARED BODIES, BABIES, WERE-WOMEN AND ZONBI IN A RURAL HAITIAN COURTYARD
By
Alissa Marie Jordan
December 2016

Chair: Brenda Chalfin
Major: Anthropology

This study addresses embodied beings/becomings in a rural Haitian courtyard, led by a Petwo Vodou manbo in her ancestral village outside of Arkayè. I explore how persons cultivate and maintain each other as vibrant and relational selves in a shared sensual ecology through daily social practices and their concomitant rhythms. Towards this goal, the text passes through phenomena of infant care, eating practices, magical crafting, anti-werewolf campaigns, and zonbi manufacturing as exceedingly precious intrasubjective experiences of bonding and care which are the very flesh of life. Within the rural Arkayè region, animate relational existence is rooted in the substance known as nanm. Everyday tasks become binding social exchanges of nanm: food-food, mouth-mouth, ailing heart to ailing hand. A vast local ecology of selves and substances participate in these everyday tasks, creating a dwelling space composed of many agents who assemble, reassemble, and disassemble each other’s bodies as part of the regular work of living. Full bellies, healthy bodies, and magically protected spaces are not treated as signs of connection with others, they are themselves the substance (and substantiation) of interconnectedness. Through practices of cleaning, feeding, baptizing, protecting, and assembling one another, life is made palatable, sensational, concrete, and meaningful. I argue that Haitian Vodou practice, with its sensorial attention to
permutations of flesh, brings to the surface a connection between self-making and a deeply socialized sensorium.
CHAPTER 1
MANY SURFACES OF BEING

This is the world in shadow. This is the world in light. In the dry season, sunlight sears the rugged land of central Haiti, shocking the rock shelves, the necks, chests, and eyes of the all the living creatures, the out-turned branches of trees of noble birth. It burns things dry then peels them back: leaf, hair, paint, and all. Light and dark, wet and dry, temper the surfaces of the known world. They work together with hands, leaves, words, twining the threads that bind together the living bodies, the dead bodies, bodies of field and water and earth. This dance makes things grow, it’s true, but also burns, bleaching the bones of the dead many times over- and those of the living as well. Shadows are welcomed at such times; darkness offering reprieve in the hidden corners of day. Night will quickly turn its face from this folly. In the evening, the land falls under a spell of darkness as thick as the hot wax of day, and the rooms, boarded up against intruders, become steamy boxes of rest.

Heavy darkness, like heavy light, cannot be supported for too long. After the last laughter rubs off before midnight, night bring things most strange, most unwelcome. Things that perch and peck. Things that crawl under your skin. Things that rip you from your sleep and suck your marrow dry. Violent, sadistic night travelers, but also those blessed, sleepy, sensual lovers among the lwa. At moments like these, light is welcomed, light is tempted, light is encouraged to breed again and again from candle to candle.

The Town up Close

People cross the river wash which marks out the town’s boundary, but only to get from here to there; they use it only to cross over to the next town, climbing the cliff
with the help of someone tending their field close to the edge, or only to find growing herbs dried out by the dust and the wind that sometimes howls through (Figure 1-1).

The first night I spent in Sou Lapwen was two weeks after the earthquake of January 12, 2010, when thousands of persons were displaced and a hundred thousand died under the rubble. I was huddled with other well-meaning refugees: Port Au Prince residents displaced by the earthquake, and those who sought escape from the voids of regret and plenty that haunted them in Boston, London and Beirut. In services, they wailed and wept, while calling out thanks. I, too often, lost myself in myriad personalities and stories I encountered. Some nights I stole away to listen to nothing but the wind across the rocky ground, where a cliff hung over a deep crevasse. The cliff was a machine for humbling me. It so abruptly plummeted from gray to black that it seemed possible to pinpoint the line between the colors, some five feet down, when distance swelled outward into nothingness. I sat long in the stillness and the wide, wide sky. The clouds washed it now and then, letting through those few pale and glowing things, the real traces of light from stars that were themselves no longer real.

Try as I might, I could not succeed in measuring the distance of the dried riverbed by listening for the sound of pebbles that I tossed. But I still played a small game with the depths, throwing these rocks down where they were swallowed and seconds later made an echoing clack that could not be traced and which divulged nothing. Somewhere in the background was the hum of an evangelical service, but it was blocked by the short, steep boundary of rock hills gathered by farmers who sought to make something of the soil. It muted the sound of the relentless prayers and the dogs howling and circling around (Figure 1-1).
The Town from a Distance

The project centers on the Haitian village community of Sou Lapwen¹, which lies an hour inland from the coast along the Northern departmental border between the Ouest and Artibonite districts (aprx. 60 km North of Port Au Prince). Around 255 families live in Sou Lapwen, their homesteads and gardens scattered alongside concrete irrigation canals which act as the most important footpaths in the area for they are often shaded by bands of trees that arch over the water. In 2013, only four homes in town had electricity, supplied by solar power or car battery rigs. A single streetlight added in 2012 supplies enough electrical current to charge several cellphones a day; in 2014, it was joined by two others and it now keeps the streets alive for the first few hours of the night.

Residents use a variety of tactics to empower themselves and their communities, including social activism against injustices such as corruption and the rezoning of land, or on-going ritual interventions surrounding infants. The Haitian State is only rarely made present in town, leaving it to its own devices except when called upon because of land disputes. Public resources in the area, such as a large water bladder and a primary school, were provided by NGO’s with whom residents have equally strained and uneven relationships. Palpable government authority is nearly absent in the village, and the single municipal council member acts more as a mediator of vigilante action than as a local force channeling State power.

¹ The name of the community, as well as all informants (excepting lwa), has been changed to protect anonymity.
A recent and concerning addition to Sou Lapwen life has been the ongoing cholera epidemic, hitting the surrounding territory in deadly bursts since October 2010. Though several NGO’s include Sou Lapwen in their operational territory, many residents cannot afford access to medical care or potable water. Some better-off families can purchase treated drinking water from NGO-donated water bladders, but many others must drink from potentially cholera-infected irrigation canals and rivers.

Community efforts to combat such insecurities are inextricable from interventional philosophies provided by religious currents in the community, especially those present in syncretic practices of Catholicism, Vodou, and Protestantism. Residents actively insulate their lives using vigilance and preparedness, while also creatively working to alter community futures with a mix of religious strategies, medical interventions, and neighborly care.

Religiously, the village is roughly divided between those who have outwardly converted to evangelical Christianity, and those practicing a more traditional mix of Vodou and Catholicism. Vodou is near-universally acknowledged as an effective cosmological strategy for healing, altering fortunes, and manifesting desires---it is the morality of such tactics, not the effectiveness, which is challenged in Evangelical and Catholic dogma. Although these important differences exist, shared spiritual threats and village triumphs crosscut these major faiths and contour daily life with terrors, joys, and vulnerabilities. Most residents participate in rich networks of reciprocity and care in order to actively mediate local vulnerabilities and to protect those who are most at risk. Lines of information, advice, and assistance help mediate the damage in times of crisis.
Most notably, guardians and ritual specialists use a variety of magico-ritual and medicinal tactics to protect and strengthen infants. Priests and sorcerers fashion powerful sculptures, and mothers seal off infants’ quarters with barricades, while quickly and secretly disposing of hair and nail clippings. Midwives are enlisted to give magical baths, Vodou priestesses host animal sacrifices to the gods, and communities sing as they ritually walk up and down the roads. These diverse persons, each with unique aims, are bound together in a life-and-death struggle against the forces which would bring ruin to the new generation. Although it is not often ideal, life is far from hopeless, and there are many others to answer when one cries out for help.

**The Research Problem**

This research asks how Haitian persons develop into enfleshed, percieving beings that can sense and interpret the texture of daily life in patterned ways. It also asks how and to what extent ethnographers can participate in the non-verbal, minute, socialized perceptions of daily life and translate them into the media of written words.

I argue that beings in Sou Lapwen (human and otherwise) are involved in the task of becoming and maintaining themselves through practices which join them with composite webs of intersubjective beings and places that constitute their households (Ingold 2011). I argue that Haitian Vodou practice, with its deeply sensorial attention to permutations of flesh, brings to the surface a connection between self-making and a deeply socialized sensorium.

I approach the problem of senses and assemblages by narratively exploring how social practices shape perceptions (including feelings and emotions) within sensorial landscapes, and how perceptions shape social experiences, selves, and practices used to engage sensorial landscapes. To understand issues of sensing, feeling, and
practices, I explore and characterize embodied persons’ sensual relationships with each other and with their dwellings. I specifically map out the sensual relations, rooted in the substance known as nanm, that bind together a network of body-selves within Haitian courtyards, and the relations between courtyard networks are situated amidst other body-selves in motion, by highlighting numerous interrelated practices such as consuming (or being consumed), rearing infants (and being reared), baptizing (and becoming baptized), cleansing (and being cleansed), becoming a dwelling place (and dwelling within becomings). These sensual landscapes are filled out in dance styles, nighttime worlds, magical objects, architecture, ravines, biodiversity, dream states, and many other things besides.

Thus, residents of the towns in the study make and become social persons through daily acts and their corresponding emotive and sensate flows of human action (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). These acts generate certain sorts of perceiving and emoting persons and, likewise, they provide groundwork for perceiving and emoting persons to generate practices within a landscape. I approach these problems by building on an anthropology of the senses through exploring the limits of translating sensory experience through the written word and photographs (as the afterimages of certain instances in events, derived from the ethnographer’s perspective). I take a position that ethnography and writing matter because they are key vehicles for translating the open-ended and ephemeral qualities of lives always in motion, they can capture the transient, fragile moments which are easily lost. Thus, I have turned my eye to the subjective sensory components of emergent relations at the site and among persons who caretake eachother in particular.
To trace these networks, I take creative license with the notion of assemblage, taken from the methods of Bruno Latour (2005), as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987). This manuscript is interested in how---through writing and imagery---one can use Latour (2005)'s methods to access a deeper level of experience and understand relational ontologies organized by networks of actions rather than apriori ideals or discourses (2013). In fieldwork, I did this by moving (and stopping, and starting) through different networks of action which became sensible as actors moved and proliferated within them. Informants guided me towards the traces, marks, and scars left from these networks of practice. I struggled to represent precisely how these networks organize themselves, using inductive rather and deductive methods, and exploring how people perceive events through different networks and other events in relation to each other (Latour 1996).

I seek to move closer to the experience of social agents by describing the connections between specific events and those networks which perpetuate these events and related forms of experience (Latour 2013). This demands an attention to the surface of things, and the movement of surfaces. In Sou Lapwen, this sort of following also demands an attention to the way that surfaces relate to what is beneath them, or their depths. When they aren't simply ambiguous, surfaces can be outright. However, these surfaces (of things, places, events, etc.) are precisely what we first sense and react to. Magic, persons, courtyards, and much else encounter each other as surfaces and sensual things but they also reveal information about powers that exist beyond the surface.

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2 I use Latour’s notion of second empiricism to understand the term “experience” (Latour 2013:178)
Like Zora Neale Hurston (1938) and Maya Deren (1953) I am concerned with photographing ephemeral and magically charged phenomena and their traces. Photographs are meant to work in this manuscript by drawing attention to the multiple textures of events, and by pointing to the open-endedness of these experiences and interpretations in general, and the traffic and disruption of things which my words cannot adequately reflect.

What does one gain when they take the field seriously, and what happens when we strive to make that experience register on the page? Although the approach makes strides, perhaps, in representing the close sensual texture of life, it admittedly may lose the quality of finished-ness, of consistency, which can be found much more easily in the use of other methods. Thus, I consciously foreground the seriousness of fieldwork over analysis in this particular work, but this is not done to suggest that the latter is less valuable. I put forth the encounter, the relationships of the field, and I attempt a poetry of language to bring readers as close as possible to the events described. This fieldwork opens the possibilities of encounter, but it also only gives me partial objects, impressions, and rambling bits of speech.

I acknowledge that I grant a great deal of space to the emergence of sensory details and local lifeways, and this empirical privileging means that a great number of other things simply cannot happen. These other things, including analysis, discussion, and connection, will come later, but I have decided that the writing of these experiences needed to precede such an intensive analysis. My approach to writing does run the risk of naturalizing my presence in the field, given the narrative approach I take. In order to counter this tendency, I strive to also represent those moments were the awkwardness
of my positionality is brought to the surface---even if this awkwardness is the central character of the narrative.

Thus, this work strives towards partial images rather than successive claims. This is not incompatible with Latour (2005) and Strathern (1996)’s take on partial (or at least bounded) networks, nor Merleau-Ponty’s conception of flesh, or the I-body, which Ingold (2011) later developed into the concept of the meshwork. We have partial and mediated vantage points; we are the bodies that we use to think with, “the visible seer, the audible hearer, the tangible touch—the sensitive sensible” (1968: liv). Thus, less attention is paid to an encompassing narrative of embodiment, and more attention is given to the ways that bodies (as bounded flesh) are made, how they surface in different contexts, and how they come to act in the world, and how they come to constitutes variable selves (2011: 12).

As the title, “Atlas of Nanm,” suggests, this study is broadly conceptualized as a collection of various maps of embodiment, following the Vodou vital force of nanm as the local mechanism for said embodiment. It is an atlas in the sense that it ties together and concretizes four local territories (or maps, or assemblages) of nanm: charting courtyards (Chapter 2), werewomen assemblages (Chapter 3), consumption and shared selves (Chapter 4), dwelling places or bitasyòn (Chapter 5), and fragmented selves and zonbi (Chapter 6). At a local level, nanm is critical for manifesting each of these territories as a sort of person or being.

The concept of nanm as being-relation, or consumption/feeding (discussed in Chapter 3) has obvious relevance to the pivotal discussion of mana which grew out of Mauss’s (2000) The Gift, a concept that Lèvi-Strauss (1987: 63) later argued is the
cross-cultural “conscious expression of semantic function.” I also acknowledge the vital connections that seem present between Strathern’s (1988: 98-132) seminal treatment of the concept of power as efficacy, as revealed in others’ actions, in her study of Melanesian thought and exchange. There are also highly suggestive similarities to dominant substances in West and Central African religions and practices which have been discussed by a number of scholars, summarized by Martin (2008). As a relational and interactive substance, nanm is clearly related to substances of multiplicity across the Afro-Creole world, such as those that Holbraad (2008) so artfully lays out in *Thinking Through Things*. Such relationships are so vibrant and promising that they quite nearly haunt this work, but I practice restraint on analyzing these relations in detail due to the fact that such a discussion falls outside of the scope of this work. Thus, I acknowledge these important relationships as they have made this manuscript conceptually possible, but I cannot explore these avenues in detail, considering the minute and careful attention to a treatment of the complexity of being as it is developed locally at the site.

In this work, I treat the term lougawou as a literal translation of werewolf (following Price-Mars 1945: 38), and a more descriptive definition of werewoman at the site. However, across Europe, Canada, and the United States, the term “werewolf” refers to a particular phenomena of human-to-wolf transformation and this is not an accurate image in Haiti. In Haiti, the term *lougawou* is used to describe a particular sort of magical skin-changing phenomena whereby a human transforms into an animal (e.g. by removing their human skin) in order to suck the nanm from an infant. Although I am aware that this term, “werewolf,” brings together a wholly different image in the minds of
American and European audiences, I consider this lapse in interpretation to be a vitally important, if logically irreconcilable, aspect of the lougawou phenomena in Haiti today. In other words, I believe that it is useful for the reading of this piece that American and European audiences initially misjudge the meaning of the word. In this experience of expectation, surprise, and especially frustration, I hope that readers open themselves to similar problems of hesitation and perplexity which characterize the iconoclastic colonial encounter generally—but also, specifically, that moment when a French word (loup-garou) initially circulated in St. Domingue and was eventually wholeheartedly adopted to describe a very particular phenomena.

**Past Research on Enfleshed Sociality**

Ferme (2001), Glaskin (2015), and Holbraad (2010) offer insight into the problem of substance, personing, and embodiment. I combine this with work by the pioneering ethnographers of felt worlds who inaugurated a particular tradition of research in Haiti and Afro-Creole worlds. This tradition encompasses the work of women scholars including (among others) Hurston (1938), Dunham (1969), Deren (1953), McCarthy-Brown (1991), McAlister (2002), Daniel (2005) and Wirtz (2009) who have deliberately used and transformed their own skin, bone, and muscle as a tool with which to touch the field rather than observe it. Through their innovative and expressive ethnographies, all of these scholars has shed light on long-misunderstood ritual practices in genuinely participatory ways, attentive to the sensual experiences of the field. First, I will discuss substance, sense, and embodiment as addressed in broader regions (Ferme 2001; Holbraad 2010; Glaskin 2015), and then I turn specifically to scholarly avenues for exploring these questions in Haiti in particular.

**Outside Haiti**
Ferme (2001) explores the sensory aesthetics of secrecy in Sierra Leonean persons, natural objects, and material culture. Her work covered the hidden dimensions of things, that which lies beyond the surface presented to the world. This means that first impressions (as well as second and third impressions) are always incomplete. Treating this phenomenon as an aspect of Mende ontology, Ferme (2001) suggests that Mende experience a world where all things possess hidden and unknowable layers, amounting to a sort of inner subjectivity turned away from the outside world. Humans manipulate these hidden dimensions to enlarge their persona.

There are social effects to this ontological position, making the very indefiniteness of the object a powerful statement to the viewer (Ferme 2001). Priests or blacksmiths carve the undersides of amulets, masks, and power bundles with unique inscriptions and medicines that only the wearer and the maker can ever fully experience (Ferme 2001). Thus, when one sees a thing (be it a body or an amulet) one never sees all of it: hidden places in the item conceal private truths. People's motives are not always what they seem, and human knowledge is always limited, impartial, and becoming.

Holbraad (2010), working with Afro-Cuban diviners, decided to take practitioners seriously when speaking of their power (aché) as a thing that moves gods from transcendent plains into material immanence during divination ceremonies. He observed that traditional theoretical distinctions between concepts, things, and humans fall away in Ifá divination practice. Through divining, practitioners come to engage with a variety of objects, ideas, and energy flows. They attempt to elicit highly charged movements between different, yet connected, plains of experience, tempting gods into
and from within the material depth of the calabash or the table (each with their histories). Using charged divination tables, passed down in familial history, diviners assemble objects and knowledge to draw the gods deep into human movements and problems.

Diviners draw deep pleasure as they touch, caress, loudly break, and otherwise sensually interact with these powerful materials and immaterial things. By analyzing these people and their practices, Holbraad (2010) found that objects, humans, gods, and concepts have diverse and active effects on one another as they move within and through each other in ritual process. Thus, Holbraad draws Afro-Cuban cosmo-political practice into anthropology as a thing which might be learned from rather than learned about (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007). Holbraad (2010) uses this example to demonstrate how things emerge out of the ethnographic experience and dictate their terms of engagement with the ethnographer (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007).

Similarly attuned, Glaskin (2015) was drawn to the way in which her Australian community considered encounters as they could hide and conceal identities. Glaskin speaks of the cross-cultural diversity of “cognitive orientations” across the world, byproducts of the intense socialization of children early on. She argues that Australian orientations in her community of study have material effects on perception and in creative expressions. She coins the term “perceptual openness” to describe this orientation and to describe body-selves which are predisposed to both notice and explore phenomena which do not fit easily into existing ontological schema and which demand epistemological work. This orientation means that, according to Glaskin, indigenous Australians are inclined to accept that: “that dream experiences and things
in the phenomenal world ‘might be something’ that is not immediately apparent on their surface.”

**Inside Haiti**

Zora Neale Hurston (1938) and Katherine Dunham (1969) exploded onto the ethnographic and creative scenes in the mid-1930’s, traveling to Haiti on separate research fellowships. Dunham’s dance techniques (1983) and Hurston’s (1938) groundbreaking ethnography, “Tell My Horse,” laid the foundation for interactive and deeply embodied ethnographies which rippled through anthropological work for decades. Maya Deren (1953) later took her approach to experimental filmmaking to Haiti. They can be considered dual yet independent frontrunners of new approaches to anthropological research (that built on Boas’ methods, e.g. Boas 1897), with the ethnographer acting as a skilled initiate-observer. Each of these three: Hurston, Dunham and Deren, e initiates and students of practice who specifically sought to discipline their bodily techniques (Mauss 2007) and dispositions for researching expressive ritual. Following in the footsteps of Dunham and Hurston, the accomplished experimental filmmaker Maya Deren (1953) began research as an initiated ethnographer in Haiti in the 1940’s, solidifying an expressive multimedia tradition in anthropology.

These three anthropologists methodologically deployed their performing bodies, giving implicit attention to perception and embodied being. To tend to their skin and muscular movements in the field as initiates and participants, they sought out the bodily dispositions of others, and in so doing were attended to by others and taught to perceive movement, space, and their communities in different ways. In doing so, they paved the way for the later works by exceptional ethnographers with similar attitudes.
toward initiation and participation, such as Karen McCarthy Brown (1987, 1991) who was embraced by a Brooklyn manbo known as Mama Lola and who came to marry the Iwa Danbala. Elizabeth McAlister (2002) stomped through the streets with a Rara band, Yvonne Daniel (2005) explores the embodied knowledge of Caribbean dances, Wirtz (2009) learns to touch (and not touch) the material remains of past rituals in Cuba, and many more.

Haitian anthropologists have long made the case that bodies-persons in Haiti work at the daily level as selves produced within and through each other in coextensive ecologies (James 2008). Various terms have been applied to this: interrelational, intrasubjective, trans-corporeal (Strongman 2008), and so forth. I take a slightly different position that many works, seeking to root this not in conceptual religious structures or theories of personality, but rather in embodied and day to day activities.

That said, I also consider persons to extend beyond the flesh. Many studies demonstrate diverse experiences of personhood across societies (Conklin 1996; Lambek and Strathern 1998; Strathern 1988; Hallowell 1960). In some of these cases, persons are not conceived of as essential individuals, but rather relational subjectivities that emerge in relation to their perceptual worlds and are sustained in everyday practices (Munn 1992; Strathern 1988; David 1999). In Haiti, persons can be deeply embodied and palpable while remaining invisible, for example, or they can be imperceptible or perceptible to only a select few.

James (2008) found that informants understood their embodied suffering through epistemologies of flow, exchange, and permeability. Her two principle sources revealed themselves as profoundly permeable to incursions of force, energy, and change, not
distinguishing between their origin in "society" or "ecology." Emotions, as dynamic forces, can wreak havoc within relational-selves just as they can invigorate entire communities. Body-selves are interdependent and fluids pass between them. Tension and anger have a grave impact on bodily health and given the interdependency of bodies, the health of the courtyard as well (Farmer 1988).

**In Sou Lapwen**

The enfleshed collectives of people in Sou Lapwen and other study locations span a multitude of lifeways, forms, durations (Figure 1-4). The lwa themselves are dense, firm, and grip the living across time and space (Martin 1995). The earthly lifetime of a human being entails transubstantiation of skin, which is always available, always palpable, and always-changing through bio-social processes, as well as the transubstantiation of nanm—the vital blood of being/awareness/presence. In a sense, the world makes beings into shapeshifters through spiraling processes of renewal, transformation, escape, unearthing. Non-humans are assumed to have personal histories as emotional and diverse as humans, even as the precise nature of these personal accounts is known only to them and their conscociates. Each lwa has their own unique relationships or long-lived feuds with other lwa who can be either within or outside of their nation.

Thus, the best answer to what Vodou perception "is like," is not a single, unified statement. Perception in Sou Lapwen is built through sensations experienced at the interface of shifting subjects, others, and substances. Social relationships are critical to survival in Sou Lapwen and outside communities. Webs of relation with persons and personing-places (human and otherwise) entail obligation and exchange, and they must
be continually balanced through practices of feeding, cleansing, baptizing, introducing, relaying, treating, assembling, disassembling, and managing each other as we change.

Families often work together as a single unit in these webs of relation, but each person also has stronger or weaker ties to courtyards which do not extend to all members of their family. Relations and practices are measured out by the expression of sensations: hunger/satisfaction, weakness/strength, relative cleanliness, heat, cold, and so forth. These feelings originate in a unique perceptual plane where eyes are for swallowing, ears are for keeping watch, stomachs are wellness. People perceive through heads, waists, backs, and wombs that open and close, through entire bodies which can be let go and grabbed on and much more. People are pushed and pulled by these sensations, and interconnected courtyard ecologies mean that they extend beyond single, named characters and become shared sensations—troubling, joyful, or otherwise. When feelings are intense and relations become strained or broken; not everyone can knit them back together. Vodou specialists are kept close in relational networks, extending across many courtyards as their skills are always in need.

It is true that exchanges of such things as flesh, sensation, and states of wellbeing are relational and fluid in Sou Lapwen. Then again, it is equally true that persons—aware of this fact—remake and police the boundaries of their flesh and that of shared others, courtyards, and communities in everyday and ritual ways to prevent unwanted incursions and control movement. Likewise, in situations of stress, unremitting harm, or inter-personal violence, both humans and non-human allies can and do attack the flesh, courtyards, and communities of others using material technologies at their disposal, which range from magic to economic isolation.
Practices create perceiving bodies and selves which are supported through training, and who become part of new practices—now and, perhaps, in the far future as ancestors. Embodied-personing is an ever-transforming task; we perceive phenomena and through practice incorporate aspects as experiences and events, we adapt our ways of knowing and technologies, and so on.

An Assemblage-Based Approach to Studying Embodied Experience in Sou Lapwen

The question of how perception and experience are linked to practice is ultimately a question of both ontology and epistemology. It addresses a world of things that exist inasmuch as they are perceived, as well as those experiences which are formed through coming to know what we perceive, defining and using our bodies in an open-ended way. Yet before we ask what is experienced, we must first ask how we go about sense-perceiving. Even when we are only "perceiving" we are tending to the world in skilled ways (Mauss 2007; Ingold 2000). How do social practices enskill people with a particular perceptual orientation, facilitating the incursions of certain phenomena upon the senses for those in the research?

I seek out both direct and indirect practices which socially cultivate sensory aptitudes. Like Merleau-Ponty (1945), I turn to “bodily existence” as the source of lived experiences, even those experiences of consciousness and self that have been traditionally associated with the unlocalizable “mind.” beginning in early infancy and improving and transforming throughout life.

Bodies are indivisible from selves in Sou Lapwen. Among my informants, I am attuned to myself and others as bodily-self surfaces which mold and perceive each other just as they too are molded and perceived. Taking very generally from Bourdieu
I find that habits of practice become the embodied mechanism through which bodily existence becomes a fully socialized phenomenon. To analyze how practices intersect with and alter bodies at the individual and social level, I employ Latour’s notion of assembling (2005) and Deleuze and Guatarri’s (1988) notion of assemblages.

Assemblages, whether bodies or trucks or ideas, express properties and potentials that are more than merely a sum of their capacities taken individually (Delanda 2006). They accomplish this through a tight network of relations among the fundamental forces in the assemblage. Thus, these forces do not merely add up within the assemblage arithmetically; they meld into each other and emergently generate an experienced thing which can express novel capacities which are relational affects between given entities (Delanda 2011). In Haiti, humans, for example, as bodily assemblages, have the capacity to heal and poison. They have the capacity to receive lwa-riders in possession, riders that have weight and substance. They can travel with purpose in the visible and invisible world. All of these and much more are complex tasks which individual components in the body-assemblage could not accomplish alone.

Heeding this understanding of assemblage, I treat being in Sou Lapwen as an embodied, multifaceted assemblage of substantive forces rather than an essential “spiritual” or “mental” phenomena. By treating beings/selves as embodied assemblages, I am also in line with local experiences of body-selves as aggregated and transforming beings whose lives and selves are profoundly molded by their particular genealogy of relations.

At the same time, the words “assemblage” and “constituent” are merely relative. I use these concepts as proxy translational tools for describing and analyzing how
research participants use and act with their body-selves and those of others. In framing bodies as assemblages, we can gain entrée into a social world of sense whereby bodies are quite naturally workable, accumulative wholes. They are open to particular sorts of phenomena and capable of radical alteration. They can stretch across distant territories, even extending their reach into space and the stars.

Combining an attention to practice with the concept of assemblage, I find that what I am seeking (indeed, all I can seek) is the surfaces of selves, the encountered flesh, skin, glass, hair, or bark of being. It is not possible to speak of the "whole" person or the "whole" assemblage in this sense. Some spaces and capacities are withdrawn, concealed, and only erupt into being under the right experiential circumstances (if they erupt at all) (Harman 2005, 2010). There are individual potentials as well as material actualizations that retreat from the surface, enfolding themselves in depths. Thus, to be precise, I am after the way that practice enfleshes beings given that the fullness of being underneath flesh is out of reach. In enfleshing beings, practice extends beings towards others, creating them as relationally porous media of blood, hair, and vital substance (Merleau-Ponty 1967; Turner 1980; Strathern 1988; Haraway 2008).

This is a particularly valuable insight in Haiti and the Afro-Creole world given how so much of the world is unseen though it still may be felt, heard, or otherwise intuited. Furthermore, things are never merely reservoirs for "meaning"—they carry with them a depth made of their particular histories, capacities, and potentialities which can be differently engaged at different times. Thus, I am aware of the interplay of surface and depth that occurs within and between bodies, although this work pays close attention to
the observable surfaces of interaction. This attention is drawn not only from readings of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), but also Ferme (2001) and Wirtz (2009).

**An Overview of Research Claims**

Animate relational existence is rooted in and as the substance known as *nanm* in Vodou practice. This means that many bodily practices of care act directly on surfaces of being, or beings, such as human persons. These practices touch, cultivate, and feed the existence of humans in direct ways: full bellies are not *signs* of contentment or inner satisfactions, they are themselves the substance (and substantiation) of content, satisfied lives. These practices make flesh and surfaces into the prime medium of existence, much more than other possible media such as breath or language. The vocabulary of embodied being is thus radically post-human; it expresses itself on the surface of things while toying with relation to depth. Furthermore, practices of feeding, cleaning, treating, and assembling others, life is made palatable, sensational, concrete, and meaningful. Persons are turned towards surfaces, skins, and feelings as the orienting mark of perceptual awareness. Feelings, skins, all of them can deceive us too, just as much as they can replicate and procreate and be cast away from each other.

The study opens with an introduction to the notion of *being* as a *substance* (nanm) in Vodou. Following this, it explores how human practices cultivated in infancy and mastered throughout life hone sensorial tendencies and perceived selves/self-perceptions. Body-selves surface in communities through practices of noticing, strengthening, developing, and managing others-as-flesh. Baptism introduces new members into the broader homeland outside the courtyard, continuing with practices of exchange that more concretely bind one to other persons in the community. Other assemblages in the bitasyòn seek to unbind these persons, such as baby-consuming
werewomen, who destroy the work of communities and courtyards by invading spaces and consuming infants. Such creatures dissemble infant and child bodies just as courtyard and familial forces are fighting their hardest to make them grow.

The constant push and pull between assembling, disassembling, and reassembling bodies can be seen in zonbi and zonbi craft as well. Zonbi are incomplete fragments of the human force-substance of nanm, particularly the force-substance aspect responsible for health and robust work. They can be disassociated from the body after death, and used by those who serve the lwa, or they can be removed from living bodies to protect a person, then placed in sacred canari jars and hidden or transformed into trees, animals, and the like. Taken as a whole, these practices leave a wealth of traces on courtyards and bitasyòn across Sou Lapwen and the other communities in the study.

**Concrete Ethnographic Methods at the Site**

My studies in Haitian Creole began in February and March 2010, when I built relationships with women and children as a relief worker in Sou Lapwen, and began informal investigations into spiritual and social experiences of insecurity in the community. In 2011, with 3 months of UF funded preliminary research, I began research with a Vodou priestess (Nel) and her patients as well as evangelical community members. I learned Vodou and Catholic ritual vocabularies and began learning Petwo songs and ceremony texts, as the Petwo nation of lwa were served most prominently at the site.

I acquired advanced fluency in communicating, writing, and reading in Haitian Creole in prior language coursework, including a Federal Language Area Studies administered through the Latin American Studies Center at the University of Florida,
which was awarded for intensive study of advanced Haitian Creole in 2012-2013. Two early months in Sou Lapwen in 2010, when I was engaged in preparing food for survivors after the earthquake, allowed me to develop critical contacts, research partnerships, as well as a site-specific strategy for ethnographic and linguistic documentation. In 2011, I spent three months over the summer conducting preliminary research for the proposed project, during which I refined the research questions and methods and explored the potential for multimedia research and analyses.

    During exploratory fieldwork, I attended several ceremonies for subduing misfortune and strengthening pregnant women, unborn children, and neonates, and became acquainted with many mothers and families in the community. I recorded chants, prayers, and music and later transcribed and analyzed them with Nel’s assistance. During participant observation with a oungan in the community, I learned that infant caretakers were particularly well-versed in methods of supernatural protection.

    Through twice weekly telephone conversations, and later social network programs (e.g. Facebook and WhatsApp), I remain in regular contact with informants and engaged in long-distance interviews with persons (and resident lwa) at the site. In 2012 I returned to the site for a month, traveling to Vodou temples and attended services and several funerals at the Catholic church nearest to Sou Lapwen. I returned to the site in November 2012 for a brief trip and an important local funeral, and in May 2013 began a 9-month period of research. The experiences and observations discussed in the manuscript are drawn from daily participant observation as well as the following methods.
Over all 14 months of research, I was attentive to Schep-

Drawing methods of “object” ethnography from Ingold (2009), Carrington (2012) and Gottlieb (2004:112-133). I observantly participated as Vodou leaders crafted over ninety magico-ritual creations (like leaf wraps, substance bundles, charms, amulets, sculptures, and caches) which were used, in conjunction with Iwa efforts, for a variety of tasks such as healing persons, protecting spaces, channeling energies, and---especially---for treating infant, childhood, maternal, and women’s illnesses. During these ritual sessions, I conversed with Vodou leaders and families about the function of objects, finding that they were rarely discrete items but rather conceived of as extensions of other buried objects or reservoirs of force in the community from which they were derived (or with which they were simultaneously created). I visually documented how the objects are placed within homes, and followed the objects by periodically observing and photographing them. I sought how children and adults abstractly conceived of home organization (through two-dimensional sketches of their

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3 I also established extensive and ongoing verbal consent. As in Gottlieb (2004), if children fell ill I assisted guardians to the fullest extent possible and desired (regardless of a family’s participation status in research).
courtyards), I documented songs and ceremonial texts and located and interviewed ritual song authors at the site.

I conducted open-ended, brief interviews with around seventy-five infant guardians organized around prompts for their reproductive histories, such as infant deaths and illnesses, probing how treatment decisions are made, the results, the role of non-human agents in treatment and illness, and their attitudes at the present towards these past events (drawing from methods of Gottlieb 2004; Ferme 2001; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Bernard 2012). Furthermore, I engaged in long-form life-history interviews with eleven residents aged between thirty and ninety years of age, exploring how their childhoods, past reproductive experiences, historical positionality, and personal styles affected their current characterizations of themselves as relational persons within a moment in Sou Lapwen’s history (following Scheper-Hughes 1992).

I conducted in-depth, long-form, open-ended interviews with twenty-nine ritual specialists, whom I met through soliciting introductions from close informants, and used prompts to seek out their scope, experience, and styles of communicating with non-human forces, diagnosing and treating illnesses, and their life histories. I had ongoing relationships (generally meeting thrice monthly) with sixteen of these specialists in particular, including two manbo, one female ritual assistant, one female healer, one Chanpwèl empress, two male bòkò, one male ritual poet/songwriter, three male oungan, and five lwa (Simbi Makaya, Twa Grenn, Bossou Twa Kowòn, Kafou, Dantor, Brav Gede).

In all, my portable field data consists of audio-visual and written diaries from more than one-hundred magical ceremonies of varying complexity, daily participation in
communal child-rearing practices, nightly ethnography and dream journals, and approximately three-hundred informal interviews and fifty ad-hoc forums (usually involving the sixteen specialists I met with regularly, see above). Audio-visual data consists of five thousand photographs, and 150-200 ritual chants (many transcribed in collaboration with Ninev, Yvon, and Gaen).

All the data I draw from, except work in Kafou, is directly indebted to my relational ties with Manbo Nel and my sincere privilege of being her adopted daughter; in this region of the countryside, communities are notoriously reticent to integrate strangers into community life (Figure 1-2). Living in and as part of her courtyard, I was rapidly drawn into the lives of many of the other courtyards, public spaces, and events in town (Figure 1-3). Her contacts touched many other people in surrounding towns who were essential to the research.

However, of all the methods and data described above, it is my perspective that the most important method was attention to the regular and mundane experiences of this or that illness or life event, and gentle questions and observations about how others feel when taking part in them. I gained brief access to this world and I attempted to integrate myself (as much as possible) into the phenomenological rhythms by which night, midnight, morning, and daytime are measured out. I woke myself up when I heard others stir, I bathed alongside the women of the courtyard, cooked alongside them, and tried to become familiar with the intricacies of living which demanded great skill and attention (and, as many anthropologists before me, I was still often bested at these by children). In time, I do believe I gained a basic sense of how courtyards change when new members and infants arrive, the place of food, feeding, and washing in maintaining
selves, and the unexpected and open-ended ways that relations expand, contract, or become hostile as the habitation transforms with the hours and the seasons.

It would be instructive to note that this story did not set out to study flesh and being alongside a manbo. Initially, I set out to explore imagined securities among appx. 1,400 displaced Protestants from Port Au Prince, who were granted land and support temporarily by the Sou Lapwen community after the earthquake. Although amiable and grateful to these villagers at first, these displaced persons gradually became more and more distrustful of the closely-knit villagers, constructing large walls, policing the entrance to a huge swath of land that they inhabited, instructing persons only to travel in large groups.

My research switched to working with the manbo due to a number of difficulties I encountered in establishing a feasible research plan with the church. In the course of these troubles, I ran into Nel (whose solar panel, at the time, could charge my telephone and my camera) who was herself embroiled in an unfolding event of illness and zonbi attack that I quickly inserted myself into. I met Nel first as a responsible and measured community leader, and her incredible talent for cooking and desire to share quickly drew me in. I came to know her as an exceedingly wise, patient, intelligent person who pled that I eat from her pot. It took several days to realize that Nel was also the local manbo, a point which became obvious only when she read my cards in a badji so non-descript that I thought it was a storage structure at first. As fieldwork so often does, this life experience drew me down a path I did not expect. This manuscript, I hope, will be a credit to this contingency and to the long afterlife of research plans.
Dwelling in Town

Various crossroads make up the town of Sou Lapwen, building out on each other and then converging back in. The light shines through the mountains when the sun rises in the morning. In the evening it will arch over the scores of planted fields, then over the highway, then the fisherman's houses, till finally, many miles west it will plummet into the shallow aqua waters of the Caribbean. South of town, a great river wash forms another boundary. In the morning it is no less impressive and mysterious as it is during dark summer nights. It is at its best in those months after December, when no water comes, and it is dusty and limestone ridden, with black rocks, some glittering with quartz, and a few that are said to hold the secret of fire within them. When in the wash, there seems to be nothing else but the wash. Enough space, at least, to hold fifteen semi-trucks stretched long ways, and front to back, and that is just the width after all. It is enough space to cut off the peripheral vision of the towns cuddled against each cliff up above, or the cliff at all, or even the shadows cast by the cliff.

When walking across it, your face, hair, and skin is quickly ashened by eddies of limestone dust. I never learned to notice this powder on myself, it took others brushing my hair, remarking that it has become gray from the coating of limestone and dry from the sun. In the wash, in summer, you can look ahead and see nothing but white stones so sharp in color it hurts your eyes, stacked on evermore white stones. Pale white boulders and white pebbles as bright as bone ash lay there in the blaring, burning light. It is a place of emptiness and silence at such times, I thought. Empty of water and empty of blood--just a skin, hollowed out. A husk that is soft but dry as powder, something that can be lifted up and away in the wind. When it is dry, it is a strange land. People do not go to it unless they have to: either to pick the stunted, dry herbs that
crouch beneath the field of bone or to cross over to the other side where the village of Nan Dò lies.

In the months after March, the rain will come. It changes everything. At first, it drizzles, and freckles of blue and green blossom on top of the ashy rocks. Then it drops, and spattered colors come out of the dry limestone powder replenished with water. Soon, the rocks are altogether wet, and you can see that pastel colors deep within them make each one unique, break apart the landscape. And then in the good times—*the exquisite times*—rain is plentiful, the winds will be soft, and the banana “trees” on the cliffs will bow their radiant leaves downward. Under the rain, they will glisten like latex. Then—only then—will the stingy rivulets of water appear and wipe away the sun from this dry white world, growing into blue-grey streams that cast back the color of the sky. They broaden into basins here and there where the laughing women and young boys come to wash. They splash each other; they come bringing the house’s toddlers, they come soaping their dishes, clothes, bodies in the cold mountain rainwater, and then they will dry, refreshed in a muted sun, clean and smiling.

Even when there has been a good but not overly burdensome summer storm, and the water dries quickly up, one can see the paths where the white rocks were quenched. They become a lush silver and quartz garden, tracing out the slick trails of the waters. The trails that water will follow are not perceptible to those who are strangers to the valley’s ways, but they are as alive as the plantain, the rock, the wind, the night. Children assess the water and its traces throughout the day, eagerly relaying if it is high, or low; coming in small fingers, or not even there at all. Many times, the news reaches you incorrectly because children, at least the wise ones, do not like to
veer so close to the edge of the cliff when it has rained, and thus their small network is extremely susceptible to flows of misinformation. However, rumors are often enough to get the adults moving, especially if the day hears many cries of “water!” from the mouths of these roving, roaring, youthful faces. We check. Often, indeed almost all of the time, there is nothing but white stillness and the dashed dreams that some far away and unseen rain might bring a rush of fresh water down the mountain side and into our palms.

On the occasion of storms, bad storms, its gifts are more ambiguous. The water turns brown and it rises. It takes houses and lives by the steep sides. But that is Manbo Magalie for you: the Iwa master of these local waters, canal and wash alike. Up the cliff, where bustling children share the dust road winds and news, there are quaint and brightly colored mud and cement houses. Small yellow-haired island dogs dart between them with their skin exposed, dry and black. They are always yapping daringly but bolt quickly lost matches and cower near the hibiscus trees, licking their wounds and jumping back as you pass. The trees twine and blossom through barriers of woven banana leaf or a lone wire stretched across the yard and strung to a tree trunk, marking out space. The appearance of trees stops short around the few walls of cement which are stronger, sterner than those of the other houses, crafted from the ground-up rock of Manbo Magalie's limestone riverbed.

Down by the old dusty crossroads at the start of town one sees trees scattered around the paths, trees of magnificent variety and color, all blooming together in a musical ensemble of noise and color. The wind rushes through them, the dust uplifted and dancing in their boughs, notes of sunlight cutting through in shafts and glistening on
the outstretched cups of their blood-red bouquets, their shocking yellow petals, their waxy greens. At midday, the small household gardens are bright in midday and can be seen over banana leaf fences. They receive the best sun. Vivid wild spinach leaves are set off by the long and budding fuchsia seeds, like Christmas necklaces in the tropics. “Beautiful, beautiful!” Carmelite would say, thinking that they look like food, but that they will taste like money.

Here, magic acts, ritual treatments, and prophylaxis are stamped on surfaces across the whole landscape, from under the earth to the reaches of galaxies flickering in the night sky. Some Vodou personnel reside here, many as practitioners for their families but most are also willing to freelance for outsiders. The earth and surface of the crossroads bear witness to their nighttime crossings, but it is not only the practitioners who wander the roads at night. Many others wander; those who seek to heal are side by side with those beings who hunt the living, all of them breathing down the necks of brave farmers whose visas for watering their gardens at night keep them from harm.

There are more than ten kay lwa here, and at least seven are still in use. Each of these ritual quarters provides services of healing and intervention when necessary, but most too poor to hold every yearly festival to feed their lwa. Many other lwa houses lie abandoned and have since become public forums, houses for the poorest of the living, or places where old men seek shade in the day. A few that look abandoned are not, but instead are saturated with nanm and nanm works from the ones who came before. Small orange flickers can be seen at night where people have quietly come into the dark rooms to respond to someone or something in their life. Likewise, a few that seem most vibrant are in fact unused, with large, fancy, metal roofs, and a decorated poto mitan,
which is the central post holding up the roof and structure of a peristil, temple, or other Vodou structure for a diaspora member who hasn’t returned to town in many years.

One peristil in town, that of the Manbo Nel, is neither visible from the road, nor painted with images, nor marked with gesture or invitation. The courtyard seems open and empty in the center as if it were barren, but this is nothing more than a trick of the untrained eye. Nothing grows where feet, bottles, water, shovels, have disturbed the ground again and again, over time flattening it into something like rock. Inside the three rooms of her kay lwa---her laboratory---walls explode with color and magazine clippings; each has a bed, a table, a chair. From the outside, one could not tell these were such trafficked rooms. It is the courtyard itself on either side of the clearing which appears most majestic, opened wide, with gardens on either side. The natural poto of tall, tall, siwel trees rises from the center of a rock pile positioned just right for sitting. They hold up nothing but the sky and their branches, which cast a broad umbrella of shade around.

Another open temple courtyard relevant to the study, which is at the end of six different paths. It is the most magnificently strange house in town, built high and narrow, and it is for the most lucrative of the practitioners in the confines of the settlement. It has no gate save a bit of wire strung up around a boulder and stretching far to the exterior concrete wall. It often dazzles tourist passersby with full-color murals of the lwa who inhabit the space. The owner, Anperè, sleeps and lives alone for the most part. His youngest daughters and son are living with their mother in a more convenient location for them to attend school. His twin teenaged son and daughter, though, still visit weekly.
They can be found lounging on the second floor of the only two story building in town——built like a bright, stacked teacake.

Like all those who serve the Iwa as practitioners, he sleeps alone by vow at least once a week (the day depends on one’s patron Iwa). Like Nel, but unlike the others, he argues that his Iwa are of the jealous sort and prefer him not to keep womanly company at all. It is a convincing argument, which is correct for the most part, just as it is true that he enjoys drinking, playing dominos, and hanging out with the other more rebellious men in town far more than he has ever enjoyed permanent cohabitation with a woman. At night, his open and ungated courtyard is filled by a table of men and rugged women playing dominos, betting, and glugging back kleren—which he distributes for one of the few local producers in town. On nights when they do not come to play, he can brood and become lonely, though he still prefers to sleep alone without a woman in town and will say that the Iwa have prevented his desire on this account

That simple wire around Anperè’s house is tasked with keeping wandering goats, sheep, and donkeys out, but it often does not. It only deters the least ambitious of Sou Lapwen livestock, while jittery stray mules and such can still find their way in. Perhaps they are drawn to the images of virgins and mermaids and sisters three, lounging on the pale pink cement background, their eyes and fingers freckled with gray where the paint has chipped off over the years.

They do not often enter as far as the peristil, for a small cement wall demarcates its space. The pole of cement, the poto mitan, is covered in white wax and rises from the floor to hold up the corrugated tin ceiling. Chairs are suspended upside down in the rafters, with wrapped animal bones, a hundred packets of every magical thing and some
oozing with dark cane syrup as fragrant as myrrh. There is a metal basin which rests on the altar now. It is empty today, but has chicken feathers sticking to the sides, a trace of a hot ritual done last night to distract the evil forces which have been threatening a neighborhood baby. A strong man in chains is painted on a wall behind the basin. His face and arms are large, muscled; his chain is rattling as he struggles to break free. Behind him you can see the courtyard continue, a flambwayan tree dropping red silken petals over everything, which drift into the peristil and decorate the floor. Hugging it is another tree covered in nails, thread, shards of metal. The tree trunk has grown over and around these intrusions, pulling them in, and they seem as if they were sunk into a liquid or waxen material resembling bark that has only just become solid. These intrusions make the passage of social time palpable, fluid, interpenetrating landscapes. When the rare groups of Christians come through they like to pass by and photograph the images, they like to think them gruesome and threatening. They have more than once pointed to the picture of Kriminèl, saying it depicts Haitians murdering whites. They do not notice the trees.

At night, residents lock the doors to their mudbrick homes with thick bars of iron. If there is a newborn in the courtyard, men sit with machetes drawn in front of the house. It is no secret that infants are precious participants in daily life, as they are doted upon endlessly in the family courtyard. Yet, during the day, the streets seem strangely empty of children under two. This is especially surprising, given how many residents would say they were out seeking treatment with their babies in the course of a month. I now know that babies were present on daytime roads---even if only rarely---nestled
underneath bundles of cloth that seemed glued to the chests of concerned-looking men and women.

A Note on Language

In this work, I often use the term “we” in shifting contexts. It is used this way deliberately to draw the reader into a social milieu where the “we” is the most vital sort of self, and where the embodied “we” is always shifting, reforming, reformulating. To a lesser extent, “I” and “You” are employed in shifting contexts, and it is intended to reflect language or experiences directed at me or which I came to be a part of. I consider myself forever a part of the courtyard, but more so as an interloper of the boundary between the courtyard and my American family of the courtyard. I am physically present more than the diaspora members of the courtyard, but I am more metaphysically distant from practices due to my own preconceptions and physical tendencies. Wherever I use the language “I” or “You”, I do so to illustrate my experiences, conversations, and lessons to the best of my ability but not to lay claim to such knowledge as my own.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2: Chapter 2 acts as a background chapter for introducing the reader to the notion of nanm as a relational substance tied to daily rhythms of living and bodily care as well ritual events, using the case study of Manbo Nel’s courtyard.

Chapter 3: According to both Evangelical Christians and Vodou-practicing residents in Sou Lapwen, Sou Basen, and Arkayè, the greatest threat facing vulnerable infants and society as a whole is posed by the blood-hungry shape-shifting werewolves, known locally as "lougawou". Chapter 3 explores Haitian werewolves, and the
assemblage of persons, beings, and situations which constitute the experience of werewolf.

**Chapter 4:** In Chapter 4, I examine the communal practices of food consumption and how this serves to cultivate nanm through exchanges of substance. I look at infancy as a case study of this practice, moving out to discuss food sharing amongst the broad local ecology of embodied nanm. I explore practices which mold body-selves into shared surfaces by making them receptive, emotive, and deeply interrelated for infants, caregivers, family and community, non-humans, and ritual objects which are becoming persons.

**Chapter 5:** In Chapter 5, I explore the bitasyòn, the dwelling, as a zone of crossing. It is organized according to a series of crossings which generate persons within the dwelling as social persons, and dwellings within persons as social. In the first part of the chapter, I explore how lwa, humans, and landscape features intersect with one another and how these intersections create a web of dwelling between them. The second portion of the chapter starts with a discussion of baptism as a ritual act which transfers broad social ties unto infants, communal incorporating them and generating social support outside of their immediate family groups (lakou).

**Chapter 6:** Chapter 6 demonstrates how zonbi (zombie) practices can shed light on Haitian experiences of embodiment, showing how bodies surface in communities and from there are worked on by the world and others vis a vis practices of assembling, disassembling, treating, and reusing selves.

**Conclusion:** In the Conclusion, I return to the question of how bodies and events surface, fragment, are interred, and resurface in communities by focusing on the traces
left by events in human skin, roads, buildings, and crafted objects. I bring together the rituals, activities, and experiences discussed in the prior chapters and use multimedia data to outline the obvious material traces that these practices etch out.
Figure 1-1. View shed of Sou Lapwen (right) and Nan Dó (left) from the center of the Nayè A, a seasonal riverbed which divides the town from another town on the opposite side of the cliffs.
Figure 1-2. The author works at the table in her room, typing the day’s notes by oil lamp.
Figure 1-3. The Author with Nel very early in their relationship, shortly after Ninev's healing.
Figure 1-4. A secret cache for a love-binding magic is buried at a passageway in Sou Lapwen. It involves excavating a hole and interring food within vessels while speaking to the magic and specific substances of corn, syrup, and thread.
Nanm is the substance which is exchanged and changed in the general web of becoming through which Haitians and Haitian Vodouissants understand the deeply socialized ecology of the family courtyard (lakou a) and the many personalized constituents within it. Nanm is the primary relational force of the universe. As nanm is exchanged or transmuted, it creates embodied experiences of personhood emerging in tandem with others, and through others, in the micro-ecological network of the Haitian courtyard.

"Each tree has nanm. And sense. Just like all the herbs do. Vodou practitioners understand this. And so do Evangelicals. The difference is that Evangelicals understand this and because they understand its nanm, they want to destroy it. They cut down our sacred trees because they say that they have devils in them. They dirty the water, pollute the ocean. They bury large rocks because they understand that nanm is inside of them. They bring destruction" (Figure 2-1).

"Once, there was a brother who came to me. He had lost his job two months before. His sister was scared [that there was no money to live on]. Now, two months later, they came to me about his trouble in [finding and keeping] work. I told them [that yes], I serve the Iwa [and thus I can look into it]. Then I felt [this] deep knowledge and understanding. This feeling of knowledge and understanding about the situation descended upon me. It was Gran Mèt and the Iwa talking to me. [I said so] as soon as I felt it. [Then I told them] don’t worry, [that job you lost] will call you [and ask you] to [come in and work] in seven days. And they did."
Later, Jameson says: “So you see, it’s not just the rich folks who are using magic (e.g. Magic to become rich). The poor have magic too, real magic. [The sort of magic that saves lives, [preserves] nanm.” He pauses. He looks at me directly. “We are not the same as foreigners. The earth here isn’t the same. For example, here a woman knows to drink [a certain fresh-picked herbal tea] when her body is broken when her nanm isn’t good. When werewolves and other things come to eat [her baby’s nanm], she knows how to fill the baby’s stomach. Elsewhere, maybe because you don’t have these problems, you don’t know how to do [these sorts of things]. [Have you heard] of foreign people who come to save Haitian babies by putting them in orphanages? [Really,] they kill [Haitian infants] because they don’t know how to save them. They only go to doctors. [Never once do] they call a Manbo or someone who knows how to offer [such treatments]. Nel makes an affirmative noise. It means: "This, too, is true."

Jameson relaxes, having come to his final point. “This earth is our mother.” He concludes. “It is not a microbe. [It’s nanm]. Loving it, eating it, is not bad. [Furthermore] once you talk to any microbe, it [is no longer just] a microbe. The earth is our mother. The sky [and sun] is our father. [Thus we see] that the land suffers just like other mothers. And the sky makes things grow [with sun and rain]. That is why the sky lies above the mother. This is why mothers grow babies in their stomachs, pushing them out in a great deal of pain. You can feel these things. They are not immaterial. [Such as when] The bonnanj of the child passes through the man, [making] orgasm sweet and transformative"

**Relation and Transformation**

No one can negate the presence, role, and importance of Vodou in the history, society, and culture of Haiti. No one can deny that Vodou is an important part of why Haiti is Haiti. No one can say that Vodou doesn’t
have an impact on Haitian comportment, whether [that impact] appears in Haitian religion or intellectual discipline. Vodou has marked, and continues to mark, our popular institutions, relations between persons, talk about men’s and women’s selves and bodies, relations within a family, relations within art houses. Vodou marks our philosophy and our moral principles, our written and oral literature, our religious and popular music, our mannerisms, our sciences, our technology, and of course our skills and methods of treating illnesses (KOSANBA 2014: 2).

Jameson’s statements are important to this chapter because they impart a multilayered lesson in Vodou ontology. At its most basic, the lesson is that world is populated with a multitude of human and extra-human forces and relations, and our livelihood and health depend upon keeping the right sort of relations between ourselves and a multitude of other local forces which have the potential to befriend, become, or consume us.

In Sou Lapwen, all who are social persons are involved in the task of caring for others, and in being cared for themselves (Figure 2-2). People foster each other’s children and friends sleep in and care for each other’s dwellings. People interact with ancestors, plants, and stones. They interpret candlelight, they listen to what water says as it moves inside a smoky glass.

In the context of this dynamic “marche du monde,” Haitians also see two different categories of change in [the universe]’s operation: first, the degenerative changes in persons and in substances which eventually decay and die, and second, certain patterns of recurrence—the cycle of generations, the cycle of seasons, the recurrent movement of the astral bodies. These are the pervasive and persistent principles upon which the universe operates. (Desmangles 2006: 48)

Our body selves transmute along with our tasks, practices, and interactions. We eat, we drink, we meet others, we zone out, we discover ourselves, or others unearth our own capacities in ways that deeply transform us; in short, we are affected, we affect

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1 Translated from original Haitian Creole by the author, 08/08/2016
others, and all of this is made possible through the expressive, fleshy, and shifting matrix of embodied being. In Sou Lapwen, these changes and others are named and understood as changes in the quality of nanm. Healthy nanm is the deterministic social mechanism through which acts of dwelling become an experience of shared personhood (and likewise, unhealthy nanm is the mechanism through which acts of social conflict can become illness and death).

The entire study addresses personing in Haitian Vodou as a relational process built through common interactive bodily techniques (Mauss 2007) and the inculcation of sensory dispositions attuned to variations of nanm (Mauss 2007; Merleau-Ponty 2007; McCarthy Brown 1991). These bodily techniques (Mauss 2007) cut across categories of the human and the non-human. They include such events as human relational exchanges with magically crafted objects, lwa behavior towards other lwa, the way one ought to shake hands in a dream, the way a dog acceptably or unacceptably steals food, or the way water sulkily swallows a table.

This chapter fits into the broader goal of the study by describing nanm in detail, and exploring how it moves through the embodied collective meshwork of courtyards and communities more generally (Ingold 2011). In the first section, I explore the idea of the “Many” in Afro-Creole communities (Matory 2009), contrasting this with Cartesian-influenced works on Haitian Vodou which treat the category of the individual as unproblematic. In the second section, I turn to the question of being as a substance in Haitian Vodou, analyzing nanm substance as a key vehicle for relations and therefore experiences of embodiment (See Figure 2-3). Although nanm is a well-known term in Haitian studies, its definition is highly variable and its application is frequently messy.
and contradictory. I treat nanm as a real concept that emerges primarily in the messy context of daily life, where it is acknowledged, diagnosed, warped, and manipulated in accordance with the given needs of any number of situations. In the third section, I walk through experiences of nanm within Manbo Nel’s courtyard, looking at the daily movements and processes of nanm that occur on a regular basis in the household.

**Undoing Individuals**

As perspectivist literature has picked up steam in the past several decades, anthropologists have become aware that multiply-embodied selves are quite common on the social stage of the world (Glaskin 2015). To name only a few, communities in Melanesia (Strathern 1988), persons of Juruna society (Lima 1999), Muinane persons of Colombia (Sulkin 2003), Lajau persons of Sulawesi, Tzotzil Maya persons of Chiapas, Mexico (Groark 2013), and herders in Mongolia (Pedersen 2011), conceive of themselves as many.

Modulations of a single force make up everything in the universe according to a process of differentiation and individuation. The unity of this force guarantees that everything participates in everything else, but its modulations are such that there exist levels of participation. In a more contemporary vocabulary, we could say that if we are all like stones, it is because humans, rocks, and everything else are “distributed persons” (Gell 1998: chap. 7), made from reciprocal “partial connections” (Strathern [1991] 2005).

In 1988, Marilyn Strathern published the monumental work “The Gender of the Gift,” which sought to shift the foci of anthropology from individuals and societies to relational matrices, or sociality. With this piece, Strathern inaugurated a new era in the study of persons as webs of specific social relations, projected out from a particular,
unique, and shifting perspectival vantage point. Considering that flesh (including faces, nails, hair, the flushing cheek) is a key site where relations are built (and communicated), skin is a site where multiple selves are made flesh, and where multiple levels of relation are led to coexist within a single surface.

It is impossible to arrive at an adequate understanding of how social practice and bodily techniques (Mauss 2007) form bodies without acknowledging the tremendous work of feelings in this process. Drawing from Ahmed’s (2004, 2013) language, I argue that in Sou Lapwen embodied and relational selves (or selves-as-relations) continually surface in society through emotion and emotiveness, treated here as dwelling practices. Ingold’s (2007) conceptual language of “meshwork” opens a path for analyzing how feelings, actions, intentions, movements, and bodies intersect with one another and create the entangled terrain of living. It is an especially useful concept for analyzing Afro-Diasporic traditions, given that there is neither an essential individual or easily generalizable subject to which researchers might point.

In Sou Lapwen, persons are not only unfolding and being constructed within a courtyard through nurturance and care practices. The courtyard is also refolding around new members, including new infants, strangers who have become friends, new lovers, houses, and so many more. These relations form, and are formed through, the expressive, emotional body-selves of courtyard agents who are expected to be permeable and responsive to the circulation of various desires, tendencies, and experiences. Close-knit courtyards situate new persons, such as infants, outsiders, or ‘new’ Iwa, within the tapestry of ongoing relationships while working to evaluate the new presence of an infant, an outsider, or a new Iwa, a within the tapestry of ongoing
relationships. These are not only the relationships among physically embodied humans in the courtyard, but also relationships between new members and ancestors, the earth, dogs, pigs, or dream creatures, moths, snakes, and even weather patterns (Figure 2-3).

It is easy to see how this sort of mapping quickly becomes an act of tracking relations rather than characterizing essential forms, especially in a social milieu where personhood, as McCarthy Brown has said, is “fundamentally relational…the person is defined by a web of relationships (2005: 11).” These relationships can both bring resources in and sustain life, just as they can be held responsible for embodied suffering. Furthermore, the relational philosophy behind Afro-Creole healing traditions extends far beyond the boundaries of narrowly defined Vodou practice, as the opening quote of this section, a declaration by the KOSANBA: A Scholarly Association for the Study of Haitian Vodou, argues. James (2010) observed as much in patients and field informants who were devout evangelicals but still expressed bodily suffering, pain, and feeling through an “epistemology of Haitian Vodou.”

Taken together, these insights about transforming surfaces, multiple selves, and the vitality of relations make clear the need for an anthropology capable of grasping multiplicity and difference. By approaching “ecological” relations in Sou Lapwen in terms of a dwelled-in meshwork, following Ingold (2011)’s notion, we can better see the multiscaler, trans-dimensional connections amongst a field of interacting agents who tend to shapeshift into and out of one another. I analyze beings and experiences as within the dwelled in meshwork of Sou Lapwen. Each relational-being within the community is also an assemblage, a term borrowed from Delanda (2006) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Deleuze and Guattari (1988), but which I also take as commensurate with
Haraway’s (1985) model of “cyborgs” and “hybrids.” Both assemblage and meshwork allow for a fine-tuned examination of being/becoming but they also raise the question of scale and separation (Figure 2-4).

Nanm as Source in Being/Becoming

Problems of Translating and Classifying Nanm

In the narrow sense that nanm is a tough force that survives death, the term spirit seemed a natural choice for ethnographers working from mainly European-Christian heritage (Figure 2-5). However, as in Taylor and Case (2013: 1070), adhering to the word spirit or soul is misleading and problematic, even though dictionaries and glossaries may offer it as the first translation (Cosentino 1995: 432). Paul Brodwin (1996) notes the multiple models of embodiment put forth in the ethnographic literature, and chooses to adhere to a translation of “soul” for nanm. In my discussion, I will avoid translating nanm directly into English. I do offer my own preliminary definition of the term to provide a groundwork for this chapter and others, but I avoid creating alliances between “nanm” and the English term “spirit” or “soul”. I do not offer a conclusive definition of nanm (or gwo bonnanj or ti bonnanj) for the simple reason that I am not sure a conclusive definition is possible; nanm, as a phenomenon, is highly contextual and is situated in the shifting sands of daily life.

Furthermore, these terms have certain highly specific historical relations that make them particularly poorly suited for describing Haitian metaphysics. Terms such as “spirit” and “soul” have their own historical to suppress. Spirit possession, for example, was already a named phenomenon in Euro-American traditions before it was applied to Afro-Creole practices. The term “possession”, in this sense, conforms to biblical corporeal dichotomies whereby humans are the only ensouled bodies on earth, and
their souls can be dislodged by Satan or his minions. Within the Euro-American tradition, beings can take control of others’ bodies, use them to do strange and unholy things, and such possessions are uniformly evil. In West African and Afro-Creole traditions, the experience of becoming-lwa or becoming-orisha is quite different from the experience of becoming-possessed in a Euro-American history. Nonetheless, the term spirit possession has historically been applied to a broad swath of phenomena stretching from Central Africa to the Polynesian islands. If not for academics, then at least for the public, this term contributes to social misunderstandings and the specific demonization of Afro-Creole religions. The point is that more caution is needed in the application the terms “soul” “spirit” and “possession,” in part because of the intensely morally coded nature of these terms and the false homologies which are drawn between them. One cannot disconnect the term “soul” from its metaphysical, ethical, and moralistic paradigm without significant work and many caveats. To untangle the local metaphysics of embodiment in Haiti, many authors have sought to precisely differentiate and classify nanm in the literature. Some even do so while maintaining that these efforts are somewhat futile, that the matters are particularly “difficult to comprehend” or of limited value given that they are intra-culturally contradictory at times (see Dayan 1995 67–68; Desmangles 1992; Dayan 1995; Kenndhy and Douyon 2013). Others have gone as far as to suggest that their informants (or others’) were simply ‘wrong’, then turning to already-published typologies in English (for example, Ackermann and Gauthier 1991). Amidst this confusion, ethnographers and religious scholars have named several recurring elements in the Haitian construction of being. Of these, the “gwo bonnanj” and the “ti bonnanj” are well known in the literature, usually indicating a certain division
within the unified body-self between a larger and a smaller invisible driving force. Per my informants, I refer to both as versions of nanm and nanm as the universal substance.

For my purposes, and the purposes my informants deemed essential, each of these nanm is best grasped in moments of encountering it. Practitioners and patients are after heuristic solutions rather than theoretical answers. In this sense, my experiences, however, were more in line with Karen McCarthy Brown’s (2006) field experiences where informants did not define bodily parts or speak of abstracted divisions, but would give concrete, specific illustrations of nanm-as-lived when the researcher enquired. These specific illustrations do not always fit together in a neat framework.

Of these, there were (6) components of the body-self assemblage which appeared more than once as the target or source of problems in treatments, diagnosis, and illness. However, it is important to note that these components were treated as indiscernible in other ceremonies, and looking diachronically, all the boundaries among them are permeable and drifting.

1) nanm, which is an indexical term referring to all invisible constituents at once or any one of them in particular, as well as the blood and nails and hair

2) eskɔt, those lwa who walk with the given living person, orbiting, protecting, and guarding them

3) zonbi by which is meant the active, impersonal, energetic force that brings about motion in the body-self,

4) the Mèt Tèt, the lwa associate of the given vivan (living person, especially used in relation to lwa),

5) the gwo bonnanj, a term used to speak of one of the shadow-self nanm of the person, also the nanm of the dead called up from the waters after a
period of time (usually 366 days), more rarely referenced or intermixed alongside the ti bonnanj, known more as the “conscience” and said by (two) informants to also be the voice of the Mèt Bitasyòn (the master of the dwelling place). It is the gwo bonnanj nanm of infants, which evil shapeshifters are known to consume

6) kò a, the body (which is also the image of the same),

Nanm and Petwo in Context

It is also difficult to precisely develop an understanding of the concept of nanm, bodies or Petwo, apart from the distinct persons, beings, and processes which these work through, largely because of the limitations of vocabulary and translation in general.Æ Researchers faced a similar problem when trying to systematize the lwa, themselves valuable and unique instantiations of nanm.

We can think of nanm as a marrow that can project outward or shrink back to the bone if certain conditions are met. As concerns the body-self, nanm is uniquely mobile (Figure 2-6). Courtyards share and exchange nanm in food and in daily activities, meaning nanm is continuously circulating. Nanm can be forcefully displaced by other nanm: visiting nanm, such as the nanm of the lwa, can replace one’s vital nanm for a short time (as in possession) (Figure 2-7). Nanm can also be seized by other nanm and consumed, such as in zonbi attacks, pwen activity, lougawou attacks, and even normal human consumption processes (which destroys or diminishes the nanm of plants and animals to survive). Death occurs, and the assemblage disassociates, which can bring about deeply contested links between prior persons, states of being, and future

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Æ In contrast with some prior characterizations of a Rada-Petwo polarization (all made by ethnographers primarily studying Rada-specialized practitioners) I found that the Petwo specialists I lived and worked with treated the Petwo lwa affectionately and integrated them into everyday family life. Like McGee (2008), I acknowledge that Vodou practice is replete with variations across the terrain of Haiti, but these variations are multilayered and are far better conceptualized as different “styles” of the same practice rather than different practices altogether.
existence. Nanm can rest latently in things, such as in ancestral bones. It can be stored away in jars on Vodou altars. It can be revived through ritual action. It can be repossessed, fed, and manipulated in order to affect or create specific others.

**Transmutation and Ineffability**

The difficulty ethnographers experienced in attempting to create a definitive list of the Vodou lwa is well-known. The reason for this problem is rather simple: no such list is possible for the lwa are inherently mercurial. They are more accurately described as ways of being in the world, subject to endless transmutation through experience, than as beings per se.

In this brief excerpt, McCarthy Brown identifies the mercuriality and transmutability of being in Haitian Vodou metaphysics, and although she limits her observations to lwa, this characteristic is practically applicable to every individuated being that exists. Nanm, therefore, is a ubiquitous, absorbent substance in Haitian life which is not equivalent with “spirit” and which is not easily classifiable. It is centrally featured in Vodou ritual while also playing a key role in the most mundane and day-to-day practices of living. This means that nanm is always multiplying as an object of study, ensaturating and individuating beings that it emerges in, or contagiously expanding to things which they know and love (Wexler 2004). It should come as no surprise that a coherent study of nanm faces complicated challenges. Indeed, Vodou practitioners have spent decades practicing (and centuries accumulating) techniques for researching and managing nanm in the embodied world around them.

**Interpreting Nanm at Home**

Before Petwo practitioners begin manipulating the complex and shifting relational-force of nanm in their patients (even very familiar ones—even themselves) they must carefully figure out the most important contexts of the problem. They prepare
to situate and clarify the situation in situ in a village, country, and state of relations that extends far beyond the courtyard. Problems, ideas, actions do not have a single value, perspective, or sense. Rather, it is the felt-impressions of given interactions and relations which formulate sense. Actions do not mean anything in and of themselves; they are neither good nor bad but contextual. This requires divination, which in Sou Lapwen is best done through card reading (using a standard pack of cards), dream analysis, or spirit possession. These technologies are meant to allow practitioners a clearer window into the specific situations, histories, and processes that have come together into the given circumstances in the patient’s life. Petwo work (travay) only works effectively when it is grounded in the roots of life’s specificities, and the beings and assemblages that co-inhabit the specific terrain with the patient.

**Nanm in the Course of Life, Death, and Everything**

“Physically, the lakou or residence unit of the larger family shows little planning and considerable individuality. It’s social organization, however, shows more of its group character. The lakou always has a mèt, a chief who is usually the oldest member of the family, of either sex. But the power of the chief, outside considerations of personality, varies with the degree of blood relationship with the other inhabitants” (Bastien 1961)

To serve the family well in this role, the priest or priestess must use konesans: knowledge, intuition, insight…Such knowledge is most often rooted in the Oungan’s or Manbo’s own experience of suffering…Once gained, konesans carries with it a moral obligation that it be used just fully and respectfully. Thus, the manbo or oungan is one who knows how to eshufe, to raise the life energy in individuals and groups, human and divine. (Brown 2006: 10)

A general discussion of nanm necessitates the inclusion of a concrete, embodied example of how it works within collective flows. Although I visited and studied in many other courtyards than Nel’s, it was in Nel’s courtyard that I spent the night and became part of the day-to-day rhythm of living. Thus, I turn to Nel’s courtyard to explain the
networked skin of her lakou a, and the permeable, collective identity of shared selves within its concrete block walls (Figure 2-7). Her courtyard is in most ways typical of a leaders’ courtyard in the region. Relations between members of the courtyard are often biological, but not necessarily, and both extended and fictive kin constitute valued members of close-knit lakou a (See Figure 2-8).

**Taking Over**

The Manbo’s courtyard is very popular given that her skilled healing hands are often in demand. Yet the popularity of her courtyard also stems from its geographic and familial location—it is found on the cleared, dusty street down which motos can pass (and cars too, though with some difficulty). She also lives in the same courtyard with her Voudouissant sister, Nanis, and just down the road from her oungan brother, Anperè, while a good distance from the street with her other siblings who are also sevitè (persons who serve the lwa). Her courtyard has also been the site of continuous habitation for many generations, and the ancestors still appear in the landscape. One finds them in the trees they planted, the lwa they built relationships with, or even their material traces of ritual objects buried deeply in the soil. Some of these objects—such as a stone shaped as a heart—are really people, and they can be coaxed from a state of relative in articulation with the courtyard to a much more interactive state.

The trees themselves are persons, each with its own name and self. Many such names are unknown to all but the trees and things themselves. Even if nanm is invisible to average persons, gangans, manbo, and bòkò know how to manipulate nanm through material action, controlling its intensity and its flows as the circumstances demand. Within Sou Lapwen ecologies, Manbo Nel twines and untwines the forces of the world. She negotiates how and what to do by expertly piecing together an approach from a
broad and shifting cache of ancestral relations, distinguished through wisdom and intuitive communication with the visible and invisible forces that constitute the cohabitlated universe (Figure 2-10). Likewise, her experiences and talents are passed on through the mouths of her contemporaries and later her progeny, becoming part of their lived cache of memory.

Nel’s most vital mystical talent is divination. “The Gods speak clearly to her” Carmelite, her sister, says, and Anita, her neighbor. So does Menfô, one of her Vodou fathers. It is a statement sometimes repeated through town when she has accurately predicted something or when she has closed herself into a room to fast due to a particularly disturbing revelation. Sometimes voices are so loud in her dreams that they wake her at night, and I hear her yell and jump in her bed across the way. With such divinations, she supports and heals her courtyard and those of others.

Manbo Nel mediates connectivity with the invisible realm, where the lwa dwell. She is also, quite relatedly, the primary chef of the courtyard. Throughout the day, she can usually be found mixing substances for tea, cooking the day’s meal, preparing food for the next day, or tending to her own growing garden and household pig (promised to the lwa). She is known to keenly understand and interpret the relationships between events, giving her proximity to the invisible world. Such talents of divination, potion crafting, and food preparation are typical for Manbo, Oungan, and other respected practitioners. However, Nel was unique in acting as an important defacto counselor in town; her talent and wisdom in civil matters and neighborhood disputes was much sought out, both by those who serve the lwa, those who fear the lwa, and those who serve only the Evangelical God.
She rarely leaves her carefully tended courtyard and instead prefers for people to approach her or call her out from the courtyard, where she is likely cooking. However, she does see fit to intervene when she happens upon a fracas. Outside of market days, visiting the ill, and sojourning for supplies or to visit sacred sites, she will proactively go outside to find and resolve a fight only in the most extreme situations, as has happened only twice in my presence. Both cases involved the threat of serious violence, namely beheading, exchanged between bickering comrades with shared lovers. Once, a boy in town was beat for tormenting a villager with theft, and much of the town was agitated and gathered, cheering and crying out for the Azèk to decide what to do with the child. People from the four streets came out to watch. It occurred near Anperè’s, just down the road, but Nel would not be seen partaking of such demonstrably riotous affairs. She is protective of her sanity, and of, as she says, “her head”, which aches terribly with prolonged conflict. Most everyone respects her, some to a great degree, not calling her by her first name as is done for Anperè and Young, but instead simply Manbo. In this context, her lakou a has long since been a second home to the most important ritual and medicinal practitioners in Sou Lapwen. Though it is not the largest, and certainly not the finest, it is unequivocally the busiest on the street in times of trouble.

Nel is also respected because she is a matriarch within a tight-knit family including her children and grandchildren, to those of her sisters and brothers, who respect her tremendously even though they do not always get along. This is not a unique pattern in the countryside’s of rural Arkayè, or higher up in the mountains where women often take control of the lakou a, and where women are carriers of deep wisdom.
in the community.\textsuperscript{3} For at least a few decades she has taken over the place left by the brilliant Tatiana, the beloved and graceful and wise mother, cousin, aunt, or blood relation to nearly all of the heads of house in Sou Lapwen. Tanbou were not beat for many years as she declined, courtyard songs suspended until she was called up from the waters following her death a year and a day later. She had become bed-ridden in her90s, before I had met her, and subsequently died during field research in 2012. It was a difficult time for everyone. Given the strong empathetic bonds tying her to the community, her children and relatives found themselves seriously ill with grief after interactions. At one point after a visit, Nel began sweating, her blood pressure shot up, and she reclined face down on a sheet in the yard, moaning and utterly inconsolable.

Thus, though Tatiana was still part of food exchanges, her later years saw a tapering of social visits by immediate family and an increase in less-close kin. Her senility was physically painful for her children to witness, who were powerless in the gradual diminution of her health. Yet, by all accounts, her death was a good one. No suggestion of foul play was made, and her life had been long, full, and meaningful. The mark she made on the community will not fade anytime soon. Her funeral was wonderfully celebrated, and even more so her calling up from central pillar in the community. Today, she speaks often to both the young and the old in dreams, her dream visage also linked to a lottery number.

Nel had since been naturally placed, as well as emplaced herself, within Tatiana’s social space. She became the wise one, the advice giver, the knower, the

\textsuperscript{3} This is in contrast to McCarthy Brown (2006: 1), who states that women never challenge the spiritual hegemony of the male, there were many women practitioners who surpassed the male practitioners in the area, both in the number of clientele, respect, and political alliances.
shoulder upon which to lean and the hand to lead. She and other similarly chosen practitioners were skilled caregivers, expert healers, and importantly, the key emergency service for infants in the area (if not the only service). In much of rural Haiti, midwives are not present for births, and manbo and in Sou Lapwen and other areas of rural Arkayè have come to take over the tasks of birthing and seclusion to the best of their abilities.

**Vodou Daycare**

Carmelite, the Manbo’s sister, is the only woman skilled in midwifery in town (besides Fran’s sister, who works at a distant hospital nearly every day of the week). Carmelite’s specific expertise is in giving complex and sometimes internal massages, caring for menstrual and menopausal issues, treating wounds and injuries, and supporting new mothers. Yet she makes nothing from such consultations and, thus, in the days of the dry season she climbs down into the ravine to crack apart rocks with hammers and load them onto trucks for a fixed stipend each day.

Together with Nel, she has worked to commit all the practical knowledge of pregnancy, childcare, birth, and massage to memory for the betterment of the community. Without midwives, and with only a few very expensive nurses in walking distance, Petwo ritual practitioners oversee the emergency maternal care in town even when women succeed in giving birth in the hospital by timing the visit just right. For that is only the beginning.

Vodou residents’ infant care practices are an important element of person-making projects in Haitian Petwo Vodou (Figure 2-11). Infants-as-nanm are both the most protected and the most hunted beings in town life. Infant cultivation occupies a significant amount of time, energy, and interest within courtyards, and as soon as the
baby is born informants are already oriented towards them as relevant actors in the social fabric of life Guardians try to decipher how infants feel around them, while also watching and limiting what others are allowed to feel around infants. In the case of very young humans, bodily techniques (Mauss 2007) for enhancing and shaping nanm are introduced, sustained, and responded to before the child is even born. They are introduced through eating practices, treatment and illness, dream activity, and through in-utero diagnostic and preventative care.

Immediately after birth, infants, and their caretakers come into being through intensive practices. Such methods teach babies how to sleep, how to feel in clothing, how soiled skin feels wrong and is quickly wiped and powdered away, or the smell of the many people who will feed them. These practices likewise teach caretakers about the particular child, their likes, and dislikes, their demands, their rhythms. Practices of bodily care reinforce the personhood of caretakers and their communities just as it lays the groundwork for infants to feel like and later become persons themselves. For toddlers and older children, the same practices actively teach them to be perceptually oriented towards young infants as well as towards their own feelings and those of others. Thus, infant caregivers and infants co-create experiences as perceiving beings in a sensual world by actively and passively engaging with each other and with other observers throughout the day.

Where once they were socially mediated through their mother’s bodies (in utero), after birth infants are in a sense, newly separated from the expertly mediated social world that their mothers managed. Infants, like all living beings, have nanm. However, infant nanm can be considered a special sort of nanm if only for the sheer
quantity of practices that go into, protecting, treating, attacking, and enlivening it over the course of their first few years.

During these early years, they are ontologically unrooted. Caregivers deploy specific practices designed to defend babies aggressively from attack, illness, and circulating emotions. One way in which caretakers try to protect the nascent nanm of infants is by spending tremendous energy in protecting and treating them from attacks by lougawou, shapeshifting child-eating women in the region. These acts of attention, perception and protection are vital in crafting both infants and participants as shared subjects who are jointly responsive. Then this is assembled into a long stretch of sickness, near-misses, calculated responses, it becomes an epistemological inheritance passed down from the living and the dead.

In the baptismal period, infants move from the vulnerable and unpredictable state of infancy into a more predictable, calculated, and stronger state when they formally become part of the courtyard and community through the establishment of social ties. However, baptism is not just about the ritual act; baptism corresponds with the ability of the infant to speak, to walk, to act “sensibly” (literally, to act with nanm). This process opens the door for relational forces to begin constituting the child-as-in-the-dwelling and the dwelling-as-in-the-child.

During the ages between 3 and 8-years-old, children are often tended by adult’s ritual treatment efforts and protections, but not to the same extent as they experienced in infancy. They continue helping around the house but are far more capable and skilled at tasks of food preparation, local errand runs, or load balancing on their heads. Around this time (if not earlier) children begin to grasp the excitement and fun of ritual activities.
They independently imitate dances which were taught during infancy. They also take up ceremonial play as well as take part in ceremonial roles.

In one instance, a gang of 3–4 year olds gathered pans and rocks and invented a ceremony, complete with rudimentary chante lwa, tanbou beats, and a faux possession of the fearless leader—a young girl of 4—whose deep intonation and eager lwa-style salutation of each guest was unforgettable.

When adults gather for planned ceremonies (not magic-making) these children are eager to observe and participate as they please, either as dancers or by developing their proficiency at particular ritual tasks. They are welcome to beg food or treats from the table spreads and are well-tolerated by adults who often ignore them until children make themselves a nuisance or demand attention. The lwa are often eager to meet them and speak of risks facing them, though it is not until 4-years-old that most children can distinguish a powerful lwa from the normal adult in possession. Then, they will no longer call the adult by their proper name or title, and

By this age, their primary relationship with one or two lwa is already roughly known, given their developing personalities. At the very least, persons in the courtyard community know what sort of lwa inhabit and protect the child’s body, being that such knowledge is often a direct or indirect effect of the treatment ceremonies and conversations with the lwa that proceed out of the illnesses of infancy. They are treated accordingly, with hotter assemblages of lwa treated with more deference and a higher effort to placate them, while children with presumably cooler lwa are subjected to more severe tones and chastisement.
Sharing Spaces

There are three main centers of domesticity in Nel’s courtyard; her daughter Ninev’s rooms, Nel’s rooms, and Nanis’s rooms at the back. All the other adults, Cassanne, Zhedd, Yvon, have their own little rooms, but they belong to the domestic centers that Ninev, Nel, and Nanis keep. Each has its own tables, chairs, decorations, and—most importantly—cookware and serving ware.

Ninev and Nel often work in perfect tandem—not so much as a virtue of Haitian household structure, but because both Ninev and Nel are both uniquely talented cooks as well as creative entrepreneurs who rarely, if ever, have disputes. When one is otherwise occupied, the other takes over their tasks seamlessly. Nel manages her room and the surfaces of her public courtyard and the entrances to rooms early in the morning (employing the children of the courtyard). When finished, she prepares delicious Haitian coffee and, money allowing, will send for sweetened condensed milk to add to the already rich, nutty sweetness of local beans.

Visitors often come during the earliest part of the day, around 6:00 am to 6:30 am, perhaps on their way to a garden or a market, but still interested in Nel’s hospitality. Ninev will not sit during this time, for she is busy preparing her house, rousing her three-year old boy, Waglet (or leaving him to sleep), preparing a bit of cassava porridge, cleaning up her rooms (and often Nel’s rooms) of the dirt and dust that the prior day brought in.

Sharing Skin

People vary in their talent for washing both households and themselves. Ninev was known for her capacity to squish the soap through the towel with just one hand, but all other women and most men can use the same motor technique to create a forceful
stream of bubbles with its distinct sound. Making the sound is equivalent to washing or knowing how to wash “konn lave” things, and knowing how to scrub one’s body well while bathing. Furthermore, many children learn to appreciate the assemblage of squeaking hands, cool water, slippery bubbles, and gentle touch.

The social skin is heavily maintained in Sou Lapwen not only through acts of monitoring and divining but also through everyday acts of touch such as those required in feeding each other, bathing, and dwelling together. Practices of bathing, for example, define and maintain the margins of the body-self. Adults bathe infants on a daily basis if they are healthy, and if they are unhealthy they bathed in ritual preparations of herb and water, often the same sort they are given to drink in cases of illness. This proves that living bodies do not only consume through their mouth, they are permeable and absorb medicine as well as illness through the skin’s surface, too.

Cras comes to be known through processes of care that our caretakers demonstrate to us (Figure 2-12)(Figure 2-15). Likewise, the mark of a neglected child is an accumulation of cras. Good, social, loving caretakers will take turns washing babies from their first days until they slowly learn how to wash themselves well enough to satisfy a family (something that will not often take hold until teenage years). Children are taught about cras and the way that cleanliness feels through practices of interaction with caregivers in water.

When water is drawn and a basin is prepared, most infants learn that water and soap are pleasant things, playful things (even if the occasional suds get in an eye). Infants become acclimated to circumstances very quickly—and bathing becomes a rhythmic bodily expectation. First, the child is denuded (if they are not already naked),
then if old enough to sit they will be placed in a laundry basin of clear water drawn from the canals and warmed under the sun. The caretaker, or lucky visitor (for visitors are sometimes offered the soapy task), will hold the baby and drip water from the basin on to their bellies to introduce their skin to the water before their body enters it.

If the baby can sit on their own, which happens at around three and a half to four months, they are let to lean over their front legs in an inch or so of water, and gently soaked with water using a small cup. Caretakers avoid exposing the infants' chest and head directly to water when they are ill. Many infants will not have their heads or chests soaked with water in this way, which is a periodic response to illness. As the water is gently spilt over their bodies, they are usually delighted. However, for whatever reason, the water will sometimes make an infant fuss or even outright sob, a reaction which caretakers respond to with furrowed brows, pleas, and assurances. This is one of the only times that caretakers will continue an activity through an infant’s protests.

Then, caretakers soap them up using their small personal hand towel, or a pair of bundled and clean women’s panties (which are the same size). With this cloth, the child is vigorously massaged in circular motions across the back. This often topples them over but caretakers expect and protect against this by planting their other arm on the child’s chest if it is very young, under six months or so, or otherwise they plant it in front of them, palm on the bottom of the washing basin. This way, caretakers easily redirect their children’s bodies when they lose balance, encouraging them to rebalance themselves but offering the initial helping effort. Like an adult, a child is not clean until they have clean necks and upper backs, lower bellies, underarms, folds of skin, wrists, ears, and areas in between toes. Each of these areas is soaped up, often multiple
times, before the baby is rinsed, removed from the bath, and laid on the caretaker’s lap where they often fall asleep as the process continues.

Across a lap, caretakers check that the baby is truly clean, rubbing the skin to see if they can still find cras on it. If no cras stays on the skin, they turn to other realms of the body, checking the infant’s eyes, cleaning out their nostrils, the sides of their mouth, perhaps retouching the areas behind their ears. If the child is three months or under, the caretaker will take the child’s nipples between her or his finger tips and massage and pinch them until “dlo a soti”, or “the water runs out”. Usually, a few drops of milky white fluid come out. However, the process is more important than the result, and it ensures that the child is clean. The baby is then powdered and dressed, often having fallen into a deep sleep (Figure 2-13, 2-14).

Bathing will also cease to occur in basins around the time the child reaches six months–24 months, or more specifically until they grow too large to bathe in basins or until they refuse to sit in the basin at all and instead wish to imitate the bathing styles of adults. In this manner, they will begin standing by a courtyard resident as she (or less often, he) bathes. When the child reaches four and is quite independent, they are encouraged to bathe of their own initiative except on school days, where caretakers frequently take charge of bathing and grooming to ensure it is done perfectly. At other times, they can be seen plodding along the white stone road with a towel and a tin can holding soap and a rag, trying to catch up with some teenager ahead who will bathe in the stream.

When a child has gone too long without being cleaned during the day, or if they have accumulated cras due to some activity or mishap, they are usually derided in
subtle and indirect ways. “Ou we salòp sa?” (Do you see that slob?) Felicie will jokingly say to me about her grandson, who is fully in hearing distance. “Ou we kras ki sou lì? Pa manyen l. Kòchon.” (You see that filth on him? Do not touch him. Pig). These indirect comments are very effective at changing behavior; they socially pressure the child to be more attentive to keeping their bodies clean of sweat, oils, or dead skin.

Adults, when bathing themselves, pay most attention to a series of positions on their body which correspond with the points that are touched and crossed over during child baptisms. We scrub the ears and neck, the scalp, and the hair, except at night when hair will not dry and can grow mildew if left wet too long (Figure 2-16). The hands, the chest, the feet, knees, elbows, wrists, ankles, and derriere, are all scrubbed very well. I imitated at first and quickly learned if my efforts were insufficient. Women in the courtyard laughed as I bathed. In this way, I learned of the cras that adolescent women and adolescent men possess in their genitals, and the importance attached to appropriately cleaning them.

It was as if a courtyard effort was organized on my behalf, with not a half day going by without one of the women quizzically looking me over, telling me not to fear douching, pleading with me to douche. Interactions became desperate, embarrassed, and viscerally detailed. I began insisting, repeatedly, that I could not douche. I claimed that the doctor prohibited it, which is true enough in the United States. I would not douche, I said. It could make me ill. Nonetheless, the fluid of the vagina is cras and dlo, the same sort as other unwanted fluids of the body. As such, it was a matter far outside the limited jurisdiction of the doctor. Nanis, Nel, Carmelite, Ninev, Gaen, all explained to
me that unclean vaginas are sticky, unpleasant to feel, unpleasant to have sex with, and
downright embarrassing.

I did not last longer than those few months due to the importance of hygiene in
lubricating social interactions. It is hard to think of oneself as filthy, genitals or otherwise,
and still get comfortably along with others. It is hard not to think of oneself as filthy when
the women are so concerned. It was a roadblock to smooth interactions, I found. By not
douching, I was bothering the courtyard as one of the women in the courtyard, creating
a sense of everyone as untidy and potentially filthy. Soon, I learned how to fake it in the
bedroom, feigning shy in a corner with Nel listening in her bed, as I sloshed the water
around, terrified of the bacteria on my fingers “yes, so much better!” I would say. “Ahhh!
See?” she would say. And I could move forward, and go to sleep, arrange my body
freely on the bed in a nightgown and fall asleep (I was always first to bed.)

Before sleeping, it is equally important to bathe, and the night bath usually given
the heat, given that the sheets must last more than a night, given that the hot rooms
maximize any foul smells at all, no matter how small. Importantly, persons must also
bathe at night so that the dirt on their skin doesn’t rub up against the dirt of others. I
would often go to a walled off section of earth with a bucket of water. The bucket is
small and within it rests a single cactus bud, broken open, whose slime has swallowed
all the dirt and sediment in the water from the stream, making the once brown, muddy
water clear and clean. With cups, we bathe ourselves, pouring water and then soaping
up a loofa or handkerchief or the underwear we have worn. Cleansing it and then using
a special practiced hand motion that makes the suds explode out in large bubbles when
we squeeze. Without this sort of suds, the skin does not become clean.
Courtyard Difference

In the morning, Nanis is often at her own room in the courtyard, preparing morning spaghetti with aransèl for her hungry teenagers, fixing hair and preparing to send them off to school. Sometimes, she is not there at all and only later comes heavily, sleepily, and loudly into the courtyard after a night of dominos, chit chat, and fun, perhaps at a party in town, or more likely just enjoying the company of her older brothers. There is but a few hours of free time in the early day before Nel begins the large meal and the day truly begins unfolding.

When Nel is ill (for illness always haunts the courtyard), Ninev takes over all the domestic duties for preparing large meals, as well as the more private and sacred tasks of sweeping the earth ground in the entire courtyard, having the neighborhood boys take leaves and debris away in a wheelbarrow, and then watering “wouze” the concrete surfaces of the house and yard to pull the limestone dust downward and away from the faces of the visitors (it also makes the ground lovely and shiny). She then takes over the midday meal, while wrangling her youngest children into Nanis’s care, or the care of Gaen, her cousin. Her eldest boy, Zhedd, is out for most of the day with his friends, downloading and swapping music for the cellphone he took from his mother. However, even he is back just in time for the mid-day meal.

Nanis, Nel’s sister, is the third domestic head in Nel’s courtyard. She lives with a teenage daughter, Nathaima , as well as Gaen (aged 20 in 2013) and her youngest son, Yvon (aged 19 in 2013) who inhabit the rooms and floors of the various structures on the land. When Gaen became pregnant in 2014, her small room began filling with gifts from her unborn child’s father, and he made plans to construct a separate building for her near the back of the property. Nanis also has older sons who live in the United
States, one in New York and one in Miami. She is a cook by trade, preparing fried foods
at night to sell on the dirt road, fried plantains or fried fish for 25 gourdes, and 50 for a
chicken drum. Although her rooms and meals are much smaller compared to Nel’s, she
too has extended mouths to fill. Nanis will prepare special fritay for her youngest brother
and best friend, Anperè, the powerful oungan at the crossroads whose peristil is filled
with elaborate paintings. The other part of her meals go to her secret lover, the town
Azèk (provincial political leader), though it is a poorly kept secret indeed.

Nanis’s daughter Nathaima, who is now a budding 13-year-old, is always eager
to be out with friends and turns up in others yards for meals, rarely returning home. She
has learned how to leave the courtyard without being noticed. She slips through the
narrow openings in the concrete walls behind the house, or the small grown-over trail
between the woven banana trellis-fence on the side of her yard, apparently while
thinking “laundry and housework be damned!”. Thus, her mother is often at her wit’s
end, already drowning under the labor-intensive tasks necessary to survive the day. As
children move into adolescence, they begin to focus more on developing themselves
socially, dating, and other concerns of youth. During this time, they often spend a good
few years without much interest in ceremonial practice, the lwa, or the shared forces
that inhabit their world, though they are still strongly acculturated into practice because
of their ongoing role in caring for infants.

Yet, despite Nanis’s frustration with Nathaima, she (like other parents) rarely
gives any real discipline for neglect of duties. Instead, her loud and indirect complaints
are often enough to curtail the behavior for at least a few days when Nathaima returns.
On Nanis’s side of the courtyard, goats must be taken to pasture and water, they must
change pastures several times, sticks must be gathered for fire as the charcoal is prohibitively expensive, food must be cooked (taking several hours), a large bowl of picklis (a delicious and spicy local salad which is very finely chopped) must be prepared for her evening commerce of fritay, the house must be rigorously cleaned, dishes must be scrubbed, laundry must be done, and her other daughter, Gaen, must be assisted as well. Gaen was pregnant, and now has a bubbly toddler, Gémima, who is a joy in the courtyard and whom Nanis often watches over.

For two decades, the family has shared the single latrine at the back of the courtyard, which I have become accustomed to. I have decided, like the others, the best time to use it is 9 AM or so in the morning, given that night brings swarms of cockroaches and midday saturates the corrugated metal with terrible odors and a thick, wet heat. It was wisely built under a broad tree, Gran Bwa’s tree, which shades it nearly all the day and is thus far more comfortable, with less odor, than most of the toilets I have used in other rural houses in Haiti. It is a lean-too which has grown less stable over the years, constructed of tòl, with a door that rolls back and can be pulled forward for modesty with a bit of old cloth tied through a small hole. Thus, you can tuck yourself in like a little fish in a metal sardine can, staring at the makeshift door and the word “zonbi” is scrawled somewhat inexplicably on the inside of the door, rather than the outside where it is found elsewhere in the courtyard.

Things change, though. Nanis’s house is expanding as her ex-lover (and father of Nathaima ) has generously agreed to design and construct a more solid home now that Nanis’s son from New York has sent money to help his mother. Yet all relationships
have their private tensions, tensions which tend to grow into strong emotions, which themselves become barbs that sicken the courtyard.

To Nel, Nanis is often a cause of concern. Though they love each other deeply as sisters, they are very, very different and they have likewise chosen to live their lives to reflect this. Nanis, in Nel's eyes, is a rambunctious and rebellious younger sister who does not heed wisdom or sense, but who lives the courtyard and her own life with energy and play. To Nanis, Nel is a highly respectable but too-controlling authority figure—she takes things too seriously, is too anxious. Nanis is often at odds with Nel's sharp, upright, and commanding presence, and Nel is rarely so sharp and upright unless Nanis is near. Nanis often does not follow Nel's advice, and this often backfires (for we all know that Nel is nearly always right), but she does not take this into consideration and listen to Nel more often. Thus, there is a prickly level of tension in the courtyard between them—it results in long silences, snubs, or flashing eyes (kout jè) in the courtyard. Very rarely, it will escalate into shouts and involve members of the extended family. When it is at its usual, low level, this tension provides much needed energy and entertainment, and often brings Nel and Nanis to a roaring laughter.

After some such half-remembered dispute in the past, Nanis began preparing her own midday meal, less sumptuous then the Manbo’s, though they still exchange token bits of cooked food on platters in a show of good form. Much of their differences are embodied and ingested in their preparation of separate food for the midday meal—It is uncommon to cook two separate meals in the same courtyard. It may have begun with a dispute, but it is clearly all for the better. Nanis’s tastes vary greatly from Nel's traditional and hearty meals. Nanis enjoys the pungent flavors of aransèl (salted and grated
alewives), imported spaghetti noodles, canned foods, boxed goods, and other new items she has found in the market place. Nel, on the other hand, is very wary of anything imported. She will reluctantly pretend to try gifts of imported food, though she really gives them away to the children at the first possible moment. She is worried about what they contain and how they were made. Though they inhabit the same space, Nel and Nanis drift in and out of intimate closeness with each other, always orbiting the same domestic sphere.

Then, of course, we must speak of the researcher. I have been adopted as a daughter of Nel’s in the courtyard, a fact accepted broadly by the community and one that means I (like everyone else) am often relaying messages and news back and forth for Nel, or fetching an herb for a concoction, or another such task. Everyone in Sou Lapwen is aware that there is an adopted blan woman living with Nel, and most are vaguely aware of my back story at Sou Lapwen after the earthquake. However, no one knows of this story in the distant market, Jamestown, where Nel buys and sells food.

**Figuring Out the Ill**

Nel’s house is often the busiest house on the street during the day. Women frequently brought their ill babies, and friends and relatives come to eat Nel’s food. They reminisce about her budding restaurant when she would sell food a decade earlier. Being so very busy, her courtyard was different from the other houses in the neighborhood. In other houses, like Elda’s, people do indeed come and visit throughout the day but to a lesser extent. She frequently solicits these visits from inside the house, shouting to a passerby who neglects to say hello. Her courtyard is small, where she resided only with her two girls and her husband, but it is across the street from her
sister’s courtyard and they are nearly always together. The same could be said for Patricia, the nurse, whose home on the corner always has two or three people around.

Most if not all afflictions are an effect of, or otherwise involve, the diminishing quantity of nanm within the body, the invasion of afflicting nanm, or some other erratic behavior of nanm in or around one’s body. Likewise, medicinal treatments involve the exchange, repulsion, attraction, removal, insertion, or adaption of nanm in any number of relevant assemblages impinging upon the issue. Nanm can be given or sent away, nanm can be stolen, drained, shared, or propagated, it can be bound and stored or hidden underground.

Practitioners like Nel diagnose and treat these illnesses by honing their awareness to the micro-ecology of their lakou a (given that nanm is shared and food dispersed here), and in a less precise way, to the ecology of the bitasyon (dwelling place) where their lakou a exists. They do this through years of practices including walks in the vision realm, communication with other oungan and manbo, and the adoption of Vodou “parents” in outside communities who have practiced longer than they have. This also involves being acutely sensitive to the words and signs of the Iwa, but also to plants, animals, winds, events and so forth, all of which exists in the courtyard. Such leaders are not solely responsible for service and respect of the Iwa, which is a collective responsibility. Rather, they act as emergency staff and vigilant guards, while many of the day-to-day behaviors related to Iwa and the world are carried out by others, according to their particular talents.

At some point, a person’s defenses will not be high enough or strong enough, and one or more forces in their body will fall prey to jealousy, sorcery, or magic. Should
it be severe, they (as an assemblage of forces) and those closest to them will return to a site of ancestral power. The best sort is the homeland where one or one’s parents were raised, where the connection to the lwa is the strongest and where one began personing to begin with. In such a situation, one’s treatment will depend on communication and assistance from the lwa, and participation from friends and associates who help constitute the patient. Presuming one recovers from this incursion or another of the sort, one will still die at some later point.

Indeed, total knowledge of the world and its specific inhabiting beings is virtually impossible to all except God (Gran Mèt), although the lwa can be quite accurate if one maintains a good relationship with them. General epistemological uncertainty is no cause for either anxiety nor elation. Instead, it is the fundamental condition of the world, and the uncertainty of outcomes and forces in the world is the reason that action by beings is both possible and worthwhile. It is part of a continual process of reworking, manipulation, and revolution. Things exist that we can’t even imagine, though undoubtedly in existing they have nanm. Thus, the principles of nanm and uncertainty are the backdrop for changes, movements, and circumstances, as well as the ritual and more everyday courses which can be taken to secure one’s path in life.

Thus, to be a successful practitioner one must be wise, and wisdom in these parts is equated with the calculated vigilance of one’s permeable social skins. Thus, all too often, Anperè or Menfò will speak to their families and neighborhood friends to warn them of impending catastrophe that they have been shown upon the horizon. Closer to home, practitioners may refuse to allow certain persons to leave the courtyard, should they have sensed danger or unwanted events. This was the case once with Waglet, the
Manbo’s grandson, whom she plucked as he was leaving, pulling him back to the peristil while his mother complained and while the Manbo shouted about a car accident. Such vigilance does not only produce negative signs upon the horizon; one's vigilance towards positive influences is the key to continued prosperity. In first coming to Sou Lapwen, I was part of an exercise in the Manbo’s ability to navigate and manage courtyard influences. I was welcomed into the courtyard only after I appeared in a series of dreams to her during her daughter’s illness, a sign which indicated to her (and others in her family) that the lwa had an affinity for me and that I could be a good resource.

When someone appears to be sick, the sickness is not experienced as being within that person so much as expressed through that person. In many cases, grave diseases do not emerge happenstance, like some long-buried seed which just now takes root. Rather, they are shot through a community like a poisoned arrow-passing person after person until it finally plants itself in the soil of its long-sought courtyard or foot-worn path. From there, it finds its target person and begins spreading its vile miasma towards them, crippling them, and by extension enfeebling their entire close kin network whose safety, selfhood and survival are largely coextensive with their own.

Kin give money, help to seek aid, consult oungan and manbo, all to remedy not simply the single, isolated person but rather to find and dispose of the ‘arrow,’ which has torn a supra-individual rift in the lakou a on its flight path. Like Congo nkisi, people and things do not exist in isolation or within themselves, their being or becoming continually occurs in the interstitial space between self and other, creating a body that contains flesh and bone but shares a circulatory system with other selves, with ancestors, and with the world.
The particular constituency of forces that make you in life tends to disassemble and reconfigure after death (Sommerfeld 2010; Hertz 1960). The constituents which together helped form their body can stick together but more often than not hurry down their different paths from where they can join into new and ever-evolving assemblages. Perhaps one goes with the coffin to the graveyard where it might later be harvested, and one might go to the waters where it can later be called up and emplaced in the crowd of the Ancestor-Gods, others to the trees, some straight out of the atmosphere into other planets, others becoming iwa (Desmangles 2000). Specifics are very difficult to determine, and every case can be unique. The overall process of growing, change, and association is more important than any of its individual effects.

After death, this nanm, as substance, can remain circulating in the bones of the graveyard. The zonbi-nanm which inhabits bodily remains can be made to work as a powerful tool in ekspedisyon (a ritual sending of the dead). It can also be fragmented into shards for other travay (work). Or, if treated improperly, certain nanm can become angry and harass living relatives of the deceased at home, and the families may then decide to entomb it within a govi (small-mouthed, wide clay jar for holding nanm) to escape further attack (Courlander 1973).

Nanm is therefore not a static entity in life, nor is it equivalent to the personality or “self” of the person. Rather, it is one of many flows that is adjusted periodically and as life circumstances demand. Such adjustments require the training and continual learning of Vodou practitioners. Over a lifetime, these forces learn to adjust into harmony with others and with each other—exploring their limits as well as learning about their interconnectivity with others in the world (See Figure, 2–20). There is no final
resting state towards which they aim, no being that is perfectly balanced and in need of no further work. A person’s survival and success depend on how well they (already an assemblage of ancestral, willful, diverse, forces) develop by integrating with other folk, other relatives, ancestors, fields, or the lwa that protect them.

Together, a nested and networked unit of persons and practices works in tandem to create a multiplied experience of personhood that is strong enough to prevent the incursion of negative forces at a variety of levels. The specific constituents in the network change through time and circumstance as people move elsewhere in the world, have children perhaps, become augmented or reduced by changing associations.

**Conclusion**

When blankety applied to Haitian Vodou, terms such as “soul” and “spirit” tend to erroneously bifurcate and exoticise Haitian “spirit” being in contrast with mundane, natural “bodies” and bodily being. Likewise, it is unsound and problematic to accentuate ad-hoc divisions between Vodou nations and Afro-Creole practices (such as Rada vs Petwo, Vodou vs. Palo) without serious ethnographic and ethnohistorical investigation. Ethnographers should carefully weigh their desire to succinctly generalize religious traditions against the histories of Western colonization, plentifully enacted vis a vis accentuating and promoting religious and ethnic divisiveness in African and American pasts and presents. Even when used with care and caveats, terms like “soul” (translated for Nanm) and “evil” (for describing Petwo) channel very specific historical flows which can silence the diversities and multiplicities which are the very vitality of ritual practice.

Take the example of foreign nanm, which passes by our bodies all the time, yet it doesn’t demand notice and leaves no mark. In other cases, persons come to notice
these interactions only retroactively as their flesh carries a trace, perhaps some powder or air, which demands that the person exercise caution so as not to spread it to others. Still other persons will feel the pointed and powerful effects of unknown nannm encounters much later, when the nannm has had time to eat away at their insides, a fact that leads them to the doorstep of practitioners.

We must move to a language of noticing, feeling, and touching if we are to have any understanding of the embedded experiences of being-nanm in the world. Such touch is rich and varied and emotionally real. It couples the inter-perceiving persons; it is not simply skin to skin, but eye to skin, surface to surface, ear to sound, nanm to nanm. One polices oneself, one shivers, one moves to the other side of the river. One’s body has been felt by the surface of another. As their eye meets and touches the hanging zonbi in a tree, the twisted up string.

Within the context of lives like these, Vodou adherents perceive and manipulate nanm in daily as well as ritual practices, all deeply informed by Vodou epistemologies and behavioral norms. To survive, or to be responsible, clean persons, or to relay messages from the dead, or as an expert on zonbi, one must already be interacting in communion with a diverse and interpenetrating ecology of human and non-human forces. This is accomplished as much in day-to-day practices of living, bathing, and eating, as it is in ritual practices of healing, protection, or divine consultation, which necessitates ritual expertise. Over the course of life, certain nanm can be changed, attacked, diminished, or strengthened, or even removed from the body altogether, whether through normal life processes or ritual intervention (e.g. Courlander 1973; Alvarèz and Murray 1979; Sommerfeld 1994). Through these daily projects, subjects
are corporeally bound to each other and made each other. This ecology touches us and we touch it again through caressing, cleansing, soaping, and preparing our skin, with others, as shared skins and selves.

Figure 2-1. The antique remnants of a very large wasp nest, rich with nanm, sit in the ancient lwa house of Nel's ancestors in Sou Lapwen.
Figure 2-2. Nel listens closely while the Iwa Brav, as Tiya, speaks to her about their relationship.
Figure 2-3. Nanm-replete substances engaged work atop a ritual three-legged pot.
Figure 2-4. A bull’s head hangs from Bossou’s tree in the courtyard of Anperè, resplendent with hanging food, work, and the signs of vows embedded with iron into its surface.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some Existing Definitions of Nanm</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The vital force to give life to the body and blood&quot;</td>
<td>Jacques and Douyon 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the four dimensions of the human being, as distinct from the rest</td>
<td>Sterling 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>The whole of the soul, made up of heterogeneous parts</td>
<td>McAlister 1995, Desmangles 2000; Rigaud 1989 166; Deren 1953</td>
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<tr>
<td>A general name for a divine animating principle present in nearly all things (both animate and inanimate); a specific one of these animating principles. Nanm related to ionbrij (similar to shadow, but more specialized)</td>
<td>Sommerfeld 1994.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soul and personality</td>
<td>McAlister 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;only one of the complex of forces that constitute a person. A person’s nam is usually understood as the animating force of the body. The most immediate effect of death is the departure of the nam, which is sometimes said to linger for a short period of time around the corpse or grave. The nanm is an evanescent thing that disappears soon after death.&quot;</td>
<td>Brown 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of two types—bon nam and gwo nam. One bad, one good. Bon nanm synonymous with anj</td>
<td>Brodwin 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animating force (flies after death)</td>
<td>Brown 1989</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;The nanm represents vital energy, strength, vigor and is distinct from the spiritual soul defined in Western thought. It is like a condiment of corporeal existence, much as salt is to food. As they say in Haiti, the salted pork, the ti salb, ; nanm to peas, or to bean soup. Not so long ago, there talk of soul music, of soul food, in order to signify a special link with profound life&quot;</td>
<td>Taylor 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Soul, conscience, substance, energy&quot;</td>
<td>Cosentino, ed 1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 2-5. A variety of definitions of nanm in the literature.
Figure 2-6. A hurting and frustrated Carmelite looks on, upset that she has been injured by her brother, Walken, who has inadvertently hurt her by remotely sending powerful negative intentions and utterances. He apologizes, takes responsibility, and later bathed her back in herbs to heal her.
Figure 2-7. Temporally extensive diagram of nanm within a courtyard. Roots stretch down into Ginnen (the ancestral home and Other World) and the ancestral past, future directions reach out from beings within, and helper nanm-bodies hang from the outstretched branches.
Figure 2-8. The Manbo prepares meat for a small feast, surrounded by weekly groceries, eating a snack, and tossing food to her dogs.
Figure 2-9. Panorama the courtyard at a still moment, standing in Bossou’s garden. Left hutch is Brav’s house, with a tree reaching over it for a lwa whose name is unknown, next to several important rock-nanm. The rocky hill includes the siwel trees of Gran Bwa, and Gran Bwa is also found at the back center. The iron bar is for Ogun and, on occasion, Lisifye, with a collected deposition of ash from prior ceremonies. And on the right, is the most social of the trees, the tree of Atibon Legba. Hanging in trees and buried beneath the earth, the courtyard is replete with matter, paper, food, plates, pins, each remembering a particular moment in the life and flesh of courtyard activity.
Figure 2-10. Brav, a Gede Iwa, (as Tiya) wakes the courtyard and visits, speaking with each of us in turn. A candle is lit for her as she takes a seat inside of her house on Nel's property. She expresses frustration that the author has not yet painted her image (author and artist painted sacred images on Nel's peristil)
Figure 2-11. Gaen holds Gémima upright at five months old, and as part of her casual daily routine, shows her how to dance to the drum music playing on the radio by bouncing and swaying and moving her arms.
Figure 2-12. Locations of cras on the body of infants and in other substances and objects (a dish pan, an egg, chicken breasts).
Figure 2-13. Elda powders her daughter after the bath.
Figure 2-14. A young local woman babysits the infant son of her neighbor, taking a moment to caress his skin while her own niece looks on in the background.
Figure 2-15. Young women going to bathe in the water at nightfall, catching a crawdad for an infant in the courtyard.
Figure 2-16. Nel washes her head with an herbal concoction which the lwa requested in a dream-vision.
CHAPTER 3
FEAR

Costs of Certain Powers

During the night some people have the power to fly through the air with a big red flame under their arms. These are the werewolves. (Price Mars 1945: 38)

There are times when you wake up in the morning, bathe, clean up the house, and a person passes by, then wham. The baby gets diarrhea. The way it happens, if it’s the werewolf that is eating the baby, it’s the meat-nanm that it desires. So you go pound aransèl (alewives) with garlic. You make the child stand in the crossroads. You kill a chicken and make a cross with its blood upon all the pwen of the child’s body. When you are done, you put fresh water into the aransèl (alewives) and garlic and other ingredients, you bathe the child with it. (Menton, Oungan, Miwòt).

In this chapter, I examine werewomen in Haitian lives and the efforts townspeople make in order to counteract them.\(^1\) The problem of werewomen is a deeply emotional and material one. It presents a real issue of insecurity to Central Haiti, posing questions about women relate to other women and families within communities, and rooting this in how infants differentially fall ill and die.

At their most basic, werewolves are generalized as being merchant women who acquire the ability to shape-shift after buying (and using) strong magic to sell their wares. Concomitant with their shapeshifting abilities comes an insatiable hunger for infants. Lougawou satisfy this hunger by alighting onto roofs or trees and sucking out a sleeping infant’s nanm by using their eyes.

\(^1\) Although some will object to my use of the term werewolf or were-woman I use the term to preserve a sensitivity to the name of the phenomena in Haiti, while acknowledging the multiplicity of other designations that could be used and that relate to other specificities of the phenomena. Following Deleuze’s (1990: 50-51) reading of names, designations, and their (non)senses, I will point out that although the phenomena known as lougawou to Haitians bears upon a broader phenomena which has (for better or for worse) been titled “witchcraft” by anthropological scholars, the phenomena of lougawou in Haiti is like that phenomena known by scholars as “were-animals”, is named lougawou in Haiti, a name which can be translated in English as “werewolf”, and which can be described as were-women in the regions of the study.
Infancy is an extremely risky time in Sou Lapwen. Parents, on average, reported losing nearly 25% of all infants born alive within their first three years (Jordan 2014, unpublished survey). Many parents and families still feel these events deeply, even if they happened long ago, just as these same families were hurt anew by multiple werewolf-attributed deaths during my investigation. Added to this, some families avoided discussing or mentioning those infants who died because by doing so, they believed they were implicitly addressing the matter of the werewolf who killed them, likely to be a person in the community. This chapter was built as much on things done as it is built on things left alone, discarded, forgotten. As bòkò Young said to me repeatedly: “This is a fragile topic, Ali, a fragile topic.”

Unwrapping themselves at night, certain women are said to become dogs that speak Creole, donkeys as large as houses, turkeys whose eyes burn with light, crickets that glow red, or infants that weep blood. Their eyes focus outward and hook into infants like parasites, consuming them little by little, making them shrivel up and shrink under a violent enchantment---a gross departure from the ways the people, and head courtyard women in particular, are expected to nourish and grow infants. Werewolves swallow with their eyes rather than give with their hands. They are said to vomit up what they eat reversing the normal gastrointestinal process. After vomiting up the namn of a gradually consumed child, and gushing up blood and energy into the form of fish, matches, or wares, they can then sell it for a profit at the marketplace.

Werewomen’s existence, and communal counteraction of their tendencies, has marked the flesh and folklore of communities across Haiti. Through crisscrossing insinuations, experiences, and illnesses werewolves are made flesh in Sou Lapwen In
this work, I attend to the multi-vocality of werewolf fears, experiences, attacks, and accusations by taking an assemblage-based approach to the problem of werewolves, paying close attention to how persons isolate them as a phenomenon and manage their effects (Figure 3-1).

The first portion of the chapter, “Werewomen Assemblages,” discusses seven components which come together to form the werewolf assemblage---as residents encounter it---in daily life. The second portion of the chapter, “Managing Werewomen,” highlights the various social bottlenecks which seek to contain and channel away werewomen’s effects on communities.

Werewolves bear down on certain nights and certain roofs, they bewitch this or that hole in concrete walls, they inhale particular infants with wide, staring eyes. Tugging on the local marketplace, dragging on the local roads, they are known to us through our relations with everyday sites and practices. Finally, I explore how Sou Lapwen residents intervene upon werewolves by managing infants.

**Werewomen Assemblages**

As Nanis sat preparing food, she jumped at the chance to speak of lougawou away from Nel’s ears, who would discourage such conversation. “In Sou Lapwen,” she explained, “there are lougawou, but no one knows who.” She was sitting over a fire, bringing spaghetti noodles to a boil, to which she would add aransèl, or salted alewifes.

“What are lougawou exactly?” I asked again. By now, Nanis was used to me asking such questions—the same sort—day after day. When she did not know the answer, she would find someone who did in the large town. Yet in the matter of lougawou, Nanis needed little outside help. She was well versed in the matter, as she helped with many of the treatments Nel performed in the courtyard. Patiently, she
rephrased an explanation she had given me before: “lougawou are the things that kill children to eat them. When they get a hold on the child, they kill them. Nel is used to seeing a lot of kids with lougawou problems, Anperé too. It makes the kids unable to eat, drink, sleep.”

“What can be done about it? I mean, what happens when an infant is ill, when the werewolf won't let go?” I asked.

“What can be done?!” Nanis exclaimed, “Look here, I'll tell you what can be done. There is some magic you can do. Of the sort that Anperè and Nel do. You can have a bòkò do magic too. This magic makes it so the werewolf cannot finish off the child.”

There was a pause in the conversation, during which she added aransèl and I helped cut onions (Figure 3-3) (Figure 3-6).

Nanis watched carefully as I worked, and even though I had done it many times before I was still in need of correction for cutting them too thickly, holding the knife wrong, doing it carelessly, or wasting bits of the onion. We chatted about what was missing in the food, money being such that we couldn’t put in fresh carrots or green peppers to our afternoon meals but once or twice a week.

Before the sun came to burn us and push us and everyone else into the backyard, I asked: “What do you, personally, think are the main reasons that babies and young children die?” Nanis said, “The number one reason is lougawou. The moment the lougawou has seen the child, they have already had a chance to consume them. The next reason includes normal infant illnesses, and finally, perhaps neglect. But that isn’t common.”
I speak of werewolf assemblages in order to point out the historiographic depth and internal cohesion of this phenomenon. Werewomen are known because they have marked and continue to mark people’s lives, and because they and their effects are witnessed in this process. In the work of existing, werewolves come into contact with real families and leave their dreaded marks—seen in the injured bodies, the wailing, and the infant burials. In speaking of assembling and assemblages in this way, I borrow from the assemblage theory of authors such as Deleuze and Guattari (1988), Latour (2005, 2011, 2013), Delanda (2006), Harman (2007), and Bennett (2009).

Components of the assemblage have traveled, and are still traveling, in many directions all at once. Pieces of the whole have coalesced from a multitude of flows, some obvious and others more subterranean. There is first and foremost the flow of the word “loupgarou” through the French trade in enslaved persons, across the Atlantic in the belly and stern of groaning ships, passed into words and stories in French and then by the emerging Creoles which would come to dominate the Eastern portion of Saint Domingue. There are also those flows that carried shapeshifting experiences and fears together with witchcraft practices and preventions.

Then there are those more contemporary flows, powerful ones, that have sustained some inequalities on the island and vastly intensified others. Looking through the angle of exchange, werewolf stories do bear striking similarities with stories in South Africa and South America of which the Comaroffs and Taussig have analyzed as social critiques of structural inequalities. Elsewhere in the Caribbean similar shape-shifters, many times women, also make their rounds—even carrying the name lougarou or various iterations (see Anatol 2015). Where they are part of lives, they present a
complex problem for societies---both because real women can be identified as shapeshifters, and on the other side, because they point to the unequal misfortune facing certain infants (and others). Although there are important similarities between werewolf activities in Haiti, and phenomena elsewhere in the world such as those discussed above or witches among the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1976), were-animals and *lebu* among the Banyang (Ruel 2013: 335), *liemba* and later *nyongo* among the Bakweri (Ardener 2013: 148), *nagual* among the Nahuatl (Pitt-Rivers 2013: 190), and many more, my study will not discuss these. Instead, I have chosen to study the phenomena as it is found specifically in Haiti, and as it relates to Haitian experiences of existence as laid out in this study.

At the ground level, experiences of lougawou attacks are specific, ‘messy’ and diverse gatherings of somatic data. Thus, werewolves become real through the sounds, sights, and bodies of the community: in the babies whose bodies are shaking, or in the sour-milk smell of Rina when she lost her baby in the night and then refused to bathe, while waiting and watching the roof. The signs of such werewolf attacks were even in Manbo Nel’s face, where a circular burn still showed on her cheek after 60 years, marking the perils of her infancy and the intensity of treatments used to save her life. In the narrative of the werewoman, one sees the strangest and most grotesque animals emerge from underneath a woman’s skin, shedding her body like the zandòlit (house lizard) does. When werewomen are thought responsible for infant illness, they are presumably a close neighbor, a friend, a reliable merchant.

In this section, I map out what werewomen are and how they manifest themselves by methodologically treating them as an assembling of various component
pieces, or sensual flows, tied together through close relations. I do this by identifying and examining seven of these components that make up werewomen in village life: silenced speech, narrative rumors, market women, townswomen, jealousy and greed, the falling of night, night roads, night roofs, and shoebox coffins. In the following chapter, I explore these flows and how they intersect and create a partial outline of the phenomenon known as a werewoman in Sou Lapwen and other sites (Figure 3-1).

However, though I believe it heuristically possible to break down the constellation of feelings, spaces, and experiences that socially define werewomen in Haiti, this constellation is not a networked or divided thing in practice. It is a unified assemblage that locals in Sou Lapwen recognize when suspicious touches, envy, night roads, and infant illness crisscross each other. In other words, werewomen are actually real in Haitian life, perceived en masse, with each component carrying the others through its relations. For this reason and others, it is analytically valuable to consider werewolf phenomena as a unified assemblage that local Haitians can recognize (and in so recognizing, can seek to act upon).

**Silenced Speech**

The story of how lougawou are made and who lougawou are, epistemically-speaking, does not reliably parallel how lougawou are experienced in the phenomenal realm. Lougawou vary, like all real beings. They can be stereotyped, turned into metaphor, their name—lougawou—can be used as a jest in one breath and a deadly accusation in the next.

Often, people experience werewolves in ways that sidestep or even contradict mainstream etiologies of werewolves. In the moment of crisis, caretakers are far more concerned with the practical methods for healing infants than with identifying people
who fit the narrative of werewolves, or about anything else (Figure 3-6). With more time and patience, I was carefully taught that a space lay between what folk said and what folk meant. In that space there were stories of anguish and frustration, deep guilt, sometimes a sense of failure; all of these emotions were difficult to share with an outsider, and I blush now remembering how I must have seemed to residents, who keep their inner sorrows so private.

It took two years of visits before anyone besides a few key informants would speak about werewolves as a real force in the community. When they were discussed, it was only under the utmost security. Even in the surveys men and women would frequently avoid speaking the word "lougawou". Many of the respondents lowered their voice when I asked what it was that sickened or killed their babies. However, the tell-tale signs of their presence were everywhere—in the whispers following infant births and especially their deaths, the barred-up gates, or the men guarding the houses of newborns with machetes for ‘no reason’ (pou anyen) (Figure 3-2). When I peeked more closely at the hushed phenomenon of local lougawou, my closest informants would at first only respond: “Mwen pa konnen anyen sou bagay sa” (I know nothing about those things), or by playing dumb: “èske e pa pwason li ye?” (isn’t that a sort of fish?).

If we take pause for a moment and consider the word “lougawou” and what it means in many cases, we can see that it points to an ambiguous entity: one that is real but never fully known, that is contingent and contradictory, specific and general at the same time. Epistemological uncertainty shapes the world of the werewolf (not to mention people, things, god-ancestors, gardens, and all other entities). Although people believe werewolves to be specific (though unknown) humans in their daytime form, it is
considered exceedingly poor behavior to speculate publicly or privately on *who they might be*, unless there is a given infant in question who has failed to thrive after repeated medicinal approaches. Nonetheless, the very existence of werewoman attacks shows that there are women in the community working towards the destruction of the young:

The term lougarou is a very strong and terrifying word in rural Creole. Its emotional impact results not only from the terror felt by people against any creatures who can harm their children, *but also and largely from the fact that this epithet is applied against neighbors.* (Murray and Alvarèz 1987: 31, emphasis mine)

The term lougawou becomes a loaded one, much like a curse, something uttered only when absolutely necessary. When attacks happen, even then the word is not often used for it is not needed---the cause of illness is clear to all, in such cases, and speaking the word *lougawou* will summon a mountain of bundled tensions. It is best, in many families eyes, to simply attempt to treat the child and then be done with it. Werewomen embody a deep underlying rift in dwelling experiences that everyday life strives to set aside, as Murray and Alvarèz pointed out many decades before:

Most infant attacks are perpetrated by unknown or at least *unnamed* assailants, and when the illness is resolved, the question of *who was eating the child* likewise dissipates. Even those residents who have seen werewolves in action say that it is virtually impossible to uncover their everyday identity. In cases of protracted and unresponsive illness, however, the family can come to develop a general notion of who the culprit may be. In these situations, it is acceptable for families to privately arrange a conversation with the suspected woman, who is then asked to provide resources to treat the child, but this is a step many do not eagerly take, given the tension it can create within communities.
One gentleman in Kafou demonstrated a style of storytelling about lougawou that I came to associate with new informants who were hesitant and reasonably suspicious of my motives:

I asked James, “You heard something, you said? What did you hear before you went out and found the lougawou on the road, the woman they stoned?”

James responded, “I heard a lougawou came to take a child right out of the mothers lap. I don’t know if it’s true. I don’t know if it’s a lie.”

So I pressed him, “Okay, you don’t know, but what do you think?”

James said, “I can’t think it’s true, I can’t think it’s not true.”

When I first met Nel, she too hesitated in speaking of the phenomena. She prefaced her narratives with caveats and loopholes, and they often wound up as dead ends. She cut off conversations. However, she at least would utter the word (though she might later walk back and denied knowledge entirely):

On one such occasion, Ninev answered for Nel, explaining that werewolves did not literally bite into children: “They don’t need to really hold the child, and bite it, no. From the minute she sees the child, the child falls sick.”

I then pressed her specifically on the issue of her own son, who I had heard had fallen very ill by a werewolf attack shortly after I left the first time: “How old was Waglet when the lougawou attacked him?”

“8 months old,” She responded.

I moved to ask her about the specifics of lougawou here in Sou Lapwen: “Are werewolves only in Sou Lapwen, or are they everywhere?” I asked.
Ninev glanced at her mother who raised her eyebrows and turned back to cooking. “I don’t know; I don’t know them.” She responded.

So I moved on to speak about the earthquake which hit Haiti on January 12, 2010: “What did you hear about first after the earthquake in Port Au Prince?”

Ninev responded, “First, we heard that houses fell on people.” I nodded and approached the topic of werewolves from a different angle: “Yes. Did you hear anything about werewolves, like, going to the area?”

Felicie piped up and reiterated the one piece of information Ninev offered. “They hold them, ensorcel them, but they don’t literally pick them up. Do you know of werewolves too? Do you know of them?”

I didn’t understand: “You’re asking if I know…."

Felicie finished my sentence. “Werewolves. Do you know them?” I couldn’t tell if she meant the question personally, as if I knew a werewolf, or more generally, as if I knew of werewolves; neither made much sense at the time.

I struggled to respond: “No, um, I don’t know anyone who is a werewolf. But I have heard stories. A lot of stories. Stories after the earthquake. People said they had problems with werewolves because everyone went to sleep outside and the werewolves could just get children any which way.” This was the truth, but a deeper truth would be that many of the families who immigrated to Sou Lapwen for safety, and then left some months later, had left due to their fears of werewolves in the vicinity. Likewise, I had heard conversations in Sou Lapwen where locals mumbled about shapeshifters in the church camp brought up from Port Au Prince.
Ninev spoke: “They were sleeping on the street, on the street.” Felicie specified the conditions, “But they were under tents.” And then both together. “Yeah, and under tents.”

Nel spoke for the first time but did not look up at me, seemingly lost in the task of cutting onions. She answered my much earlier question: “Yes, we heard that but we don’t know anything about those things. We heard that, but really, really, we don’t know.”

Felicie looked over to Nel as she talks and then swiftly turned her head to me: “We don’t know about those things.”

Ninev repeated, “We don’t know those things.” I said, “Okay. You don’t know about those things. But you have heard about them, I have heard you speak. Where did you hear these things?”

Nel was the one to respond as the others had fallen silent, somewhat humbled by Nel’s implicit edict to not speak of such things at the moment.: “We heard those things in Port Au Prince.”

Ninev and Felicie nodded: “Port Au Prince, in Port Au Prince.”

I carried on: “Oh, in Port Au Prince. I guess in Port Au Prince it was a common story. Okay. Do you think a lot of people were telling that same story after the earthquake?”

I intended to turn the conversation away from Sou Lapwen and instead veer back to Port Au Prince, where it might be more dispassionately discussed. Nel again took up the reigns of the conversation: “Yes, I heard them say that. Children died, I
heard. Then others said it was the werewolves who took them, but we, here, we do not know those things.”

Again, Ninev and Felicie chimed together, at nearly the exact time: “We don’t know those things.” Ninev continued. “No.”

The emotion shone out from just under the surface of their words. They were not comfortable with me, not yet. It would take them months. But at this moment, they wanted to speak without speaking. I played the fool, pushing the limits of the sort of negation they met me with. Rudely, perhaps, but just enough to get Nel to clarify her stance. Was it speaking of it that upset her? Was it the existence of the phenomenon? Was it only me, there, asking questions, that caused anxiety.

Very softly I asked out, after noting something in my book. “Um, so do these things, whatever, they are, travel a lot at night or during the day?”


Nel flatly tried to declare an end to the conversation, veering it away from what had obviously become a charged and impolite topic. “Okay, Okay, Okay, Alissa. I don’t know who are werewolves. I do not know what this thing is called werewolves. Do you understand? I don’t know what a werewolf is.”

I nodded. “Ahhh, so if we are talking about things that aren’t well known, then it’s truly possible that these stories were made up, they aren’t true. Werewolf don’t even exist.”
Instead of growing frustrated, Nel surprised me and let a smile break on her face before seriously responding: “Okay. I don’t know if the stories are true, if they aren’t true. People said those things, but I didn’t see them. I wasn’t there. Get it?”

I said, “Yeah, I get it. It’s possible that lougawou aren’t real, maybe they don’t exist, maybe they do, maybe it’s made up.” Nel laid down her knife and tossed the cut onions into a small plastic basin for washing before they were put in the stew pot. I would get only one affirmation from her that day

She wiped her brow and sighed. While she spoke, she tilted her head to the side and looked at the ground, then at me. “Yes, lougawou exist….but it’s what you see that you talk about. If you don’t see it, you can’t say anything. How could you say something? If you don’t see it and you talk about it, you say ‘oh that werewolf is here’, that’s a sin before God. You can’t lie, come up with a false memory, you can’t act as a witness if you weren’t there. You understand? It’s what you see. If you see it you will say it’s there, and then, only then can you say: Okay. I’m holding this thing; this is the thing called a werewolf a werewolf.”

Ninev added “And then if you saw, you catch her and take her by the arm to the courts.”

Felicie echoed: “Catch her; take her by the hand. But if you didn’t see her change, if you didn’t see it happening, you can’t say anything.”

Then both together said: “You can’t say.”

Nel smiled, “Yessssss. Exactly. You can’t say anything. If you do it’s a lie.”
I sought to elicit comments on the situation in Port Au Prince: “I heard that in Port Au Prince, people killed other women because they thought they were lougawou. That’s never happened here in Sou Lapwen?”

Nel said, “We don’t have those things here, there aren’t people who do that here. There aren’t those things here.” Ninev emphatically echoed her, “Here in Sou Lapwen, there aren’t those things. There aren’t those things.”

Everything seemed to be wrapped up, but there was one loose thread that continued to bother me: “Where did you say your baby fell ill after being attacked?”

Ninev responded with a single word. “Street.”

So it was in a public area of the town. But was it truly here in a public area? Not somewhere far away? I asked: “Here, the street here in Sou Lapwen?”

Ninev nodded, “Yes, he fell sick here, but we don’t know which person did it.”

I asked abruptly, “No magic exists to figure out if the person is here or who it is?” If this was true, it would be a relief.

Nel spoke for her, “Okay. If a person is there, if they are living, if it’s you yourself that finds the werewolf and you hold her with your hands.

Others like Anperè were even less informative on that matter, deliberately teasing me and making me laugh in the process. Anperè took his turn to play the fool whilst in front of a guest who was smirking and had come to help Anperè sort through and sell many of his multi-colored sachets of magical powders:

“A lougawou?” Anperè said, “What is that, what is that…isn’t it, like, a fish? A fish that lives over there in the ocean? Yeah, I think that’s what it is.” Later, reminiscing on this conversation, others laughed and exclaimed that he treats many lougawou victims
in Sou Lapwen; like Nel, persons often come from other towns so that he can heal their children. He was nearly as popular as Nel, in this respect, and they often worked together. Soon, I would witness these treatments.

I made a breakthrough in a period of unproductive field questions about lougawou when talking to Siméon, who conversed with me about theft in a nearby community and said a woman killed in 2000 down the road had once lived in Sou Lapwen. She stole children, “vòlè timoun” and ate them, “manje timoun.” I asked another few questions, and he became silent. With respect, I backed off the on the topic.

I asked questions about the incident to Nel, to several oungan, and finally a pastor in the area, all of whom seemed to remember the incident well. “Yes, it happened,” they responded, before politely excusing themselves or changing the topic.

Two years after my first visit to Sou Lapwen, in 2013, I was better known and officially part of a local family. I was told similar versions of the following story from many different residents:

That year, in 2000, so many babies had died. Families were beside themselves, courtyards were dotted by fresh mounds of dirt no bigger than the shovels. No one even said the word werewolf in public until later, but she had been accused many times before, known as a werewolf. At the time, there were just swollen eyes, tears, silence, and the resounding power of whispers. She wouldn’t pay for treatments! She wouldn’t leave the community up the road! Insisted one couple.

When it finally happened it was probably a group of young men who did it, dragging her off into the sweaty evening, but folks say police on the roadside saw it. They were remembered to be smoking cigars and watching in the glow of the headlights. Better than jailing her for her deeds, they said. It might have been one of their babies that died, too.

In the morning, everyone found the body at Domawòt, after she had died. They left her where a recalcitrant thief was burned every decade or so. What was left of her body was split open, pulled apart, burned. The
newest dead baby was laid to rest inside her opened belly. *Upside down, face down, in her belly. That, that is what I mean by lougawou*” Siméon said.

**Narrative Rumors**

Yet there was not only silence in the question of werewomen, there were also intense bursts of speech in rumors that punctuated daily life. People could also say the word “werewoman” in jest, teasing a cheap friend, but it then also not said and still used as a hint, or shouted as an insult in a fight. In seeking education about the social processes related to werewolves and werewolf attacks, I came to see that there existed an experiential divide between the categorical and rhetorical notion of werewomen, writ large, and the particular, messy instantiation of a named person in your midst who may or may not be well behaved, who may want your baby but has learned to control themselves. Narrative rumors bridged the gap between the general and the specific as well as the spoken and the silenced.

Beyond the swapping of stories containing anonymous infants and persons, there are regular rumors about werewolf activities nearby. Such rumors are often quite obviously (to residents) couched in generalities and heresy, and rarely designate individuals whom the speaker is in regular contact with. However, they could be quite specific if frequently inaccurate elaborations about given infants and households who witnessed an attack, or who had fallen ill. Although individual people may have encouraged the growth of a certain rumor (perhaps even the parents of an afflicted child), they were quickly snatched up by the grapevine, elaborated, and passed along as communal property. From house to house, men and women shared facts on when, where, and how serious attacks were in the community. These stories were primarily
used to circulate ‘incident reports’, acting as key barometers of the health of the local infant population. When a situation is more serious, residents of Sou Lapwen informally organize themselves into groups to drop in on families with young infants, where they can check in and offer advice or engage in debate about what might be the best.

Informants consciously exchanged these speculations and they worked as one of the most powerful tools for measuring the incidence and location of threats in the area, as well as creating implicit pressure on women’s behavior and the freedom families granted to young children. Caretakers also used a werewolf-rumor “pipeline” to access medicinal and financial resources, appealing to the fact that werewolves had been sighted somewhere or another, seeking better medicine or protective strategies to ensure their infants escaped the period unassaulted.

Haitians feel lougawou as dramatically real when lougawou touch courtyards and selves directly, but this is not the only way through which lougawou manifest, and they do not only speak of lougawou in terms of direct personal experience. Rather, folks in Sou Lapwen, Nan Dó, and Kafou suspected a great deal about lougawou, and these suspicions were important ways of perceiving lougawou and learning to notice them. At the same time, they could be rewritten, added to, contradicted by phenomenological experience, and it did not shake the reality of the lougawou. There was plenty of room for contesting their identity of werewolves or contesting the story of a witness, and this is part of the explanation for how and why names are rarely spread.

Saying that one had heard of a lougawou demanded attention and concern. In one such instance, a story passed down through word of mouth that a child in La Dig had been attacked by a werewolf. Casseus eagerly brought the story by, explaining that
someone had called him to relay the narrative today. Casseus reveals that it was a neighbor far in the hills, someone a friend knew, who had committed the crime. The perpetrator was a woman who came to watch over the child when the father was away.

Casseus, aghast, began:

“The little girl came to talk to her father. The Aunt brought her over and said: ‘Look at what that woman did to her!’”

“Now, she takes the girl’s hands like this, she shows where the woman latched onto her, and she says to the father: ‘Look what she did to her!’ When the Father and Aunt grabbed the girl’s arm, they said: ‘Show us, show us what she did to you.’”

“The girl meekly gave her story: ‘She grabbed my arm hard, she said she would give me a gift of something. Then she started changing. Changing and getting bigger. Her hand hurt me and got tight, and I saw this here on my skin begin peeling back and the flesh rising up as if a cat had ripped her arm.’ Her Aunt was furious. ‘All right!’ she yelled, ‘Let’s show that woman. Let’s see what’s up.’”

“She found her sister, the girl’s mother, and took both mother and father to the accused woman’s house with the girl, and had the girl speak. [They told her to tell the story from the beginning].”

So the girl began again: ‘The woman came into the house, saying, look here, I’m your Aunty. As she came in she asked: where is your mother? I said she wasn’t here. She said she would give me a gift.’ The father turned to the woman at her doorstep and asked her, enraged ‘Now what were you going to give to my daughter? Show me that little game you played with her!’ The woman shrieked: ‘No! I didn’t show her anything, I didn’t show her anything.’ The father responded: ‘No? Didn’t you hold her hand, and as you were holding her hand you said you would give her a gift? And then, then she saw her arm peel back, rise up, and when she screamed for help, you ran off? Why did you run off if that isn’t so?’”

Nel interrupted Casseus’s oration, exclaiming: “Adje!!!! I would have dragged her off to justice.” Casseus was energized by the interruption, continuing in an uncharacteristically quick staccato tone that was full of life:

“Then the little girl…the father said, the father went like this. He said: ‘You need to show her mother the game that woman made you play.’ The
woman stood here [in front of the daughter].” Casseus motioned in front of himself to demonstrate.

“The father said again: ‘Show us that game, that little game, show me it now.’ Of course, the woman protested: ‘Me? Myself? I didn’t show her anything, okay?’ You see? But if she hadn’t shown her the game, then the girl wouldn’t be hurt so badly, burned so badly on her arm, yet still the woman insisted she didn’t show the girl anything. The woman sensed that she had to get out of there, she had to run, but before she could do so, the father took a machete and FAP! Cut her head off. Her head [practically fell off] right there on her dinner plates. The girl’s mother screamed and ran, the child screamed and ran, good lord!”

Nel laughed and said, “He gave her a big chop of the head.” She swished her hand across the air, imitating the machete slice, but was careful not to knock over the bowls of beans she was shelling on her lap. One for the fresh peas, one for the husks for the pig.

Casseus responded,

“In a single cut, Nel. I told you, YAP! There the mother goes, there the daughter goes!” He pointed at the gate, showing how they ran off. “And the head just fell off in front of the table.”

Nel reflected, “Cause now the woman would have really killed the little girl. Well done...I suppose...”

Casseus wasn’t finished, “So then mother ran off, yeah? She ran and ran and ran and found someone to do a remedy for the daughter, but later for herself too. The mother started dying, like the girl. Why were they dying? Shock!”

Without fail, someone in one of these impromptu groups exchanging stories will suggest a remedy that they ought to have done. Perhaps they will bring back a plastic sachet with western medicines or local herbs, produce thread and beads for apotropaic
charms if there is a baby, or simply suggest that the family ought to have consulted with such-and-such a healer or pastor who was well-known for resolving such matters.

Not only did these rumors obviously provide some local healers and evangelicals with fresh work, they wove a collective net of vigilance and security around the imperiled family. By participating in these rumors and extra-household interactions, residents cast the lougawou phenomenon as a communal threat at the same time that they insisted on the incredible social value of infants in their town.

Once, an Arkayè news station blared out notices on an old radio textured by static: a “notorious Lougawou” in the community of Les Cayes had “finally” been killed by a group of vigilantes. The radio said: “She was known to be cruel to community members, and to have eaten many town children without mercy…she was found Friday burned and dismembered with her victim.” Some machete-wielding night watch group was responsible, if this was true. Without skipping a beat, the DJ switched to a song, later reporting on international politics, and actions of MINUSTAH.

Informants and I failed to verify the story with the residents of Les Cayes, saying they had heard too, and “perhaps it was another ‘Les Cayes’?” Residents asked around in the market, but rumors ran dry and in the end no one knew who spread the story or where it came from.

**Market Women**

A werewolf is, like other beings, an assemblage of nanm. However, they no longer maintain the appearance of a social person, just as they no longer participate in the acts of being human. Their contestation of dominant social practices is echoed in a profound ethno-physiological contestation of skin. Indeed, they are so deeply disassociated from social obligations that---aside from consuming infants--- they
willingly discard their human skin and their status and appearance as persons. They unwrap their human skins in order to inhabit a grotesque and uniquely gifted form. As werewolves, they can enviably travel like the wind, with boundaries and transportation and terrain meaning nothing to them. They accept this uncanny gift and they use it to consume the young, an eating practice that supports their trade and livelihood. Indeed, market trading is a key element of the narrative and folklore of werewomen (Figure 3-7). Even if a given woman is not actually thought to be a merchant, it can be presumed that the heavily-trafficked profit-focused energies of the market are one and the same with the energies of the werewolf.

The market is a powerful sensory experience. People are often overcome with heat within. Stall make attempts to fix this, creating a patchwork of colored light with tarps strung ahead. Bodies push past you, sweat rubbing against your arms, anxious stall owners who know your face tug at your arm and tell you to buy–here! Here! When you first approach, on the outer edges of the market in Arcahaie are the rope workers. Cord for tying animals, bags for the market, woven hats for the field. And then the stalls with the packaged merchandise—there are spiraling baskets of toothpaste, arranged in a delicate towers that reach up to the tarps. Floss, toothbrushes, soaps. Then you reach a group of sandal merchants, with wares wrapped in plastic, probably imported from Taiwan. Next come the candies, the cookies. People roam throughout selling cold drinks. And then near the center, the produce was visible. And the bags of materials—of rice, of beans, of soft white flour. Different languages are written on the outside of bags. English here, Spanish on another, even Chinese characters on cornmeal. Moving in deeper one finds the fresh vegetables with dirt still clinging to them, arranged in a
thousand beautiful colors. Perfectly ripe green peppers, stacks of limes as tall as a 6-year-old, are all organized into tinier collections of five or six for sale.

The smell of sweat and vegetables and then, later, the death of the animals in the meat section swam together, making the market even hotter. In the meat section it is clear that there is immense variety in the smells and textures on the insides of bodies. The stomach, with its acrid scent, a strange sweetness. The organs with their own scents and textures. A satin-smooth liver props up other meat for sale, acting as a display case. Heads of goats, stripped of their skin, stare blankly in tiny rows. Intestines coil up, seeming to throb, like snakes.

Everywhere the market is filled with arrangements of bodies and goods. From the bright clothing of the merchants, covered in wares as to demonstrate their beauty, to the tidy, neat arrangement of vegetables into perfect piles and perfect lines. And just as one was bought, another went in its place.

So too with the meat. The body parts were arranged into lines, circles, boxes. They stacked on top of one another, or faced one another, like heads, or stood in neat straight rows. They were to be noticed, to be admired. And they were admirable, even in the stink of the meat section, the meat as it tried to rot underneath the sun—the merchants never would let it do so completely---but in the heat it would take on the too-sweet taste of something almost ready to turn. The fish come nearest to the harbor, where they are arranged in beautiful spirals of color more fetching than the meat. The small crabs for spicing greens are flipped upside down so their meaty underbellies show. The rainbow colored fish, when they are freshly caught, look almost like glass window hangings. They stare blankly in death as the merchant women sprinkles water
on them like a florist would, keeping their scales wet-looking and cool. It is important to say merchant women, for at this point, for it is nearly only women who sell products in the market, except at the rope-sellers near the exterior. But the woven hats and bags are also closest to the street, in the center of the street—in fact—peddled from a median. The customers, too, are largely women throughout.

It is true that you will find a few men speckled, here and there, but they peddle many imported goods like clothing and earrings on mobile trays and blast large loudspeakers while they make their way through the market. And there are also plenty of young men waiting to make a few pieces of change by helping carry the week’s groceries, and so too are there men who usher people into and out of the tap-tap trucks. At the interior of the market, however, they are vastly outnumbered.

The charcoal section is the last section at the market. Past a ring of sheets which protect the interior sellers from the black dust there is a field of this neatly stacked charcoal. Women crouch over the midst of several bags. The faces of sellers are shiny with ashes and young women’s brows furrow under the heat of the sun. They strain to arrange their charcoal within an ocean of other charcoal from which it is indistinguishable. By the charcoal sellers, you gain new perspective on the location of the market. Right beyond the rim of the charcoal field, the green banana leaves of private fields come close but are dusted in black. At this angle it is so far from the road that it one could plausibly think that the entire market is tucked in a rural town and not the center.

**Townswomen**

Although you know who your friends and neighbors are in the daytime, you may not know who they are at night. (Bourguignon 1954: 262)
The connection between werewolves and womanhood pushes beyond the question of merchant women; it also speaks of the role of women as ethical leaders. Imagined and unknown women are the implicit antagonists in all werewolf preparations. Women who were mentally ill and who had never worked in the marketplace could easily be considered werewolves, depending upon their behavior towards others. Behind every story of a werewolf attack or a werewolf death, there lurked the image of jealous, stingy, cruel woman-ing, even though in most cases the werewolf’s identity was not sought. Werewolf being was a disease of cruelty and jealousy that infected certain women and destroyed certain infants, and although men too had their specters of shapeshifting evils it was the specter of the werewolf woman that caused the most actual harm in communities (Figure 3-8).

This specter followed residents, even those who left the town to put down roots in other countries. A diaspora family living in Venezuela came to visit their home in Sou Lapwen, and they reported that female shape-shifters were behind many infant illnesses in Haitian immigrant communities abroad in Venezuelan farming towns and in the bustle of Brooklyn flats (Kari, Telephone Interview 2012; Hinche, Personal Interview with Author 2014). Not only were werewolves spread across geographic distances, they extended into deep temporal terrains as well—informant’s passed stories, remedies, and songs down through long ancestral lines for keeping threats at bay.

Although werewomen are ever-present in bodies and effects (measured out in infant illness and herbal cultivation), residents are profoundly reluctant to name members of the community as offending werewomen. Such namings do happen when children are still living (for example, Nel’s sister) but none of the families whose children
died claimed to know the identity of the offender unless the offender was already deceased. It is fair to say that the naming of werewolves causes as much anxiety in the hearts and minds of residents as does the child illness. As Murray and Alvarèz (1973: 14) states the fear “that apparently harmless people with whom one is in frequent contact are members of this category of being.”

In this respect, the phenomenon bears resemblance to Ruel’s work on Werewomen among the Banyang of West Cameroon. Ruel related Banyang werewoman existence without accusation to a prevailing system of moral introspection, whereby social members are encouraged to interrogate their own capacity for inadvertent evil. In Ruel’s case, this meant that social members considered it possible they themselves were traveling as Werewomen at night, harming or hunting others. The anthropological study of such an ethically tense phenomenon as vigilante namings, which can lead to profound superstition and in the most extreme cases, also death—demands careful and long term consideration.

The word lougawou could be thrown out in jest at a domino game to consolidate existing experiences of loss, anger, and jealousy under a single name. When these incidents are spoken of, they are expected to be wielded towards particular ends. Accusations come from intentions, and most of the time—indeed, if not all of the time, public accusations are wielded to discredit and alienate members of society through association with the image of a werewolf. Although most persons may be skeptical, and although such accusations, themselves so rare, even more rarely escalate to actual vigilante intervention, the women who are stained by these accusations are stained in very serious ways.
It changes how one can interact with infants for a time, it changes how one acts around others, when traveling, when hosting people in their home. It can be a very depressing decline, indeed, and it is one that many women—especially successful women—must actively work to avoid. Ultimately, it can only be remedied with either strong social networks that come to one’s defense, or alternately gaining a reputation for sharing and generosity—the image of the ungenerous woman, of the cruel hoarder, is one that is intensely grotesque and yet ever present in mainstream society. Because of this, as in Barnes-Josiah, Myntti, and Augustine’s (1998), women are especially hesitant to involve themselves in the birthing process of bitasyòn residents outside the courtyard.

In one case a woman, Keekah, had supposedly been caught as a lougawou when attempting to consume her own baby. She lived right next door to the woman relaying the story, Geraldy. Geraldy began:

Keekah’s husband, Shelove, had returned home after work in the garden only to find a beast covered in feathers in his house, near where the baby was sleeping. “A bèt (beast)” Geraldy repeated, inflecting the word with disgust and terror. “His hands found first the bucket of dirty water, then a bucket of clean water, which were against the wall, and he threw them at her in succession. As the water hit the beast, she transformed from an awful feathered creature with pin-feathers poking out of her skin into a tiny baby, a sitting baby! A baby just like Keekah’s, which lay on the bed, sleeping. Only this baby’s eyes were glowing red.

Slowly she became Keekah again. Shelove said he wanted to kill her right then and there. In the act. But of course he couldn’t do so on his own. Frantically, he called his own relatives, who were upset and called her relatives. He then immediately received a call from her family in the mountains, who angrily and quite convincingly threatened brutal retaliation if Keekah "happened" to die, or if Shelove tried to hold on to the baby. Shelove, who had called the neighbors, who are then watching as well, surrounded Keekah but they came to realize they could not kill her. Instead, they let her get her things, take the baby, and they chased her off into the mountains to her family.
As Geraldy narrated the story, Hercule made it clear that he outright disbelieved it. He kept interrupting with noises of dissent, inserting “ahhhh” and “tchshhhh,” throughout Geraldy’s story.

Nel quietly shelled peas, shaking her head. At the end of the story, Hercule declared that although he would grant that werewolves existed, he wouldn’t believe any particular story of a werewolf unless he saw it with his own eyes.

Nel nodded and began speaking, looking only at the peas. It caused everyone to turn to her: “*That* man wanted to get rid of her,” she declared, “you see? You see the things that happen in the country of Haiti? He couldn’t kill her himself or he would have gone to prison. He needed a band; in Haiti you have to have a band [of people]”. Ninev and Felicie began discussing the matter in a way that revealed their close friendship, they each would interject only a few words into the relative quiet of the pea shelling.

Ninev says: “Hmm, well.” The crack of a fresh pea pod.

And Felicie says: “Yeah.” Slapping her thigh.

Ninev says: “Her child, you know?” and Nel tilts her head in a way that means: *good. You understand.*

The background noise of daily life goes on and Fran says “Sheesh! This country.”

Not sure about what point was being made, I leaned towards Ninev and made eye contact. “Hmm?” I asked.

She clarified: “Never heard of a werewolf that would eat her own child.”

Felicie nodded. “Never.” Nel raised her eyebrows and looked at Geraldy knowingly, who was quiet and embarrassed and quickly took her leave.
At another point during my field research, one of Nel’s sisters had the misfortune of being suggested as a werewolf in the community. Yvla, the sister in question, came to complain about the matter with Nel in the courtyard. Yvla was known for having a certain personality that solicited much attention, both material and immaterial. She asked frequently for money, food, drinks. She was a kind woman, but lacked mastery of the social skills of managing one’s own image as a generous being rather than a taking being.

Sidney first came to us, angrily ranting about the incident, promising to exact vengeance on the young men, his domino partners, he shouted. Yvla was sitting with us quietly at the time, which was unusual. She wasn’t much for socializing, and was often in a dour mood. There were also six other visiting women who had relations in Sou Lapwen seated in the front of Nanis’s house with Nel, Nanis, Ninev, with Nel politely consulting with them on manners of dreams and events, while managing a bit of frītay for the guests on the tiny kerosene stove.

Sidney interrupted the gathering loudly, but Nel was quickly able to calm him, handing him some fresh frītay and telling him to sit and eat, reminding him that if he shouted and lost his emotional control he was going to weaken and poison his own blood and others.

He explained that his mother, had been accused by two families of preying on their children, eating them up at night as a lougawou. It happened at one of the dominoes games, which were played late into the night in Yvla’s yard. They collected young ambitious men, bored older men, and gruff, adventurous women together to drink, bet, swear. Everyone had imbibed their share of kleren by the time the incident
occurred, and it somehow slipped out that Onal’s baby had sickened. Another man nodded, he had heard. Emil piped up and, tipsy from the kleren, said that all who were present knew the real reason Onal’s baby was sick, pointing out that Yvla had looked after the baby in her courtyard for a short period. Sidney heard it, astounded. He couldn’t believe it, he said. These accusations, right here, right on his mother’s front porch? He drew his machete and challenged the three men, kicked over the domino table, cursed them like dogs. It was Yvla herself who had to come and disarm him.

Yvla, sitting in Nel’s yard, listened fretfully as Sidney relayed the story. When he finished she finally piped up and said: “I knew the kid was sick, but I didn’t know they named me as the reason!” She paused. “Well, maybe I was beginning to suspect.”

It just so happened that very few kids were coming to the courtyard anymore. One child of 3-years-old normally came by her yard to buy supplies, and she hadn’t seen him in days. The father carried him to Yvla’s gate earlier in the week, sort of shoving the child’s body in her face, an act which is profoundly accusational and often (though not always) indicative of lougawou. It is one I have witnessed three times. It is a complex act tied in with guilt, fear, and hope: the guilt that families feel over the poor management of the child, the fear that the child is certainly dying, and the hope that in placing the child at the doorstep of the problem, the accused will have no choice but to face their victims and heal them in order to heal themselves. By handing a child over, one symbolically ties the fate of the child to the fate of the accused. If the child dies in the arms of the accused, the accused can be forever marked, forever gossiped about, forever the source of suspicion.
Yvla explained that she took the proper precautions when the father came to her doorstep, handing over money for the child’s remedy. The father accepted it and later said he had taken the child to a nearby oungan.

“I had no idea another baby is sick!” She cried. “The house. Everyone in the vwazinaj (neighborhood) has started hating me since I constructed my new house up the road.”

“Yeah, well, lougawou can’t be poor.” Nanis clicked her teeth and shook her head. The others agreed, including the visiting women.

Then one of Sidney’s friend spoke up, a tall young man who had presumably come into the courtyard the back way and had been listening throughout the conversation. He exclaimed: “I am staying at the house, I sleep at her feet…I mean, if she was flying at night, wouldn’t I know?!"

The level of tension in the courtyard was palpable and high pitched, an occurrence which would usually lead Nel to disband or break apart the excited group so they could cool off and so they would not fall ill with bad blood from the strong emotions which were circulating. This, however, was a serious matter that could not be set aside. It had to be attended to, even if there were visiting guests who demanded attention.

Nel was done cooking at this point, and handed over the distribution of plates to Shelove, her 9-year-old great-nephew who was working at the house for school fees. Nel explained to the visitors, and said regretfully to the gathered residents, “people are accused so much in the bitasyòn! Too much! Everyone is willing to just throw out the word lougawou if they don’t like you or like how you act.”
Nanis tchwipped again and kicked at the dirt: “such a huge accusation, such a terrible and sad situation.” She leaned over to speak to me: “When you are called lougawou, Alissa, People won’t drink, eat with you, offer you anything. People won’t come to your courtyard to buy anything, to visit. Nothing.”

“What makes them accuse other people in the neighborhood?” I asked. Nanis responded, “OK. If you have seen a person glaring at the child, if you tell someone that such and such a person was glaring at the child, people [in your courtyard] will listen. The first thing you do, you tell two other people in the courtyard, they can go over to the courtyard of the person who was glaring like that and they can quietly ask them to pay. If you get asked, you must pay. If you don’t want to pay for the remedy, you can’t say anything. Anyone can kill you, anyone on the street…a child died in Semeda some time back, they put a tire around the woman’s head.”

Nel turned to Sidney very seriously and asked how the accusation had happened, “how did they think to accuse Yvla? It could be anyone. Anyone!” she said.

No one challenged the fact that the two ill children were ill by lougawou, and instead sought to introduce doubt about linking the word lougawou to a specific person, in this case Yvla. Yvla explained that the victim bought cookies from her. The young child and a few older children ate at her house before, she had asked for things like food that they had with them, and they shared them.

Though being a werewoman is not a punishable crime in itself, it does come with a very narrow and defined set of recourses should a person’s abhorrent desires and fascinations come to light. Refusing to assist in the event of an illness is the act and event which is punishable. In larger community life, it so happens that people often
know women who are “werewolves, but who have never been publicly accused and thus have behaved well or had strong community support. Then, people may also simply suspect werewolves, never speaking the word due to the damage it might cause. People, like Nel, may also strongly feel that a certain woman killed their child, but they refuse to mention this due to the moral stain that reactive community actions would leave on them.

Yet they do not implicate these persons indiscriminately. Instead, people think about (but do not openly accuse) those persons who are close to them but are also greedy, cruel, and deeply jealous. Persons turn their suspicions to those friends or acquaintances who have dissented from the appropriate models of sharing, generosity, and mutual imbrication. This shared system of social practice is that which proves and sustains social personhood, as discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

Madam Alexandre, for example, was an old blind evangelical woman of moderate means. She avoided playing with children, and died of natural causes sometime in her 90s, and I was in attendance at her funeral along with nearly every other available soul in Sou Lapwen. As is customary, many people wailed, pulling at the coffin. A band led Madame Alexander’s way to the graveyard, and by all accounts it was a well-attended funeral and a well-mourned woman. However, after she was laid to rest in the graveyard near Montrouis, we took tap taps back to a main intersection and began walking back to Sou Lapwen on foot across the dusty, rocky path.

A young woman pulled me aside by pinching my shirt as we all walked back to town. She scrunched her face and said quietly “lougawou.” As in any small town, someone made a point to overhear our conversation despite the young woman’s
prudence. In this case, it was a mixed group of older women who went walking down the road, proudly donning their elaborate funeral hats just as they sucked on their teeth and clicked to show disapproval of the teenager’s gossip: "you know it wasn’t her fault," one said.

And another: “It wasn’t her fault, Felicie, she was a good old woman, a kind woman who swept and cared for everyone’s yards!” Their admonishments faded as they went past.

**Jealousy and Greed**

Evildoers…okay, so a Malfektè is a person, a person who comes into the Society, they see that you have money, money you earned honorably, and he sees himself without money. He hates you. He hates you so much! He strikes you with powder, powder, a big strike of powder. He leaves out powder for you. If he sees you at night, he sends a rock after you, he hits you with a rock. A rock that has…it’s a zonbi, understand? Around that time, the malfektè shows up at your house [vis a vis the zonbi rock]. He hides in your house; he goes to your restaurant. It’s as if I’m at your restaurant. I’m eating, I’m eating, I’m drinking, and meanwhile all that money is leaving, all of it, every cent of it, I don’t have any but now the money is [getting ready to] grow. I go to pay [for my food and drink] and I pull some money out to pay, I pay, and you give me change, and I go. All that money that person made for the day, all that money that you made selling, now it’s come to my pocket. All the money that person made from selling, it’s in my pocket. What mystics! That’s called “Detounen Moun Nan” [Embezzling A Person]. (Ronald, Personal Interview, Kafou, 2011).

Underneath the surface of life in rural regions, there are unspoken accusations, suspicions, sympathies, fears, and judgements of others. Many women have been suspected, not in word but rather in deed, and the silence of others’ judgement can (in the worst of times) hang like a noose just above one’s head.

Jealousy and generosity, as well as greed and selflessness live side by side in town. Even the smallest shifts in fortune are noted by others and rigorously examined: was this change in fortune the result of unethical acts; or was it the natural result of
good social bonding? Jealousy haunted Sou Lapwen’s infants from their convalescence to their adolescence—if not because a particular someone was actually jealous, then because very precious things must always exact a price. The courtyard is consciously attached to its children, and likewise the village to the village’s own, and their minds and dreams swim with the dark and powerful imaginings of losing a baby or child to the world, indeed, at the hands of the world (Figure 3-8). Yet even when illness, nighttime, or evil kill children, so too does the strength and blood of the world make and become children again.

Like a tiny flame being added to and kindled, and being made vulnerable, infants are a central reservoir of food, care, objects, possessions, appreciation, and care in village life. What if that care, energy, appreciation, could be consumed and one could enrich themselves with the child rather than the child being enriched through the parent? If a stranger (perhaps a distantly familiar guest) gazes too long at a child, and that child then falls ill (as so many do in this country ravaged by infant death), she will (under a set of specific circumstances) be thought of as a werewoman. This prospect is all the more probable if—when she is told of the attack upon the child—she doesn’t seem to care appropriately or offer to help.

This is at least partially because of the social fact that when one comes to sit in another person’s courtyard in Haiti, they can expect a chair and whatever sustenance is on hand or within fetching distance. The condition of a woman being able to look at, or care for, a non-kin infant means that she is someone participating rather deeply in communal ties with the family. As such, families can easily perceive a friend’s reluctance to help an ill child as profoundly selfish and cruel; she has received the
benefit of friendship, but she refuses to extend herself at the expense of the vulnerable. It is a feint of reciprocity, and it demonstrates a lack of an “extensive” mood, which would encourage one to maximize their own generosity at the benefit of community existence.

Infant death is assuredly not meted out evenly. Among the villagers, there are those have met with profound and inexplicable misfortunes in rearing children---one young woman had lost her only two children in the span of a year: the first, to a werewolf, the second was crushed at the age of four when a wall collapsed on them during a visit to a friend’s house. Who could blame any especially unfortunate mother or family for feeling jealous of the living, for being angry or bitter, for wondering why it must be their child and not another’s who had died? Murray and Alvarèz (1973) were among the first to point out how werewolf experiences dredge up subterranean feelings of both jealousy and love, feelings of hostility and amity, that twine families together and break them apart in close knit social life. “The term *lougawou*” Murray and Alvarèz (1973) said, “seethes with the latent suspicion and hostility and jealousy that community members frequently feel toward each other but which must be masked under the conventions of superficial daily interaction.” Although daily interaction seems anything but superficial to me, their primary point is vital: werewolves do not so much create problems as they unearth them. These thoughts may or may not emerge in the wake of deaths, and they may only be momentary and immediately regrettable, but families simultaneously empathize with these feelings, fear them, and project them onto others.

If a case happens and a child falls ill and someone is thought responsible and—when approached—they respond hatefully, caretakers can tell members of their family
that their child is ill and that this such-and-such a suspect is on the loose. This does not yet amount to the town knowing. Caregivers can only point out one person (uncertainty will not do) and most caregivers are unwilling to name anyone, much less insist that they saw how the accused gazed at the child, or imply that a certain look, a mesmerizing gaze, a fascination was in the works. If the child is ill enough, and if it has been thus ill many times before, and if caregivers are certain of the evil intents of another, the accused woman will be approached at night by these two secret police, and she is given the choice to pay for herbal treatment in the house of a manbo or oungean. In this way, the question of her being a lougawou does not escape the mouths of those close to the child; she has acted reasonably, and in thus acting reasonably she has introduced doubt (even if only a little) to the question of her nocturnal happenings. Whether out of gratitude or doubt, the family of the infant will often not consider the lougawou responsible for the child’s condition after this point.

This is because it is not the woman’s supposed desire to feed on children which negates her ties to society; informants suggest that a socially protected space may exist for such cursed unfortunates so long as they provide care for their infant victims. The social transgression that negates their social ties comes when and when they refuse to intervene in the life of a floundering infant whom they know and with whom they have had a relationship. If we set aside, for a moment, the powerful imagery of a blood-sucking monster, we consider two events that occur with regularity in social life: one is the image of a woman looking upon a new infant in admiration, and the other is that of a woman standing aside as the same infant succumbs to illness. The woman, in having an opportunity to look upon an infant, is assumed by many to have enjoyed an intimate
relationship as a guest or visitor in the child’s household prior to illness, as infants are routinely protected from the gazes of strangers and mere acquaintances.

Active and hostile community suspicions only rarely became public, such as in the case of Yvla. Though numerous radio reports claimed that werewolves, and local women, had been killed—they produced no evidence when we went out to seek the veracity. Most were clearly fabricated, much like another case that was highly reported—heart thieves. Yet named accusations were enough to make the situation unsettling.

**The Fall of Night**

*NIGHT*: Considered a time of terror. Mysterious, evil beings (evil *lwa* - *movez espri*; witches - *lougawou*; the secret societies, organized bands of evil-doers - *sanpwel*) are about One does not go out, and every crack and crevice of one’s dwelling is tightly shut (making for stuffy, crowded sleeping areas where contagious diseases such as tuberculosis are easily spread). Only in the urban slums are people out at night - there is simply not enough room inside, and sleeping must be done in shifts. (Freeman 2007: 94)

The same child also spoke of seeing werewolves and dead people. Indeed, quite a few children saw dead people, werewolves, demons, evil animals, and evil people in the Rorschach cards and they not infrequently added, “They walk at night.” (Bourguignon 1954: 68)

Night provides the backdrop for all werewolf attacks and many other shapeshifting problems and magical violence besides (Figure 3-9). It is the time when werewolves make their appearance, a time when many folks should be sleeping, and when the streets are already inhabited by strange and uncanny others. Yet the night alone is not always evil, nor are people always truly shuttered inside. One avoids the streets, backyards, toilets, normally. However, the night is also the time of seeking-out, the time when lovers brave dangers big and small to lay next to each other, the time when the *lwa* speak most clearly to courtyards, when magic is crafted in secret by
manbo, oungan, and bòkò, the time when the Vodou drums beat and Chanpwèl gangs roam. Such festivities and trysts serve to demonstrate that the night is not truly owned by humankind, though it may on occasion be leased.

Really, townsfolk only own the land of the bitasyòn for half of every day. When awaking at night, perhaps to relieve themselves or find fresh air, they are likely to discover that they cannot open the door. In the morning, if they got up early enough, they might peek through a hole in the wall and find that a mangled sculpture of chairs, old mattresses, and heavy barrels barricades their exit, closing them off from the porch and the courtyard and the street. By 6:00 am, like elf work, the objects disappear. A considerate guest would probably best keep quiet about the whole thing. Fear is too embarrassing and above all, it is an accusation of insecurity which produces more insecurity than there was to begin with. Your host was being a good host, a very good host, and that is what matters. It is very uncouth to notice that Sou Lapwen is only rented by humans for the daytime hours, during which it is familiar. Blessedly, we sleep through the strangest bits.

Far before to the Occupation of Haiti by US Marines, there were reports of public terror and anxiety about street passages at night, containing not only lougawou but also other creatures such as male shapeshifting baka. State newspapers such as the Nouvelliste, L’éclair, Le Republicain covered these matters. In Antoine LaForest’s (1906) work on social life and customs in Haiti, there is a brief description of the supernatural dread surrounding night road:

"[One Haitian] told us that immediately after the time of sleeping, that infernal beast, red-haired, with sharp fangs, made his macabre patrol through the city in search of children…” (LaForest 1906: 20. From the original French).
In LaForest’s example, the entire community fled town when a particularly deadly baka (a male shape-shifter) was on the loose, finally seeking shelter in rocky outposts to escape attacks on their children (1906: 21). Such fears, LaForest tells us, were not limited to the young and fainthearted but instead left even “guards of the islets, as well as women…and old people, trembling in their bed sheets, in mortal fear. (LaForest 1906: 21)”

Even Nel had deep qualms about night, though she was well-protected from human thieves given her reputation. She once had a big dog in the courtyard who had grown old and died during my first year of knowing her. Before he died, she had found two young pups that grew into adult females before too long, one bearing puppies. At night, her courtyard was an array of barking, sniffing, and growling sounds that took me a month to become accustomed too. At first I woke up at every barking noise, but gradually became acclimated to sleeping through it, slowly gaining proficiency in isolating the more important noises from the wall of background perceptions that I hadn’t yet learned to sort out. Dogs are the first mechanism against night wanderers, and in a sense due to their constant barks, the night itself. After the first night of sleeping with the howling, barking, and fighting right outside the paper thin door, I stumbled out of my room in the morning with a sporting headache. Nel was there, fixing coffee, smiling, asking how I slept. I told her I heard them barking and she laughed proudly. “They are security at night. I can sleep peacefully with them” she said, “I can finally let my body go when I hear them bark.”

Zora Neale Hurston is the first ethnographer who brushed up against werewolves in a significant way within the realm of anthropological literature. However, Dr. Hurston
does not name lougawou as the phenomena in question, instead approaching the partial experience of lougawou through the activities and fears of a particular servant family (Hurston 1938: 201-203). The father of this family, Joseph, comes to her door one night in an absolute fright. His reaction seems to impress itself upon Zora more so than what he says he fears. She recalls his unsettling and uncharacteristically invasive behavior in a brief vignette (1938: 202) where Joseph begs her to keep his baby locked in the house for a night:

He told me that he had seen figures in white robes and hoods, no, some of them had red gowns and hoods, lurking in the paraseuse (hedge) the night before. He thought the cochons gris knew that he had a very young baby and they wanted to take it and eat it.

Desperate to keep up with writing, she denies his request that she sleep with the new baby in her own room. After he explains that he fears his baby will die because of the “cochon gris”, Hurston (1938: 201) attempts to assuage his fears:

In the first place, I have never seen a grey pig and do not believe they exist. In the second place, hogs do not go about in robes of any sort and neither do they go about eating babies. Pa kapab.

Joseph, unswayed by Hurston's points, replies (1938: 201):

But yes, Mademoiselle, there are very bad thing that go about at night. I have great fear from what I saw last night. I want you to take my baby into the house with you. Then nobody can steal him.

The ethnographer again firmly responds to the rather forward request, reminding him that she needs to get valuable writing done (1938: 201). Joseph, unphased, persists yet again:

But he is very little, Madam, he cannot cry much. Take him to sleep at night, please, Mademoiselle. If you don't want baby in the house than please give me seven gourdes and I put my wife and baby on the boat to Petit Gouave. My family will take care of them. Then I come back for you and I work for you very good because then I will not worry about my baby die.
Though we only have a snippet of the conversation, Joseph’s statements illustrate the profound emotional and perceptual impact that this terrifying encounter had upon him and his ability to work normally. He senses that his baby is in mortal danger, and this sense obsesses him. There is no intellectual uncertainty in Joseph’s attitude. Instead, Joseph decides he himself must change the situation in order to avoid certain death for his young son.

**Night Roads**

Ages ago, house owners could sleep right beside the road, and nothing would happen to you. That was the period of Jean Claude Duvalier, when all the young men were Tonton Makout, when Tonton Makout were everywhere. Other forces too were walking around, passing through streets at night. The only sad thing was that Chanpwèl couldn’t walk about. You would see the houseowners sleeping by the side of the road, he might hand over a little food, and you get security. Now? Now if you are sleeping inside your house, you need to shut the door tightly, bar it, and close all the windows. (Begory, Forum, January 2013)

In the annals of Haitian history, there are also those formal attempts to secure nighttime streets from the danger of shapeshifters and of lougawou in particular. If lougawou were heard to be walking (or flying) along night roads, it was a general threat to public security, and thus something police forces were responsible for managing (if communities didn’t deal with it first). Many news reports detail the arrest and prosecution of werewolves, or their death at the hands of community watches. Such events have slowed down, but still exist throughout Haiti. In the historical newspaper L’éclair, from the late nineteenth century, a reporter recounts the nights events under the headline “Loups-Garous”:

"On the night between Saturday and Sunday, a stir was caused by the presence in the streets of the capital of one of those fans of human flesh and Vodou ceremonies [a Lougawou]. We are told...that this woman...would have chased off police officers using her phosphorescent
lights and so they were wont to wait for morning to catch her. (L’èclair
1889)

While the living have fare over the daytime road, night roads serve as Vodou
highways for the lwa, centers for ritual practice—but not places for dalliance or play. For
Vodou, the roads of the living and the lwa "lwa", cross each other in ritual Vèvè
drawings, in ceremonies, and in everyday life. These crossings are importantly linked to
the temporal moods of the road, to its nocturnal and diurnal phases. Several informants
explained that economically productive nighttime movements that could not be avoided
were not cosmically punished, such as watering a garden at night, or setting out for a
distant market. However, one would be sure to meet frightening supernatural creatures
on such outings, beings who might interrogate them, but if they found their cause fitting
they would be permitted to pass (Jordan 2012, Interview with Sara, Nel, Dadorie). Many
Haitian folktales tell the stories of farmers or traders who dallied in their duties and
started back for home too late in the day, only to have frightful encounters with the
myriad beings that traffic these routes in the evening. In a mid-century story, one lwa
interrogates a man from the market, foolish enough to attempt the journey in the
evening: "Who gave you the right to travel alone at night?" he asks, "The night is not
yours. You have the day and that is enough (Simpson 1954: 399)."

Road crossings at night makes the bitasyon a certain sort of bitasyon as well.
One that is close and familiar in equal measure as it is terrifying. More than 100 years
after the account in L’èclair, lougawou narratives made international news in the
aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake. After the earthquake, those in Port Au
Prince and in Arkayè spoke of an increase in lougawou activity. In the cities, informants
argued that these beasts left the hills en masse to flood urban camps, where they could feast on the flesh of children.

Angelique escaped Port Au Prince for the countryside a week after the earthquake, explaining the devastation and dismemberment it had brought to her street in Carrefour:

Right, so after the earthquake, everyone left their houses, left where they were staying. It was as if everyone was sleeping on the streets. They just fell out on the street, trying to hold themselves together, houses all crushed. Everyone slept on the street. They had to sleep on the street. At that moment, the street was the house of the people, the population, the public. Everyone was reflecting on what happened, at the funerals they had, everyone was beat up, so many people died, but there wasn’t even enough time for everyone to get baptized. They didn’t want to sleep inside. At the same time, now and then, there were tremors. For a really long time. People didn’t want to be in then. It was really serious. Everyone was [thinking darkly]. Everyone knew someone who died. There were people who tried to pull them out. They found help from Dominican Republic folks and American folks.

As more families slept near streets and highly trafficked areas, fears of shape-shifting lougawou intensified. Reuters reported survivors’ worries that roaming lougawou were stealing and consuming children. In the wake of such anxieties, make-shift night-time patrols sought out these dangerous people, killing dogs believed to be transformed women (Reuters 2010: 1).

James himself spoke of clearing his entire urban street of all the cats with a group of other young men. “Around a hundred cats” James said “You don’t know which are werewolves and which are cats but you can’t just let it continue.”

Berlinski describes equivalent experiences following the quake, when conversations about lougawou virulently circulated the radio waves, saying these shape-shifters were reported coming “down from the hills,” ready to seize the opportunity to hunt openly in the city (Berlinski 2010: 1). One informant saw “a black
dog as big as a horse” after the earthquake, stamping through the crumbled streets in Carrefour, while another woman in the countryside saw “a goat running up her street, looking to find [her child]” (Onal. Personal Interview. 20 June 2011).

These heightened dangers didn’t result from net increases in supernatural movements, but rather from the behavioral adaptations of survivors. New forms of living, new interactions with the nocturnal phases of roads meant that tense encounters between realms were escalating: “Now, with so many people in Port-au-Prince sleeping the open air, the lougawou were believed to present an exceptional danger (Berlinski 2010: 1).” James explained the difference between werewolves and other such phenomena,

The baka makes the child ignorant, makes him deaf, and the parents can recognize this. But lougawou? There is a big difference there. Lougawou love what? They take orphans as much as those with parents. A lougawou is a person, and there are two ways they became that way. Much like I am a man, and you are a woman. Women fly, women fly, women fly! They fly high! There are wings they have that transform crookedly from their skin.

I prompted him, “You said you saw a huge dog once.”

James reminisced, “Yeah, a huge dog. At two o’clock in the morning. The Lougawou were staying in the zòn as dogs at that time. In my godmother’s zone, they turn into pigs, pigs. You’re surprised. Pigs that are far too tall. That’s in poor areas.”

I turned to a somewhat less obvious question, asking: “Why do they transform into a big animal like that, why not change into a normal looking animal?”

James corrected my underlying misunderstanding, “They don’t transform just like that. You see there is a huge dog. You yourself see a huge, tall dog. You see it’s a big dog, but it’s not really a big dog. You’re a person just like me. And if you pray, if the
nanm transforms, it makes you see the nanm but the nanm knows you are looking. But it's not a dog. If your mother was a mystic.”

Jalo lived in Sou Lapwen and sold brewed local coffee in the mornings. Despite the social distance between her life and that of James, born and raised in crowded urban Kafou, she had similar experiences of night time roads. I asked her, “Have you ever stepped out onto the street on a normal night, like around midnight or 1:00 am?”

Jalo shook her head emphatically, “No, I never walk around at those times.”

I prodded her for more details: “Are you scared of walking out at night? Why?”

Jalo responded, “When you walk outside at night, like 11 at night, you can find things.” She paused. Later, I asked if there were truly lougawou in the area, hoping for more information on the matter.

Jalo insisted, “Yes, of course they have lougawou here.”

I clarified: “But you have never seen one?”

Jalo said, “Ok, Well, I haven’t seen one with my eyes, no, but my child was almost eaten up entirely by one, and I have heard them.”

**Roofs**

The roof is the first bastion to be prepared in defense of the young lives within. Some people will say they have never seen werewolves, but a few simple inquiries make it clear that most people have heard werewolves. The roof mediates the experience of werewolves; it is one of the first and most important ways that families and courtyards come to feel them in their lives (Figure 3-10).

I asked, “How do you know if it’s a lougawou?”
Nanis responded, "When a lougawou passes above the house, on the roof, the lougawou turns into a pig, a turkey, a beast. They perch on the roof. You hear it. As I told you, when lougawou take to flying about, the zone is much more endangered.

Before an infant’s death, or a period of illness, and despite the regular care and monitoring of children, lougawou will still alight onto roofs and consume any infants inside (Figure 3-11). There are noises that vigilant mothers, fathers, and families know and fear. Of these, perhaps the most terrifying is that of the noise of a werewolf landing. A lougawou can be heard when it lands, making a characteristic THUMP on the tin roof at midnight, and a KLOK KLOK of tip-toeing nails. It is very different sound on the roof than the taps of seeds, which are constant, or the regular whacks of fruit falling, or the tiny clicks of pigeon toes.

Werewolves also are evidenced in trails of glistening and unearthly lights above the roof which rustle window fabric late at night. After these apparitions, (even if illness blessedly never comes) families and friends monitor infants for days— looking for the tell-tale swelling, the diarrhea, the loud cries, the softer cries, and finally the dreaded silence. In this way, infants themselves impact the sort of preventative efforts and werewolf mediations that occur at the familial level.

By monitoring infants and their behaviors closely, Haitians also open a space for infants’ emotions and wills to affect the course of lougawou responses. In the most obvious example, fussy, aggressive infants such as Waglet (Nel’s grandson) are held and monitored more often than quieter infants because they desire it more, according to caretakers, and they have much ‘hotter,’ and thus more demanding god-ancestors. Thus, the more demanding children are naturally accorded more time and interaction
than infants who prefer silence and peace or those who don’t make their preferences clear. However, this is not to say that quiet infants aren’t worrisome; they are worrisome for their own reasons. Families fret over how they feel and strive to decipher their often concealed emotional states. They are far more subtle in indicating they are sick or that they have been attacked.

**Shoebox Coffins**

Sitting outside by the siwel tree mound, I began speaking to Begory about the babies he knew in his long life who had died from werewolf attacks, unable to be saved. Nel, for example, had lost most of her children before becoming a Manbo, and Begory had been there for the deaths more than once. He was an important Uncle, called in during the birth.

“What happens when the infants can’t be saved?” I asked (Figure 3-17). He grumbled and rested his head on his cane, a hat casting shadow on his forehead but not hiding his striking eyes.

“Those hurt worst by the lougawou died.” He lifted his head and looked around the courtyard for a moment. Felicie was sitting next to him, packing tobacco into her nose. “Do you see this lovely lady in the courtyard?” He gestured to Gaen’s room, though it was empty. She must have been six months pregnant at the time. “We haven’t done anything for her yet.” He shook his head, shamed. “Nothing.”

“Why not?” I asked, sitting in front of him with my camera on my lap, taking pictures of the courtyard here and there.

“Ahhhh” He said, clicking in distaste. “Ask her mother. She’s not gotten anything *together.*” I nodded.
In a few moments, I continued. Women wouldn’t talk about the infant burials easily, and it was clear that men were more involved in the process, several men had brought up the fact that men “take care of it” after the death.

But where did those dead infants go? Did they go the same place as dead puppies, dead cats? Those hundreds of bodies of Sou Lapwen young, all dead within 50 years? I had only ever heard that they are “not in the graveyard”. So I pressed on: “If your child died, what would you do with them? Would you bury them?”

Begory answered the question in his own way, saying: “I lost a child at 10 months once. A boy.” I knew of him, for Begory (even at more than 80-years-old) would speak frequently of him the same way my own grandmother reminisced on her firstborn girl who died. My grandmother would say: “Her name was Silvia, isn’t that a beautiful name?”. She could not forget the head of her baby girl, bandaged from where the forceps had broken her face, dead after only a mere 12 hours living. She could not even forget Silvia at the end, when she had forgotten where she was, which member of the family was present, or even what country she was in.

I said: “Begory, when your boy died, did you bury him in the cemetery?”

Begory lowered his eyes. “Yes, I buried that one in the cemetery. He had been baptized.” Ah, I thought. He had reached a milestone quite early, or perhaps was baptized near to death. Even if he had still been expected to be endangered after the baptism, the ritual made him somehow more real to the world and more solid in Begory’s arms. “I lost one, I buried it in the cemetery.”

He counted him separate from the three others that died, he counted this one as a child, “timoun.” Someone with a name known to the community. If you asked, how
many little ones have you lost? He would only say “one”, counting only the child buried in the cemetery like nearly everyone else.

The others were there but out of the tally. They were still real, still potently painful, but never having left the courtyard and never being children, real children, to the public world.

He continued. “I lost others, I buried them in the house.” I raised my eyebrows and was genuinely surprised. I wasn’t sure what I had expected, but I hadn’t expected them to be so close. Up until that point, I expected that people were reticent to speak of infant burials because these children were buried so unceremoniously, perhaps at the edge of a road, a cemetery, near places where things are disposed of. I thought this might make it easier to forget and let go. But the house? It was a shock, and it made me ashamed for my own suppositions about the unspeakable grief of the deaths.

I repeated to him: “The house?” and then “Where?” for he said “inside, inside the house” for his own children.

Begory said, “When Nel’s died, we buried them in the courtyard here, under the tree.” It is where we always sat, the sweetest part of the courtyard. It is where people came and went and where we ate later meals and it was most importantly in between all these lwa, all this movement in life. The infant’s bodies at least were resting forever with the underground loves and mystery and magic of the courtyard. “Here?” I asked, pointing at the ground.

Begory said, “Yes. Deep.” He wiped sweat from his upper lip. There was a pause. And then, as if he needed to explain to me, perhaps thinking I found this silent burial cruel (though truly I felt much the opposite), he carried on: “They weren’t yet
baptized. You see? The State didn’t recognize them yet. So you bury them in the cemetery, only in the cemetery when the State knows them, and when the State hasn’t yet known them, you bury them in the house.”

He said house again, lakay, and not lakou a. It was the smaller of the two designations. It was home as in beds, clothing, sleep, walls, roofs. I asked him where his children were buried.

“Under the door, where the threshold lies.” A place walked through every day, I thought. Every morning and every night. A crossroads. He wanted to talk, and his eyes were far off as he remembered, and I wanted to listen. These children were not forgotten or cast off. They were interred. They were placed deep down in the household in a reverent and lonely act.

“What did you do with bodies exactly? Did you wrap them in a blanket?”

Begory responded, “So I carried the baby away.” He pulled out a dime-sized sachet of tobacco and began to ramase l, bringing a small bit of the powder together into the shape of a tiny pyramid. He placed it in his nostril expertly, none falling out. “I dug a hole,” he said.

I imagined him young, strong, struggling with his own feelings and with what must be done regardless. I imagined his shovel, like the one he always used at Nel’s to help till the soil. He went on: “And I placed them in a shoebox. You know, a soft box. A box filled with cotton.” Cotton blossomed from the trees in the courtyard and elsewhere, bursting forth from the outstretched branches. “You bathe them. You dress them up in their clothes. You tuck them into a soft blanket. You bury them.” He explained each action with his eyes nearly closed.
I listened and waited for a moment. Then, I asked: “Is the mother there, when you do this?”

Begory responded, “No, when you take the baby away to bury them, you don’t tell the mother. You don’t let her know.” He sniffed to keep the tobacco in his nose. “You do it alone.”

**Managing Werewomen**

When we examine how illness is interpreted in the case of illness scenarios involving deliberate attack, we find three typical scenarios. The first refers to souls (nanm), which are agents sent by magical-religious procedures; in the second, a lwa is sent; and in the third, a "lougaou" (a king of vampires) is implicated in a childhood disease. (Vonarx 2007: 18)

The most potent and dreaded of a werewoman’s actions are those inscribed on the lifeless bodies of cherished infants, and these demand management at a number of levels from the familial, to the communal, to specialists, to ancestors. Infant illness is treated swiftly and with great care, and families are willing to try a great number of remedies from varied brings up the intense problem of unfulfilled sociality---floundering infants who die from lougaou attacks are imagined to be erased entirely from the web of existence. Their nanm is consumed entirely, made part of the werewoman, and there is no nanm left over to continue in a semblance of an afterlife.

Early incidents of preparation, attack, prevention, or treatment shape the contours of infant's lives, even when they survive. Their experiences with lougaou are formative, especially as such attacks often occur more than once, and are common for ages up until 4-years-old when children are building lasting memories. Then there are those signs of failed preventative efforts throughout the community as well: the half-closed lids of suffering infants, their swollen bodies, bloody vomit, the haunting image of a cherished child becoming a corpse. Most residents have general ideas of what
symptoms to watch out for, and if they do not see the symptoms, their social network will often point these out—the most notable being full-body inflammation and dry mouth, often preceded by a period of diarrhea, vomiting, and fever, and in the most serious cases followed by a rapid decline with listlessness, seizures, twitches, and finally death.

**Communal Responsibilities**

The fact that lougawou are considered a communal, not solely an individual, threat in Sou Lapwen is evident in the practice and habits of community members as they sought out aid for struggling infants. The communality of the lougawou threat would not be sufficiently obvious were one to only listen to conversations on infant illness—it was necessary to witness what was actually being done. Although healers, caretakers, and extended community members would sometimes speak about afflicted children as if they were ‘lost causes’ or resigned to the strategies of their parents, their actions told a very different story.

Perhaps most noticeably, community members acted in unusual unison when lougawou attacks were suspected. When infant life is at stake, Vodouissants, Evangelicals, and even neighborhood rivals will cross normally observed divisions in town communication. At the same time, even if prevention efforts are sometimes effective, it does not mean to imply that the threat is largely avoidable or even that it can always be mitigated. The beauty and allure of the child, in this sense, can often pull stronger on the werewolf than the magical forces seeking to keep here at bay.

Given the vested communal interest in saving infants, preventing accusations, and suppressing the intensity of jealousy and blame which does not often occur but does so often threaten to, treatment is diffused across a web of relations (Figure 3-13). Community members in Sou Lapwen acted in surprising unison when werewolf attacks
were suspected. When infant life is at stake, Vodouissants, Evangelicals, and even neighborhood rivals will cross normally observed divisions in town communication (Figure 3-12). Take, for example, the converted evangelicals of the Sou Lapwen Kò de Leroi church (Body of Christ). Kò de Leroi “sisters” and “brothers” were known as the strictest and most fervently anti-Vodou sect in a three-town radius. Upon conversion, they were expected to sever ties with non-church members, destroy their old clothing, and accept the demands of the pastor without question. Yet, if they knew an infant in peril (or had reason to suspect such), they reached out to a community much wider than their parish.

In one case, evangelical sisters of the church and the child’s husband led 18-month-old Carl Edouard, who was recently attacked by a werewolf, to the Manbo Nel’s courtyard with his mother and his father. In normal daily life, the same sisters (and most other church members) would cross the road to avoid passing too close to the gate of Vodou healers. In this case, the sisters’ complicity in Vodou practice was a sanctionable offense in the church, and if church leaders had known of these visits (or the number of others), it could have resulted in excommunication. Carl Edouard’s visit belied the severity of church edicts; it occurred in broad daylight like numerous other dialogues on infant protection which crossed town divisions. It was as if a white flag was waved, and a communal code of silence was unanimously respected when infant’s lives were at stake.

The crossing went both ways—it wasn’t unheard of for Vodou families with sick infants to meet up with evangelicals on the street, requesting prayers be said for the child. For example, three Sou Lapwen families in a household survey converted to
evangelism specifically because of continuing werewolf attacks on their children that did not respond to herbal or Vodou treatment.

Extensive prevention efforts like conversion are applied and passed on because they are seen as being somewhat effective. As in the southern community where Murray and Alvarèz (1973) conducted work, Sou Lapwen residents are expected to take extreme precaution during early pregnancy, keeping a woman’s condition largely secret. Once she is past the point of easy miscarriage, she bathes herself and thus the child in *boutey beng*, a substance which is repulsive to lougawou.

When Carl Edouard first arrived, his most serious symptom was obvious. His entire body was swollen, from his eyelids to his scrotum and to the flesh of his toes. He hadn’t peed in a day. His skin was cracked and peeling off of his thighs, back, and chest where his body had grown so engorged that the skin could barely keep up. His procession of three adults had worried, terrified expressions on their faces, looking to Nel and Carmelite, who ran their hands along his entire body, searching for clues. Carmelite questioned the father: “What is his room like?” and “Did you hear anything the night that this began?” Yes, he said, he had heard a noise. He didn’t see anything, maybe just a red flash, and then the boy became increasingly swollen over several days.

Felicie, Ninev and then Nel asked the same questions again in turn, Felicie focusing on the charms and preventative measures that the man had not taken, while Nel was concerned with the child’s breathing and crying fits at night (Figure 3-14). Nel shook her head and called forth a selection of three sorts of leaves, which Yvon rushed to go find. Ninev went to fetch water, as she knew the basin would be needed. The
sisters were sent after rock salt and kleren, and Nel asked that basil be plucked from her tree in the back yard.

Carl Edouard’s healing ceremony was one that was repeated over forty times during the course of research, around thirty of which I witnessed. Like all ceremonies, it was multi-layered and consisted both of portions that had to be pursued by the family at home, and portions that the oungan alone would do with material items she curates, as well as those elaborate portions that had to be communally attended to. The communal portions of the ceremony reiterated ceremonies of baptism, and although Carl Edouard was an outsider his medicine would consist in binding him to the courtyard in general, but specifically to the bitasyòn and the masters who watched over it. The ceremony required no less than seven persons, each with their own role to play. Nel chose my husband and I as the first set of Godparents, while Felicie, and Yvon were the second set, and Catheline and Ninev came to assist so that at least seven would always be present. Nel orated a decade of the Catholic rosary, and then called out a series of saints by name, followed by a series of lwa, and then coming to finally end on those lwa here among us including the Mèt Bitasyòn, and all those who inhabit the courtyard. The longest and most solemn song was sung out to Legba.

The time came for presenting the child to the world, an act done in an effort to save the infant by solidifying his social bonds. Jeff, my husband, and I were first called and took the vows of baptism, verbatim Catholic ones, promising to keep the child from harm and out of the reach of Satan, and make sure he was reverent and walked in the way of the Lord. Throughout the ceremony, we had to keep our single white candle burning, and we bestowed two special and secret names upon the child. Next, Carl
Edouard and the procession were brought under the tonnèl of the peristil where we were given basil leaves, salt, and kleren. Each of the seven attendees stood in a circle around Carl Edouard, held by his father, and flanked on the East by Legba’s tree. Nel stood in the center, calling out the song.

She directed each of us, telling us when to approach the child in solemn procession and baptize Carl Edouard through an anointment of salt which was to be crossed across all of his bodily intersections. After this was completed, we each took several leaves of the sacred basil tree, as well as rock salt and a swig of kleren which we crushed in our mouths in order to bless the child. Finally, Carl Edouard was passed through seven clouds of aerated salt, kleren, and basil leaves, and then passed into a basin of warm water containing the selection of three leaves that would work together as diuretics and as protective agents. After he was bathed and entirely wet, he was given a tea of the same leaves to drink. Before he finished drinking the tea he was handed, he began to urinate profusely and in the course of several hours his swelling had reduced tremendously. Nel gave directions for what he was to wear for the next few days, and how the parents were to speak of him, as well as when to administer the same bath and how to continue protecting their home.

**Specialist Responsibilities**

You boil palm oil with garlic, two spoons of palm oil, you grate into that one whole clove of garlic, you grate in nutmeg, you put it all together, you boil it well, you but in a little water to boil too, to kill any germs. You beat it up, whip it together, turn it into the consistency of labouyi, and you feed that medicine to the baby, and you bathe them with it. (Ba, Personal Interview, 2013)

In practice, Vodou infant treatments were the only non-familial treatments where specialists rarely discussed the ability to pay as a factor in the sort of treatment they
would receive. Parents from both within and outside of Sou Lapwen could reliably come to seek herbal consultation, and even magical treatments, without worrying about money. This was in contrast to the local NGO “hospitals,” where payment was due before consultation with a foreign doctor, and frequently resulted in a refusal to treat the child because of a “lack of supplies” (an expensive and non-refundable gamble).

Treatment efforts reflect how crucial membership in the communal assemblage is for survival; when babes are seriously ill, manbo and oungan treat them by bringing them into the fold, eliciting non-kin (or non-immediate kin) to baptize them and thus take up the role of spiritual sociality, or god parenthood as soon as possible. In so doing, they strive to magically protect and augment the child’s self so that he or she can act as “many” rather than “one” for at least a short time.

In order to determine the infant’s illness with confidence, families and neighbors work together to select an appropriate Vodou practitioner who can officially divine the causes and treat babies. Using cards, spirit possession, herbal consultations, diviners attempt to determine the cause and chart out possible routes of treatment.

Young, a local bòkò, uses spirit possession to divine the causes of illness. When a two-year old named Hans Whalter was sick, Young asked Simbi to “mount him,” and thus Simbi gave the child a bath and baptism to deter the interested werewolf. The child didn’t improve, so the family returned and Young consulted with Simbi again, deciding to craft a much stronger counter-magic in Hans Whalter’ image. Young adapted a technique he used to prevent dead lovers from pulling their living partners to the grave.

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2 Excepting extreme cases where repeated attempts by specialists have failed, and where more elaborate treatment is deemed necessary.
Sewing a small white poppet, short arms and legs splayed out, he stuffed it with thorns and herbs and attached a tuft of the child’s hair in order to attract the interest of the werewolf. Hanging it in his badji, he said the werewolf would mistake the poppet for the child, and if she tried to suck it she would be poisoned by the contents. Hans Whalter improved and, Young noted, he has not fallen sick with a serious illness since. The effigy still hangs in Young’s badji, rotated and dusted regularly—a curated life.

One day, while sweeping the backyard of fallen leaves in her morning ritual, Nel was thinking about the sorts of treatments she had done on infants in the past, as well as the appreciation (or lack thereof) that she had received for it. Renaud and I were there, pacing around the yard, helping here and there with missed pieces of trash or debris as we nodded and listened to her talk. Nel proclaimed “You know, there was this friend of mine, he came two times with his baby. I treated the baby. [The lougawou] had already taken his life-force…I treated his baby, he came here with the baby and I made medicine for them.”

Renaud, who was the slyest member of our group and the proud son of a great Chanpwêl emperor from Leogane smiled at Nel’s words, remembering: “Oh that one boy from across the way? That was a good thing you did, a good thing.”

Nel continued her story, “As soon as I was done treating him, the baby never had a problem again. You see? [My friend] never came back [to give me a little something.] Every time he sees me he says, he says, ‘Hey, Manbo, I am going to bring a little something for you, you hear? I’m going to come see you.’ He never comes. You
see? If I’m helping you out [with your baby], I’m certainly not doing it for money. Isn’t it true I always tell people I’m a good, moral, respectful oungan?”

Renaud agreed: “Can’t find that anymore in this country…It’s good. You are really doing something good here. You don’t make medicine to sell it. (He laughed) That’s why I don’t come to help you, because you never ask for pay.”

Nel chuckled, “Yeah, you see? Did you see that baby, the one I just did the remedy for [last week]?” She turned to me and I remembered the child, “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” Nel explained, “I couldn’t just let him die because I have a heart.”

Renaud remembered the incident as well, which he had avoided: “Yeah, [the baby] didn’t even have anyone in Sou Lapwen.”

Nel said, “He wasn’t even from here…they just came from the doctor, all their money was gone.” She shook her head and kept sweeping, tchwipping out of frustration given that her services garnered respect but not enough resource support.

Renaud considered this and after a long pause he nodded his head thoughtfully: “You did something truly good, with that. Good. God is really going to repay you…” (Nel and Josef. Transcribed Forum. 08/10/2013)

Nel was, in fact, generous with her mystical knowledge when it came to helping infants, but also with her economic and social resources. Let us return to the case of Clajames, the even-tempered orphan. Nel had no stable work when she took Clajames in, instead selling tobacco on and off as periodic shipments of a long cardboard box filled with fragrant Columbian tobacco leaves appeared. She and her family survived

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3 Nel uses the ambiguous phrase, “I’m certainly not doing it for money,” to complain that most people fail to pay and they forget their debts.
primarily because of her prime networking skills and her ability to enlist others in group projects that benefited her (like acquiring free rebar, concrete, and labor for reconstructing her temple after a bad storm).

Despite the economic poverty of the courtyard, Clajames was welcomed with open arms and the residents of the courtyard were delighted to help raise him, play with him, bathe and feed him (Figure 3-15). From Nel’s four-year-old grandson to the teenage boys, everyone sought time with Clajames as they would for any courtyard infant, according him the same level of protection and cautionary advice that they gave to blood-relations. Neighbors came over with old clothing, women and men playfully vied for the role of godparents, and there was never a lack of food, affection, or anti-werewolf paraphernalia for the young, wild-haired chap. Most memorably, Renaud and Carven both referred to themselves as Clajames’s father, amusingly re-igniting a passionate rivalry between the two. Within months of having Clajames, everyone in Sou Lapwen knew who he was, how he came to be in town, and many spoke of him as gentle, kind-hearted, and a child of the town—despite the fact that he was too young to spend much time awake anyways, or that his birth mother was an unknown Evangelical teenager from many cities away. This sort of communal care was the backbone of communal efforts to save him from the werewolf threat.

While on the one hand communalization of the werewolf threat maximizes the number of people who are willing and able to help caretakers, on the other hand it can be said to weaken the potential for total caretaker authority over their infants. In many cases, caretakers are quite comfortable with giving up the autonomy they once exercised during the confinement period. However, communal reciprocity and inter-
reliance can generate social discord just as easily as they generate harmony, and this
lesson is not lost during infant rearing. Put simply, social lessons of reciprocity are just
as much about our natural rights over others’ lives as they are our obligations to give,
and when others disagree with our approach to handling a potentially contagious threat,
the social fields can get very sticky indeed.

Lwa Responsibilities

Then there were those times when the lwa themselves demand the infants be
treated. In one such case, Nel had awoken from a terrible dream and had been in
prayer all morning when Felicie came crashing into the courtyard from her home across
the way. “Psst Nel, Nel!” She made herself to where we were and lowered her voice. I
grabbed her a chair. “I just had an awful dream, Nel! I don’t understand it all, not one bit.
I saw the baby, the baby was in my arms, a white candle was in my hands, and I was
going to cross the road, get it? And I see a big guy standing there, like this” She shifted
her shoulders and back till they were straight upright, confident, and she molded her
face into a stern expression bearing a trace of disgust, “Where are you going, Madam?”
He says. So I say, ‘I’m going home’. He looks at me. He looks at the baby. He looks at
me” She made her eyes into wide open bulbs, leaning her neck far back on her
shoulders imitating the posture of extreme surprise: “Where are you going with that
child?’ I say, ‘I was just going to cross and go to my house.’ ‘No’, he says, ‘under no
conditions should you go into the street with that little boy. Better you set your candle
there, on the ground, and go back.”

“Hmph” Nel said immediately “You see?”

Nel retreated into herself with her posture, bringing her legs in close, her arms
towards her body, one hand batting her forehead as she considered what was to be
done. She called for Estelle, and had her tell Ninev that she was needed to collect
certain herbs, ones much harder to find then normal. They grew down in the Nayè A
with others, but were not abundant.

First, Nel planned to make a fortifying tea, and later in the evening she expected
to do another remedy. Meanwhile, she prepared another serving of bouillon. Clajames
was supine in a kivèt on which Nel rested her foot on, so that she might tilt it back and
see him every few seconds, outside of the kitchen, where Fabien had left him. That day
was long and arduous and Clajames’ fever seemed to be a bit higher. Folks came into
the courtyard from Lamanay, worried that Clajames hadn’t improved in the past week,
and mostly worried because of how small and quiet and tired he seemed. They laughed
when they heard he had tried to go to the doctor.

Nel did a bathing remedy for Clajames. His fever descended, but now his arms
and legs were limp, and he seemed to be fading fast. After the remedy was done, they
sent me to the SADA hospital with him. I was stopped at the gate. “The child doctor is
not here today.” They said. I responded by showing them Clajames in my arms, limp.
“This child is ill, see?” The nurse responded. “Very ill! Yes, he ought to go to the
hospital. He needs serum in his veins.”

“Aren’t you a hospital?” I asked, pointing to where it said emergency room in
English and French on the side of the building. She looked where I pointed.

“Well, then another hospital.”

“What other hospital, what hospital is open? Where, where can I go with him?” I
frantically asked, “Saint Marc Hospital?”. 
“No, no. Well, there is probably no serum there. There is no serum in Arkayè, you have to go to Port Au Prince. Maybe Saint Marc. Maybe Mirebalais?” All of the places she mentioned would take an hour or more to arrive at, and that would be an hour in the hot sun, surrounded by other people.

I returned back home, defeated. The most they would be able to do, the nurse suggested, was give him serum. IV Serum would change his condition very quickly, I knew, but it was very unlikely I would find anything except the powdered packets if I found anything at all. I called other contacts, exhausting lines of assistance.

Hospitals close sporadically, even in the large town of Arcahaie. Rarely are there regular hours, even when there are fresh new coats of paint and signs posted out front that suggest that we thank one of many aid groups for the presence of the building. Even the Saint Marc hospital might not help, and I wouldn’t trust it entirely anyways.

The next day, when Clajames’ arms were limp, he was taken to a doctor at the American mission in the far-off hills. It was the only other place in moto distance, and it took 45 minutes of time under the open sun, the billowing white dust, bumps and shakes and risks to get there. It was nearly identical to the first doctor visit. In time these visits became a script that I was well used to and that made me profoundly skeptical about the possibility of western medical care being an improvement over any other form—even prayer—in the region. This time, the doctor said the child was too sick. “No, he needs to be admitted. We can’t help here.” However, he did give us a name. He suggested we drive several hours away to get serum at a hospital out in the mountains.

“We have no car,” I protested. “On transport we won’t make it until nightfall and it will be closed.”
The doctor shrugged. “Well, maybe he just has gas. It could just be gas, anyways.” Then he seemed to come up with an idea. He pulled out a pen and a notebook and wrote something on it, handing it over. “Here is a prescription for medicine.” He smiled sadly at me.

I soothed Clajames who was jerking uncomfortably. I glanced at the paper, which seemed to be a prescription for serum and a vitamin. “Where can we get this filled?” I asked.

The usual response came: “I don’t know. Hmm…not anywhere near. Maybe Port Au Prince?” He went back to his work and then said finally, “If not Port Au Prince, try Sen Loovens.” I sighed, understanding. There would be no medicine.

As I left, I took a last glance at the rows of women and men holding sick babies, children tugging at their caretakers, young men with eye infections, arms wrapped in bandages, or open wounds. I recognized many from the morning. One, a woman who had waited with her sister’s 10-month-old since dawn, long before I was there, saw me come out of a locked white room and weakly asked me: “Did you see the doctor?”

“Yes, yes he was there, I saw him.” I said. “Good, good.” She said, smiling, sighing, as if my relief was her relief. “That’s good.” I smiled at her, looking so tired, so hot and uncomfortable in the courtyard where scents of blood and sour milk were heating up in the sun.

“What did he say about your baby? Do they have medicine?”

“Oh no, I haven’t seen the doctor yet.” She looked to the closed door as she said this, and I saw how young she was, how valiant, how exhausted. “Not yet, maybe later.”
I gave her the sachet of water and crackers that I had with me, and after I left I thought I ought to have convinced the orderly to tell the doctor about the young woman. I could have said: “She’s really sick. It looks like cholera” so they might listen. But I had a feeling that the rooms would have been empty.

When we got home, we made serum with a Sprite soft drink again and fed it to the baby, who vomited, and whom we fed again. His fever spiked that night, which he spent with Ninev.

In the morning, Nel woke up with her face in a twisted, wide eyed way, handkerchief in hand, meaning she had been conducting serious business with lwa the prior evening as she lay in bed. She pulled her manbo seat from the kitchen, and smoothed out her dress, tchwipping with her teeth, and shaking her head, then grabbed the calabash nearby.

It held snuff wrapped in neat plastic strips, taken from the good plastic bags that one could find around, not the tiny thin breakable sort. She opened a small sachet, pinched a piece of tobacco, and began kneading it in the palm of her hand. Gently placing it in her nostril, she let out a big sigh.

“The lwa spoke with me last night. Good lord, that child, that child has something over him.” She smacked her legs in the dawn silence, then took the blue mouchwa on her lap and tied her hair up.

“The kid has something, do you understand? Something serious. They gave me a remedy to do for him, but….wow.” She lifted her shoulders and sighed out. It was the sort of sigh that tells you that it will be hard to save the kid, that her meeting wasn’t an insurance policy, that could either mean medicine, or it could be a premonition of death.
“Doctors can’t do anything for the child, you hear? That’s what they told me. We oughtn’t take him to the doctor anymore.”

It is not uncommon to see caretakers and non-kin residents engaging in intense discussions over how an infant is being raised, who the caretaker socializes with, and what hour the caretaker puts the child inside. Caretakers rarely (if ever) turn their backs to such conversations, as they are under a social obligation to listen. In the case of a dispute involving just the caretaker and one other person, the conversation will eventually become deadlocked and the caretaker can do as they wish. However, when the caretaker adamantly disagrees with many others over what is best for the infant, the caretaker’s wishes will be subjugated to the collective, and this will normally be done in secret. Such ‘vigilante care’ operations are very common in infant rearing, especially when it involves werewolves. Furthermore, they are quite easy to execute because primary caretakers frequently leave infants in the care of others on one side of the courtyard, while they perform daily activities on the other. In this way, community members coming in to the courtyard can slip food, herbal teas, or charms to infants when the caretaker’s eyes are averted. If the situation is serious enough, and the caretaker is too vigilant for visitors to sneak past, people will resort to outright sabotage—like grabbing baby bottles from the dirty dishes and slicing off the top of the nipples because “the baby is getting too weak and sick by struggling to suck with such a tiny hole.”

Temporary vigilante “kidnappings” are one of the more committed approaches that community members can use if they feel an infant caretaker is erring in judgment. Janine’s primary caretakers Mira and Kristòf were stout evangelicals, a “brother” and
“sister” in a local church. Janine was terribly ill with symptoms that appeared to be lougawou-related, and sister Mira had failed to find treatment for the girl after visiting three different hospitals. Believing that God would deliver Janine from the hands of the werewolf only if their faith was strong enough, Mira and Kristòf decided to forego all treatments except prayer. Friends, family and neighbors failed to convince Kristòf to pursue alternate, time-tested treatments, such as herbal remedies and Vodou magic. As the child’s condition worsened, Kristòf’s brother Jimmy arranged to care for the child while Kristòf went to an all-night evangelical ritual (*Jen*).

With Kristòf and Mira out of the picture, Jimmy and others began working on a renegade treatment they had planned for several days. A community member with a car showed up, whisking Jimmy, his wife, and the young baby Janine off to a well-known oungan in Sen Loovens. There, the child was baptized in a Catholic-Vodou ceremony, given a secret name, and placed under the vital spiritual care of Godparents (and two saints). After taking an herbal bath and drinking tea, the child was sent back home with Jimmy and his wife, where they tucked her in, went to sleep, and spoke nary a word to the parents in the morning.

The effort was secretly applauded by those who knew in town, with approbational rumors spread quietly by both Vodou and Evangelical practitioners. The practitioners who were privy to the event felt that at least *some* treatment would be good, and they were sympathetic of the parents’ reluctance to doubt God. By whisking the child off without Kristòf and Mira’s knowledge, the involved community members thought they could keep all parties happy; God couldn’t blame Kristòf and Mira when they didn’t know, the baby was given a valuable herbal treatment, God now knew Janine because
she was baptized and named (Bondye rekònet li), and most importantly, there was no conflict. However controversial this operation seems to an outsider (or was to Kristòf and Mira), a general consensus prevailed that Jimmy, his wife, and the cast of others were well within their right to act on Janine’s behalf, regardless of Kristòf and Mira’s consent.”

**Discussion**

Werewomen crosscut regions, classes, and timespans in Haiti, looming always as they threaten to do what they do best—attack. Werewolves are experienced as animated beings in motion, whether passing through nighttime streets in the flower-strewn mountains, or flocking out and away from the broken earth of Port Au Prince on the day of the great earthquake, January 12, 2010. Lougawou are in Haiti, as people will say, and they have been in Haiti for as long as residents can remember, and werewolf accusations and contestations have been around for the same period. Ultimately there is no clear-cut answer for how or why loupagou have come to inhabit the landscapes I studied, and most residents know full well that werewolves do not hunt the children of many foreign nations in such large numbers as they do in Haiti.

By juxtaposing peoples, experiences, memories, thoughts, and sounds, people cast a proverbial net around the real thing, not hoping to capture it (which might be impossible) but at least to corner it for a moment so it can be understood and dealt with. At the heart of werewomen and many other phenomenon there will always lie uncertainty, ambiguity, and shadows. Like real things, they are always changing and moving, as Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and Bergson (2002) would have it.
A cursory review of the werewolf phenomenon also reveals a self-conscious intersection of various materialities. In experiencing infants as becoming-dead, or becoming ill, Haitians must dance between commitments, fears, and varied medical systems. In experiencing certain market women as baby-killing werewolves, Haitians in Sou Lapwen point to the deep and uncanny derangements of social expectations, public health, morality, economy, politics, and family life. In other words, werewomen roam freely in the interstitial spaces of many aspects of Haitian life. They pose serious questions about the rights of individual beings to life and health in social worlds, as well as their concomitant responsibility to this collective.

This chapter has offered werewolves as a poignant case study in the content of terror and threat. Werewolves are assemblages and not essential nor univocal ideas; they are constituted by their effects just as they are constituted by our own efforts to contain them. Although knowing them to be individually complex, people tend to deal with werewolves categorically, and even then, intervene on the problem of werewolves in a limited number of ways. Although werewolves admittedly have the capacity to destabilize normal social relationships because of their greed, or drive prices and profits up resulting in starvation and destitution, or challenge community authority, these risks are not seen or treated equally. Indeed, werewolves in my study were only ever dealt with as killers of babies. Other negative effects of their presence were known, but tacitly accepted and run through the mill of rumor, never demanding intervention or action.

Speaking relatively, it may strike readers as surprising that Sou Lapwen residents work to contain the werewolf threat instead of, say, taking the more obvious route of eradication. The stated reasons for this were numerous; some were anchored
in a deep ethical aversion to the willful taking of life at the core of Vodou philosophy, other reasons involved the futility of an eradication campaign. Even considering the gravity and extremity of the threat that werewolves pose to infants, there were only two residents who suggested that hunting down a werewolf would be an appropriate response to werewolf attacks.
Figure 3-1. A map of werewolves and the flows that constitute them (blue) as well as their social effects (orange) which are covered in the chapter.
Figure 3-2. Ninev eagerly awaits news from the hospital regarding her goddaughter and cousin, Gaen's, condition while she gives birth.
Figure 3-3. Nanis holds Gémima, preparing to bathe her in a preventative medicine which will keep her safe from werewolf attacks.
Figure 3-4. One half of a magical creation to kill a werewoman is suspended from the ropes that crisscross the inside of a bòkò’s hut.
Figure 3-5. Turin's infant Wonal sits upon a mat. His condition is very poor in the photograph, though he is sitting for the first time in days. His family, like Nephertarie's (Chapter 5), eventually relocated to a different home in the same region, though Turin's family stayed in Sou Lapwen. The fact that such small inter-regional relocations are thought capable of preventing future attacks indicates exactly how intimate these attacks are thought to be.
Figure 3-6. Turin proudly holds his son, who was long expected to die from the severity of a lougawou attack, which left him unable to speak or walk. Around his neck lies a key charm for preventing further drainage of nanm.
Figure 3-7. A family from Sou Lapwen travels to the shoreline, rather than the market, to purchase fish. They are ever wary of market fish, which are suspected to be the nanm of consumed children.
Figure 3-8. Carmelite examines the infant Carl Edouard closely, asking the mother questions about his condition in an attempt to determine when werewolf attacks began. His swollen body and lips are a nearly certain sign that this was a lougawou attack.
Figure 3-9. Sou Lapwen at night, with a solar street lamp shedding light on Anperè's peristil.
Figure 3-10. A roof protects the ceiling, but there are many holes and routes of entry for night creatures. A window that used to let in a breeze has been boarded over in the wake of attacks.
Figure 3-11. Infant on main road is protected from a recent lougawou attack by the matches, part of a magic spell, strung around his neck.
Figure 3-12. Casseus demonstrates a powerful preventative, involving a lime, a needle, and thread. Along with a secretly recited name, this creation will be hung from the roof and offer protection for all infants inside the courtyard.
Figure 3-13. According to Twa Grenn's instructions, Ninev begins the first part of a ceremony at a crossroads in order to demand Kafou deal with the werewolf.
Figure 3-14. Nel makes the first of seven sets of magical crosses across every intersection of the infant’s body, a process to be repeated by each of the seven guests.
Figure 3-15. A year and a day after the first magical crosses were made on the infant, the final portion of the ceremony began by Twa Gren and Ninev is completed, when a bottle of rum is smashed against the crossroads for Kafou.
Figure 3-17. At the request of the infant’s mother, the author holds a newborn girl for a photograph. This girl died purportedly perished from a lougawou a week after the photo was taken.
CHAPTER 4
CONSUME

The Many Among Us

If it is understood that within the Vodou worldview the individual is both a separate self and an inseparable part of a family, then it can be grasped how the Iwa who are part of that extended family can be both other than and merged with those who serve them (McCarthy Brown 2006: 2)

The mattress that I sleep on bows down in the center. Those who have mattresses here have mattresses that bow, pulling occupants inward. So the night passes, rolling to center and then again moving away from each other in the heat. The nighttime casts a shadow over these rolling motions like a strange dance in the darkness over bed sheets. Sheets that are clean. Like all fabric, rigorously clean. The mattress is only motion. When we change the covers and embarrassingly see the lines, the marks, the stains of bodies over the years, it offers up the memory of sleeping flesh, the stained shroud of the living and the dead who visit. The pillows too are repositories of the mundane, the forgotten, the moments by which we measure out our lives. They are stuffed with old clothes which in their great age have become light, soft, and as fragile as tissue paper. I found out when the seam ripped on one side. A bit of the fabric began to fall out, a section of silk that had been finished by time, thinned out by the conditions of the bodies that wore it, though it still remains soft.

Between the mattress and the box frame, held up by crumbling concrete blocks, are the nicest pieces of our clothing. It flattens out our dresses, shirts and trousers, oh carefully folded on the seams so that after several months they will still be flat and fresh. This also keeps the best clothing safe from the mice and other pests. Where the mattress dips downward, we place mounds of clothing in greater quantity to try and
even the whole thing out. At first it will fill the dip a bit and we fall into each other less. I sleep curled up on the right side, next to others.

The scent of night is the scent of freshly washed skin coming into the house. Each Tuesday, it is the delicate waft of perfume, which is sometimes sprayed by the Manbo to scent the bedroom and please the living (among others). She calls out to the Other Place with that smell.

We eat again before we sleep (Figure 4-1). A smaller meal, a reliquary to the grand central meal of the day. The food is not hot but it is no less nutritious, Family members come to find leftovers, asking, encouraging you to eat, eating what is left, picking out the favorite parts to leave for you. If sick I will take the medicinal tea at night on the cement porch. Such teas are bitter but Nel mellows them with sugar, now with leaves of Asosi, now with fey lougawou, plucked up from the garden, made on a tiny private stove for tea, strained through nylon and placed in a cup which I must “drink!” “drink!”.

When I die, this mattress, clothing, pillow, will be lit aflame until there is nothing left but ash. When Nel dies, it will be the same. And Ninev’s things will be burned when Ninev dies. I think it banishes the wandering dead because it banishes their movements, the marks of their bodies, rolling all night, the smell of their hair, pressed against the pillows, the familiar release of the mattress as they arise to work again. Too much still pulls on the living, still bows the mattress down, still huddles in the plates and dishes stacked in the chiffonier. We create bonds in life so strong that even death and perishing flesh and the feel of absence cannot unlink them. It requires a stern fire and outright destruction to set them free. Even then, the dead are known to carry off the
living, those weakest, those crippled by grief. I think too much still lives on in our things when we die. The pillows and mats and clothes are our shoes. Ghosts of the living and the dead who visit. Of the friends and the enemies living beside us (too many to count). On they go, endlessly incorporating one another, fleeing from one another only to meet back at the center of living, of the courtyard, of the room, the plates, the mattress. The lizards and terrifying banana spiders do keep out certain intruders, not everyone is welcome or wholesome. Most of all, we destroy those who carry real disease, the cockroaches, mosquitoes, the biting flies. The rats, who are always with us but thankfully not in our bedchambers, have been tempted away by sweeter lures. They find delights in the kitchen where nothing can be refrigerated. Things are stored on plates with other plates stacked on top, a stone used here or there to keep the lid down.

Sometimes, the spiders, lizards, and moths are ancestral beings come to visit, and sometimes Nel speaks to them. Still, they have only the most fragile alliance with us. I am scared by the spider; others fear the lizards. It requires a good deal of diplomacy on both sides to keep everyone’s anxieties in check. We must think of the ants when we serve food. We think of the spiders as we hang clothes. The lizards when we bathe.

**Nanm Must be Maintained**

In the prior chapter, I have described nanm and its expressions in broad terms, showing nanm as a key part of the bodily assemblage that develops surfaces, responds to emotions, and reconstructs selves over time. Here, I develop this line of inquiry further by exploring how techniques of feeding and eating generate and maintain key experiences of nanm-as-being and contribute to the manufacturing of shared, mutually sensible bodies. From a Haitian perspective, food is a key locus of social life. Food is
the making of social ties. Food is the movement of empathy (or animosity) between the living and the dead, the blood kin and the adopted, the family, the field, and the friends (Desmangles 1992: 64).

These experiences of feeding and being fed reinforce an ecological meshwork of trans-visceral, trans-mortem, trans-sensuous beings (Figure 4-2). Practices of feeding connect Haitian farmers here to cooks, then to infants, to families, to stones and sites which are fed, and to the broader ecology of being outside the courtyard which includes humans, animals, herbs, elements, lwa, and many others besides. This meshwork of selves, forces, nanm, and all else is routinely mentioned in the literature, where bodies are described as permeable and intermixed. Paul Farmer (1988) writes extensively on fluids and bodily exchange, seeing bodies and persons as interdependent, involved in exchanges of fluid and food. This, he explains is why emotions can be powerfully transformative. For better or for worse, emotions transform us in/as substances, and we transform others through exchanges of substance, meaning that emotions, feelings, and suspicions have tremendous material effects upon our intertwined flesh.

A critical time in feeding practices is that early period of life known as infancy, when methods of sustaining life through food call upon women’s bodies and social networks in unique ways that demand intense vigilance and responsiveness for at least the first several years (Murray and Alvarèz 1973). During this period of intense feeding work, beings-as-bodies are themselves shaped through their acts of shaping infants.

Through social practice, these beings experience emotions like hunger and the sensual feeling of satiation, pleasure, and the company of touch. They feel and respond to those feelings emoted by others, feeling the pull of a family member’s hunger upon
their own stomach. Social practices ground caretakers and infants in the embodied empathies of feeding, being fed, responding to hunger, cultivating these as bodily-social dispositions that should always be maintained and attended to (Figure 4-3). Through feeding practices, infants come to know what bodies are in relation to others, what nourishment is, and how food is always to be shared.

Caretakers of all ages continually enact and reaffirm these lessons by acting to care for others, and by eliciting care from others. Although men, especially teenagers, do participate in feeding infants and children, they rarely match the extent and frequency with which females of all ages contribute to courtyard nourishment. In Sou Lapwen, adult women tend to act as the “poto mitan” (central pillars) of courtyard space and commerce, a pattern which was present throughout the past 200 years in several regions of Haiti (Edmond et al 2007).

Such practices are especially pronounced in times of scarcity which comes in perpetual cycles. These cycles are learning opportunities where infants are quite naturally indoctrinated into patterns of food exchange, generating (though not always evenly) eagerness to alleviate the hunger of others, even at the expense of one’s own stomach. Persons extend through each other, that hunger is not a private matter, that the emotive sensation of hunger passes through a corporeal body beyond the flesh of the infant, it pricks at all the other skin of the courtyard, right up to the lwa who will barge in through the front gate. Thus, the chapter stakes out the question of feeding as it is made flesh in infant practice, as it becomes and the conclusion connects these experiences to broader Haitian life draws upon consuming/feeding and feeling in broader courtyard ecologies.
Consumption is Nanm; Consumption is Life

Wilmina: Like, Nel, for example. I am Nel’s friend. I go to her house, sit inside. She has told me I can look inside all the lwa rooms if I like, or not. I enter her courtyard. I sit. We talk. However: I don’t eat things that come from their hands.

Alissa: So you can be Nel’s friend but you can’t eat or drink there?

Wilmina: Yeah, I can’t eat or drink there. We aren’t the same person. We can just sit, talk, do everything, go look at the lwa behind the courtyard, but the moment she makes food? I’m not eating it. If the person is your person, in the same church as you, that’s where you eat. Your food waits for you there. You call out “find your food here”. But if you aren’t in the same church, it is not done.

If someone were to broadly generalize about values in Haiti, they might come to the conclusion that food offers the best of life, while hunger is the worst. Manje, which means “food” in Haitian Creole, is also used as a verb meaning “to eat.” To eat within a courtyard is to constitute one’s body-self as part of the courtyard, to refuse to eat within a courtyard is to deny important interpersonal bonds. In the conversation above, Wilmina, an Evangelical woman who is good friends with Nel, speaks of eating habits; Nel and her cannot exchange food freely. To not eat is therefore to make oneself different.

What is in your belly, it is in my belly, too. It is in the belly of the dogs of the courtyard, the belly of guests, the belly of the peristil, which is dug and filled with it in preparation for the new poto mitan. What you drink, I too will drink. Kleren warms my chest just as it warms yours; it warms the throats of the lwa, lapping up the four servings from far under the earth, from in front of me, behind me, the left and the right. Bodies and persons are interdependent, and fluids pass between them that carry love, fear, anger (Farmer 1988; Brodwin 1996).
Many lines intersect when we eat and we share food. These practices will follow us all our whole lives. Long before we were born, our mothers knew what and how to eat based on what we told them, what we asked for, inside their wombs and within their blood. They knew how to clean their bodies and their blood as our own. Lwa are within you, a oungan told Sommerfeld, they are “your Africa, your reason, your personality” (1994: 82). Long after we die we will still be fed, and our tables will be cleaned and dusted. Lwa will visit, the lands will be cultivated, crossroads will be covered in the ancient remnants of ritual battles for our lives.

Bird-David (1999) explored personhood among the Nayaka of South India in an effort to reclaim the term animism from its fetishistic Tylorian connotations. In doing so, he touches upon Nayaka animism as creating personhood relationally and through practice rather than something imposed a priori to various beings, as Tylor and Durkheim would have it.

Though I deign to speak of Haitian Vodou as an animist practice, Bird-David’s observations are still important because they offer a key perspective for seeing personhood in Sou Lapwen as an ongoing process curated through practices including food sharing. Bird-David says: “As and when and because they engage in and maintain relationships with other beings, they constitute them as kinds of persons: they make them ‘relatives’ by sharing with them.” Like the Nayaka Devaru, persons in Sou Lapwen (lwa, humans, and otherwise) are “objectifications of sharing relationships,” they do not exist as persons prior to these relations. Therefore, sharing relationships constitute persons in Sou Lapwen as relatives of each other, a category that is unbound to blood and can become very broad in comparison to consanguineal ties.
During illness, friends or experts administer herbal remedies (and baths) for the patient so that they might consume certain helpful nanm indicated by their particular malady. The same process is applied for keepers of domestic animals who often ritually bathe and feed the livestock especially when illness strikes or otherwise when it seems imminent. The herbs used are not often pulled out at the root (thus killing them), but instead they are usually simply pruned so that they might grow again, perhaps with even fuller leaves.

Through gardens (worked by both sexes) and market exchanges (by women and girls) raw food grown from the earth is gathered into reused rice sacks, the onions stuffed in there with the peppers, the eggplant, the avocado, the tomato, the carrots, dirt still clinging to them. Even the freshly slaughtered meat and its juices, smartly located at the bottom, will mix in with the vegetables if the sack is overturned. When these market women travel home, they spread out their treasure on rickety tables for everyone to behold. Women often proudly start cleaning the vegetables, calling out for a fire to be made.

They prepare the greens, peeling out every single vein, discarding each half ruined leaf which “isn’t right” (setting it aside for livestock). The rice needs to be tossed high up into the air and sorted out so that all the stones are removed. An enormous cast-iron pot is then lowered over a carefully curated charcoal stove. The rice is added and the water inside is brought to a boil, then covered with a discarded plastic bag of some sort in order to properly steam. Beans are always going up in price, so unless someone has a fresh harvest from the garden, it is much more usual to eat a vegetable sauce made from new garden sprouts mixed with pork fat, magi, crushed green pepper,
lime, grated coconut, a spoonful of canned tomato sauce and a number of spices that will be served as a sauce over the rice. Lengthily stirred for hours, the sauce in one cauldron, and the rice in another vat, food becomes hot, warm. Ready to give nanm. It is separated onto plates from the two great iron kettles: one of starch, one of sauce. It is eaten. Through these practices, persons incorporate each other into collectives and reaffirm the relations between themselves as many.

Conklin and Morgan (1996), working with the Wari Indians, explored how shared substances and changing relationships created mutable experiences of embodied personhood and that strikingly similar ideas appeared across the Amazon and in some Polynesian societies. “The human body,” they say “becomes not just a site where relationships are signified but a site where relations are constituted.” They termed these systems “ethnophysiological models of shared substance,” and Haitian Vodou would seem to fit the description. In this work, I am not interested in models or names but rather in how relations become constituted in the substantive circulation of fluid, food, and substances, an emotionally enlivened process that extends concepts of personhood beyond the skin-boundary of so-called ‘individuals’.

There is an ingrained (and complex) conviction that resources, misfortune, and all that exists, tends to circulate in deeply uneven ways. Relations must be carefully curated; they are the source of both luck and evil (see also Brown 2006: 1). Social ties are the nearly all-powerful bastion, which, if and when wielded correctly, can stand in the way of nearly any misfortune and guarantee a life of communal abundance. From early on, social ties teach us that evenness and balance are things that must be practiced, and that new generations will inherit the great responsibility for maintaining
balance through actions of exchange and care. Balance requires constant, emotionally invested vigilance, and food is seen as the earliest and easiest way to establish balance (Figure 4-4). Balance, of course, does not always mean that everyone gets to be full, but rather that all should share equally in the proceeds of food.

Food is life itself. Nanm. Satiation. Pleasure. On the other hand, hunger, is often simply pain. Illness. Cruelty. So it is that we cannot divest these material experiences of the profound sense judgements to which they are socially joined, and from which they arise. From a local perspective, it is not as if food (manje) were some basic biological need crying out for pragmatic satisfaction, annoying us from time to time when we are hungry.

Feelings of hunger and the satisfaction of hunger are deeply socialized in Haiti, as the most prominent feelings that shape the sensorial intertwined meshwork of the courtyard. It affects how dogs, cows, humans, lwa, etc., and the entire landscape itself behaves”. Hunger is an emotion as palpable and externalized as anger, sadness, or fear. Feeling hungry (much as feeling sad or feeling excited) tends to involve one’s entire being—it is not just stomach or head that is hungry, empty, or painful it is often oneself. This hunger transforms one’s immediate praxis as well as the way that one’s body functions (see also Alvarèz and Murray 1973).

Alma Nadège Stevens, in her important study on the symbolism of food in Haiti, suggests that the emotional content of hunger sensations resembles anxiety (Stevens 1995: 78). Analyzing hunger and stress in McCarthy Brown (1991), who observes her key informant Alourdes “obsesses about food. She seems to be constantly hungry and constantly worried that no one will feed her. When food is provided, she picks at her
meal and rarely admits she enjoys it” (Brown 1991: 44 in Stevens 1999). Likewise, in Sou Lapwen, both hunger and anxiety are common responses to inter-courtyard stress. Hunger is reflected in restlessness, in darting eyes, in pickiness and nervous repetitive movements, in the contagious act of yawning. Likewise, when someone is anxious but do not say that they are hungry, food is still prescribed as a calmative agent. Likewise, when anxious, one may also be hungry, but in either case food is prescribed as a calmative agent. The opposite is also true: when hungry, one is very likely anxious, and can be treated with reassurance, touch, as well as food.

Murray and Alvarèz (1981: 62) compiled a physiological model of hunger in their explanation of gaz (gas), one of three explanatory constructs of illness in diagnostic practice at his site (the other is san or blood):

When a person is normal, and has eaten well, his breathing proceeds normally: he inhales and exhales all of the air. But if a person’s stomach is empty, there are many nooks and crannies in the stomach. When he inhales and the air goes to the stomach (it is believed that air enters the stomach on breathing), some of the air (or gaz) gets trapped into to the nooks created by the absence of food. It is not expelled when the person exhales, and it remains in the stomach causing pains until the person fills his stomach with food…But gas does not only remain in the stomach. If something goes wrong, gas can travel all over the person’s body.

Although hunger and bathing and baptizing fold the courtyard together in different ways, they are equally extensive social experiences. Hunger demands attention not just from a single caregiver, but from whomever is present. All sexes, ages, and types of persons in a courtyard are expected to assist in provisioning others, especially infants.
Practices of care-for-others were not limited to those like Nel and Nel’s daughter (the leaders in the courtyard), or even to the whole of the human occupants of the courtyard—it employed the young, like Estelle, as well as the teenagers, Zhedd, Yvon, and Eugenie, and the Iwa, Ogun, Bossou, Twa Grenn, all of whom were expected to care, assist, respond to hunger, and verify satiation in others as well as demonstrate satiation themselves.

**Becoming Infants, Becoming Persons**

It is in infancy that we see the strongest efforts to enculturate babies into relational becoming through food sharing and food consumption, (and in later infancy, food preparation) and to protect infants from the deadly incursions of jealousy, anger, and shock (Farmer 1988). Mauss (1973), wrote a short treatise on techniques of the body which became a precursor for Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of habitus. In Mauss’s work, he describes in detail the sorts of mundane socialized differences in bodies cross-culturally. Rather than seeing these as random variation, Mauss touches upon the idea that such techniques are in fact the common core from which communities arise. These techniques station and mark bodies in reference to each other, the world, activities, and tools, disciplining attentions in different ways across the globe (Figure 4-5). While sketching out a model of socialized embodiment, Mauss pays significant attention to identifying and describing infancy and infant care, childhood education, and “consumption techniques” that structure bodies.

In all these elements of the art of using the human body, the facts of education were dominant. The notion of education could be superimposed on that of imitation. For there are particular children with very strong imitative faculties, others with very weak ones, but all of them go through the same education, such that we can understand the continuity of concatenations. The child, the adult, imitates actions which have succeeded and which he has seen successfully performed by people in
whom he has confidence and who have authority over him. The action is imposed from without, from above, even if it is an exclusively biological action, involving his body.

Children are exposed to important shoulder movements and gestures that indicate caretaker's moods, they are exposed to facial expressions, methods of offering food, and communal play (see also Martin 1995). For infants and caretakers, certain consumption techniques are created and sustained as obligatory during the prolonged vulnerability and illness of the first few years. Individuals hone their skills later in life, but in infancy and early childhood, perceptual attention is carefully and clearly disciplined into children through these practices. Methods of exchange and gestures of care are the most important ways to gauge a person's intentions-demeanor, speech, likability, are all much less important. These material practices shape childhood education, but also and more visibly the compulsory characteristics of sharing food in order to save and sustain lives. Food becomes the very first medicine, the cure all.

To care for an infant is thus to look after the courtyard-as-in-the-infant, to care for oneself-as-in-the-infant, the ancestors-as-in-the-infant, the future-as-in-the-infant and so on, all in a primarily tactile and material fashion (Figure 4-6). Infants are new, exciting, and passionately adored successes in/of courtyards, and yet the very newness of their exposure to the world makes their new relations to the world particularly unpredictable. Courtyards most often take charge of infant care, not exposing them to the streets or any publics that aren’t necessary until the baptism. They are vulnerable and open “louvi” and new "tou nèf,” too easily susceptible to the ties of disease, sorcery, cruelty, and coldness, which other members are better protected against (see also Bastien 1961; Hurbon 1979).
The process is socio-spatial, as children move progressively out of the household and onto the street in direct correlation to the broader communities in which they voluntarily establish themselves. The time the child begins to grasp consistently and respect interpersonal ethics in the most compelling circumstances (food sharing, for example) they have stepped out of anti-sociality of infancy. They are on their way to learning how to be people amongst other people. This is a task that is most often carried out in Sou Lapwen by cohort groups, which, by the age of 3 or 4-years-old, most amusingly begin working together to keep each other equally apportioned and to resolve and minimize spontaneous emotional outbursts of anger or selfishness. It is not uncommon for a four-year-old to be quite close with a household who only rarely encounters his family or who is in mild disputes with one’s family (see also Bastien 1961).

During the practice and experience of pregnancy and infancy, eating, hunger, and the sharing of food come clearly into focus. As soon as a woman comes to know she is pregnant, her relationships with others change concerning food. Young Haitians are treated as infants from the time they are noticeably within the womb of a woman. Gestation, birth, and early infancy are key sites where sensations are socialized and shared experiences of personhood are built, both for infants, for caretakers, and for the networks that sustain them.

A broad community of others become responsible for satiating the hunger of pregnant women and fetuses, or they risk fetal illness or deformation\(^1\). Fetuses are afforded a mediated autonomy—their wills, desires, and personal tastes are often

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\(^1\) Also in Murray and Alvarèz (1981), where marks upon infant’s faces tell the story of how they ate in the womb.
channeled through the mother and can be interpreted through the mother’s behavior towards others. Fetuses denied food will arrive misshapen, or they will react against the mother and cause pain and upset.²

Yet the child within the womb can also directly affect others in certain situations, and just as persons make each other sick through intense emotional outbursts or ill intentions, the infant may feel strongly towards its father and lash out, causing his illness. All of this is read not through professions of speech but rather through the bodily states of the mother. Her physiological state, posture, and characteristics are known now to include those of her child. This additional being’s disposition appears in her bodily moods, not as separate from her own as in a possessing spirit, but rather as a synchronous arrangement, an intercorporeal exchange, which will continue long after birth. Likewise, her own moods affect her infant’s, and already from within the womb she is teaching the child to be active, strong, hard working, and generous (as in Murray and Alvarèz 1973).

Like other human social practices, infant feeding varies greatly in the extent to which babies are breastfed, by whom, and until what age, or even if they are breastfed at all. Communal labor efforts which sustain the infant in-utero vis a vis the mother’s body, now have access directly to the child. After the enwombment of pregnancy, the arduous battle of labor, the mother-mediated isolation of birthing is greatly reduced, but only to begin the even harder post-natal period.³ Food and feeding practices, with positive intentions, are vital to sustaining the lives of women and infants during the first

² Pregnant women, and later infants, are encouraged to eat whatever foods towards which they show proclivities. This is regularly discussed in the literature, see Harris (1987), Murray and Alvarèz (1981)
³ Harris (1987) refers to the post-natal period as the most crucial time in childbearing for Haitian women
few months of infant life. Women and infants are especially protected from incursions of negative emotion, which can destroy a woman’s milk supply and cause her infant to go hungry. Shock, anger, and jealousy easily penetrate into the blood of new mothers and infants, a process known as “move san” (bad blood) and it causes mothers’ milk to turn sour and spoil (lèt gate) (Farmer 1988; Dornemann 2013; Caple James 2008).

As a result of the extremely high prevalence of these conditions, infant caretaking in Haiti notoriously demands that (even early on) breastmilk be supplemented with the “stronger” food of the courtyard pot, which is prepared in a special way. Babies are often partially breastfeeding after the first three weeks of near-exclusive breastfeeding in confinement. Much of this is related to practices of caretaking, which place the infant outside of the mother’s arms for much of the day.\(^4\) We cannot properly speak of infants as persons, nor can we speak of them as antisocial. Infants, as always learning and unfolding relationships, are their own sort of being. Their relationships are stunted but growing. They have the potential to become persons, but their possibility of achieving this potential is predicated entirely upon the actions of others who must shield them, mold them, and keep them alive during the onslaught of calamity, which is the first three years.

In a sense, infants can be called pre-persons who are corporeally cultivated in rhythms of food, illness, and sharing. The infant is first shared with in the womb. After birth and two or more years of experience observing, infants learn to participate in the dual process of sharing. Then, through practices of food exchange and other person-

\(^4\) Bastien (1961) also observed that infants spend a great deal of time with close relatives, out of the mother’s arms.
maintaining activities, infants are slowly integrated and acknowledged as social persons.

The process is not a deliberately educative one, except narrowly when children are older and are corrected or chastised for greed. The real learning occurs early on, under the age of two years, as infants become increasingly aware of their own bodies and rhythms in tandem with those of others. By this, I mean they have learned what full bellies and empty bellies feel like, they have begun imitating the game of partitioning food out to those around them, they have seen and felt the touch of many others.

One’s own feelings of hunger cause others to ache, compels them to action, or cause you to sense the hunger of others. The corporeal interconnectivity of persons, in this case through food, is deeply felt. To be hungry is to be hungry for and towards others as (well as) oneself. It is like that acrobatic flip of embodied experience whereby empathy (or something similar) takes hold. During the first year, only the most precocious of infants will learn to share food, but the lesson is well known by the age of two.\(^5\) By doing so, they become habituated to the compulsion to eat and the activity of others, and as new infants arrive and displace their position, they become habituated to the compulsions of others. Thus, feeding practices, such as sharing with mothers and infants, and sharing with one’s own cohort, have a profoundly important social place in Haitian rural life. Adults use infants to reassert the social place of feeding, while simultaneously inculcating infants into habits of good eating and sharing food as well.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) This is discussed extensively from fieldwork at a different site in the South of Haiti in Murray and Alvarèz (1981) and Alvarèz and Murray (1973).

\(^6\) In “Socialization for Scarcity” Alvarèz and Murray (1981) observe similar practices and relate early food sharing practices to enculturating infants into regional scarcity.
In the womb, future infants are at first a group of cells, a small ball of blood (yon ti boul san). They are that interaction of flesh and fluid between a mother and a father. Yet they do not stay thus isolated for very long. Quickly within a woman’s pregnancy, her infant is tended to by scores of others, the body of the unborn is shaped and molded, pushed and pulled, most often for the better. Sometimes, more cruel and selfish energies try to affect the infant as well—shrinking it, sucking it dry. By the time an infant is born, it already some familiarity with its family, ancestors, community, and likewise they are familiar with it.

During infancy, babies are tended through feeding, bathing, and many other acts of care that secure their existence and create relations between caretakers and infants. Of these acts, food exchange is by and large the single most important. The feeding of infants is an important and quasi-sacred task that includes all members of the courtyard, even peripheral ones coming to visit. Infant viability is not only the concern of parents; it is the responsibility of the courtyard. The socialization process behind this program has profound effects on how people experience themselves within their relational worlds. Karen McCarthy Brown goes as far as to say that feeding others might be the only way for beings to actively manage the outcome of their lives: “The only way to control health and luck is through ‘the care and feeding of family, in the largest sense of that term (Brown 1991: 346 in Brown 2006: 1).”

From my perspective on the ground, infancy is very often experienced as prolonged period of illness and vigilance for the family. In this raw and vulnerable period, infants are extremely vulnerable to heated waves of jealousy, malevolence, ill intention, and most especially the free-range evil shapeshifters hiding in the community
who find them most delectable and eat them up from the inside. In interviews about children who were born here, women and men reported that 44% of their children fell seriously ill during their infancy, coming close to death, and over 29% died within their first few years (Jordan, Interviews 2013–2014). Early infant death is a special death. Unlike others, it offers no possibility of persistence. It consumes en toto that powerful flicker of life that momentarily resided within the visible world.

Even when the situation was not so grave as to take the life of a child, the period between birth and 2-years-old was a nearly unremitting series of minor illnesses, perhaps punctuated by one or two serious and prolonged illnesses. In the case of Clajames, an orphan discussed in the next section, he was dangerously ill on four distinct occasions during the first year and a half, and then at the age of three he fell seriously ill again from a thrush infection. The rest of the days he spent mostly ill but not dangerously so, with only a speckling of days that he would have been called healthy by those around them.

During infancy—and in particular infant illness— the strongest case can be made for the importance of food and food sharing practices in constituting persons. The obligation to feed infants, and to feed them and treat them right, is deeply felt among adults who have witnessed the precarious state of infant health in the region. By tending to infant growth and feeding so rigorously, caretakers are training themselves to bodily affect and constitution as well as the social obligations of personhood; infants, on the other hand are experiencing themselves as effects on others. Even when the child is within the womb, there are memorable repercussions for community members who do
not satisfy it. Marks on the cheek, forehead, or hand of newborns speak to these unsatisfied cravings, these histories of neglect (see also in Murray and Alvarèz 1973)

Alimentation and treatment are often one in the same in this early period, or at least they walk hand in hand. Villagers accept that infant deaths could have been prevented with better knowledge, and this imagined improved knowledge is envisioned as better ways of feeding and treating babies. This possibility, that a child could have been saved, hangs heavily in the hearts of mothers in the community at large. It is linked to in an intense attention to infant growth and infant feeding.

I found that such disputes over food were common across courtyards with children, if not to the extreme extent of this case. Nel would have dreams instructing her to feed certain foods to the courtyard or recommend other foods to children in the area. Herbs had their own moments and uses, as did fey, and medicinal and healing properties were applied across the board to regular food staples—requiring manioc leaves in certain cases, and spinach or other greens in others. The wide variety of local medicinal greens, and the mutual interest in the welfare of the child, meant that there was often protracted conflict over what children ought to be eating, and people commonly fed children what they thought was best regardless of the wishes of others.

The accusation that this or that food “could kill the child,” just as malignant attitudes could, was used as a warning in courtyards and it often would cause everyone but the most insistent visitor to think twice about feeding something that they felt was most appropriate. One could poison a child’s food accidentally merely by looking at it with disgust. I accidentally discovered this when I gagged at the color and consistency of a greenish-yellow porridge for the children, which had to be partially discarded. There
was no single right answer to the question of what any given infant ought to be eating, nor was there a final authority who could establish regular feeding by fiat. Thus, feeding practices were open to contestation and provided a space for discussing and planning the welfare of infants and the practices that the community and household needed to engage in, such as agricultural, foraging, cooking practices, to keep the child healthy.

Clajames

You think he needs breast milk or formula. American bodies aren’t the same as Haitian bodies. They aren’t the same. They aren’t as strong and they don’t need as much food. We need more food to run, babies need strong food, strong food to survive. They suffer serious pain and hunger if you only give them milk, crying all the time. They need beans from the garden, rice from Artibonite, cassava. We all feed him. He eats what we eat. Without it, he has intense gas pains. Gas can kill a baby. It enters their bodies in all crevices. Gas is an evil thing; it makes it so you are never full. When you are hungry, it just makes you hungrier. When you are sleepy, it makes you sleepier. When you are a woman, all your food leaves in your breastmilk, you get gas, and you feel hungry all the time. And you and the baby become skeletons, totally empty. The baby is happier, fatter, when he eats these foods. (Carmelite, counseling me during Clajames’ illness, 2014)

Clajames began his life in a less than ideal infancy. However, given that it was a sort of infancy—a foster infancy—which was well known, he was not generally treated differently than other residents (Figure 4-7). Like his peers, Clajames endured frequent illnesses. His struggles to eat, stay healthy, and combat numerous illnesses were usual for all children in the region, but more so for orphans. However, Brian’s eventually fell into a cycle of illness which was particularly concerning for everyone involved. It was outright surprising to many that he could survive such severe illnesses over so short a time. He demanded the full repertoire of expertise that Sou Lapwen had to offer (Figure 4-8). On the flip of a dime, they emptied themselves out like split sandbags. They purged themselves, cannibalized themselves, enacting the only real agency that serious
illness left them, which was the refusal to eat or drink. He would whip his head away from the bottle or the spoon, wincing his eyes, his hands flailing weakly without strength or motor control, just trying to knock the food out from in front of him. Just as soon as such periods came, there was a rush to fill Clajames back up, to nurturing food, hands, and hearts of the courtyard.

Even at those rare and special moments when Clajames was neither feverish, nor weak, nor listless, dread could be felt around the corner and we still could barely admit that the child wasn’t either actually sick or just getting sick. At such moments, we turned to the most minute details of the child’s consumption habits—was he swallowing right? What story did his diapers tell? And, most importantly of all in Clajames case, precisely what was he eating, what had he eaten, what should he be eating, and how ought all his food be treated?

I bought a hefty load of formula as soon as it was clear the baby would be staying. At first, everyone was eager to have it. However, after a few days, the popularity of the formula was seriously waning. Although Clajames was only a small bundle still, a newborn of a few weeks, he was being introduced to foods such as smashed beans and rice. Talk simmered around the courtyard, fomented by Carmelite and Ninev, who insisted that his mother had probably been feeding him solid food and thus they ought to continue in kind.

Perhaps, I said, we can find a mother who might breastfeed Clajames for a small fee? The answer was an uncompromising no. There was no one in the village with a newborn baby, they repeated. This wasn’t absolutely true—there were several other infants. However, it was true that no one close to the family had a newborn, though
many did have babies and were still expressing milk. When I suggested simply sharing a breast with a slightly older child—one of three months or so—Nel, Ninev, and Carmelite were horrified.

"Woy! Alissa ap touye bebe a" (Christ! Alissa is going to kill the baby.)

As it turns out, one can't give a newborn baby the breast milk from an older baby, or an older baby the breastmilk of a mother of a newborn. Women, much more so than men, are aware of the consistency and content changes in their breastmilk as a child ages. This consistency change: "e pa menm lèt la, lèt fanm nan chanje" "it's not the same milk, a woman's milk changes", was part of the lived experience of women. And these changes are age specific and incompatible with each other.

"You cannot go back to breast milk or formula after only solid food, or the baby will die," Carmelite explained. She was dumping out a freshly made bottle of formula, though she did weakly proclaim that it was old and sour, si, when I looked baffled. He had been vomiting all day, that time. When I found that all the bottle nipples had been cut open, I approached Casseus, Nel, and Ninev as they sat around Clajames. "What is this? What has happened?" I asked, deeply confused. "I don't understand why these keep getting broken open!" Folks were quiet, sitting on the ground with their knees drawn up, and Ninev wouldn't look at me.

However, from her fence-post door, Gaen leaned out and said in her shy voice that the rats had eaten them. They were the only bottle tips that we had. We would have to make do. The entire process of feeding Clajames was changed now that there where gaping holes in the bottle teat. Water, formula, all of it seemed to be sitting there in the bottle just waiting for a chance to explode out and rush over his face, clothes, and
whatever one was sitting on. After each short sip, Casseus or whoever else was feeding the baby would have to deftly recoil their bottle hand so as not to drown him. The movement they adopted was like that of someone rapidly patching an old pair of jeans, winding in and out of the fabric with a threaded needle. The caretaker of the moment could not let their focus lapse for a moment during feedings, or he would cough and gag as if he had been plunged under water. Although it was easy for the courtyard residents to adopt this motion (including 6-year-old Estelle) it was troublingly difficult for me. I could not prop the bottle up with a hand to engage in another task, perhaps readying a diaper, a multitasking skill I have been accustomed to in infant care in my own life.

By the same token, night feedings were far, far more labor intensive than I could ever have imagined. Who knew there were so many stages between waking and sleeping? When bottle nipples were intact it hardly mattered if you were still a bit zoned out from sleep, or even if you nodded off for a moment while propping the bottle up. This style of care was utterly inimical to the style of care needed now that the bottles had been compromised.

First and foremost, whatever caretaker was watching him had to be truly and really awake. You can’t exactly fudge it. If you weren’t completely alert—and I mean the sort of wide-eyed do-or-die alertness of fighter pilots—terrible, awful, miserable things would happen, things that couldn’t be forgotton, smells, and feelings that would linger forever in the shuttered summer oven of the house.

Luckily, when I first realized the seriousness of night feeding a newborn with a gaping bottle mouth, the fluid did not fall into Clajames throat or choke him at all. Instead, his body and the mattress was drenched in sticky milk and left a scent that took
months to go away, bringing ants up the concrete blocks that propped up the mattress and onto the sheets in waves, and worst of all, the poor baby who was sick and feverish and miserable was now soggy with the sugary, pasty residue of formula. I acted quick enough to remove his onesie and leave his chest bare so that it didn’t soak through, but Nel across the room heard me unsnap his clothing and came rushing in, whisking him up and tightly vlope (wrapped) him in a blue satin Petwo handkerchief, one that she had used to wrap her hair. "Chest, his chest! Heavens, cover his chest!” She said in a strained whisper.

“But his clothes are all wet, he’s wet!” I protested, bleary-eyed. This didn’t help my case that night. She was equally frustrated. She couldn’t sleep with him (or anyone at all) in her bed, given the very serious prohibition passed down by the Iwa, and that meant for the rest of the night any time he whimpered or moved she would have to get up across the hall all over again, untucking the mosquito net from where it was precariously secured between the mattress and the bedsprings, picking him up to make sure he was alright.

Sometime later that week, I found a bottle nipple stashed away in my things and was instantly ecstatic. I resolved to keep it close to me, out of the reach of these bottle consuming rats. I did very well, keeping the bottle secure and safe until I proudly showed my prize to Felicie when she complained she couldn’t find a bottle to feed him with. Touswit, I went to the irrigation canal to bathe with Elifèt and Caroline, who toddled after me.

After bathing, I decided to return to the house by the back passage way, which crossed an open patch of gardens and allowed one to see the entire horizon of
mountains in the distance. A tiny footpath terminated at the back of Nel’s property, leaving space for me to squeeze through the mud-wall of Bossu’s hut and the concrete block structure housing Sen Jak, Ezili Freda, Danbala, who were divided by a symbolic blue line from the houses of Ezili Dantor, Ogun, Kouzen, and Simbi Marassa. The children tottered along behind me and we approached Estelle, who was sitting against the back of Nanis’s house, engaged in some task requiring a great deal of attention.

She didn’t notice us until we were practically on top of her—and it was then that I saw that little Estelle—only 6-years-old or so—was piercing and ripping at the remaining nipple with a safety pin. Horrified, shocked, and sure that she was up to some childish mischief, I snatched the bottle and collapsed in defeat. It was the last nipple. There was virtually no hope of finding a matching nipple for the no-gas, complex, engineered, baby bottle now. She froze when I took the nipple away, and observing the level of horror on my face, she became horrified too and tried to bolt but only succeeding in accidentally cornering herself against the house. In that space of time I howled for Ninev and Fabien, sure that they needed to know of this treachery and that they too would have something to say given he nights of sleeplessness.

Estelle, I will always remember, looked so very sorry and so very sad. “Wai, wai, Alissa, e pa pou jwe non, Manman m ki di m pou fè sa” “Wai! Wai! Alissa, it’s not for me to play with, no? Mom told me to do it.”

When Ninev and Fabien arrived, looking somewhat sheepish, it was clear she was telling the truth. At the time, he was still drinking A good deal of formula.

Ultimately, they admitted that they were trying to quietly shield me from the reality of his feedings, as they knew this style of feeding was best and they also knew that I
disagreed. Distressed, Gaen would squeeze his cheek muscles saying: “It hurts him! Look, it hurts him hard to suck through such a tiny hole.” There was also a special way to cut the nipples, I found, and it was something that Estelle had been punished for when she cut a nipple too large. There were smaller holes for pure liquids, like the diameter of a pencil, and larger holes for the solid wheat cereals, like the size of the marker. The baby quickly learned how to drink from both sorts.

At first, as a small three-week old, he rarely even cried. When he did it was not a shrieking, piercing cry but more of a heartbreaking mew, as if he were crying for himself alone.

In this case, the orphan bundle ended up on the Manbo’s porch, with his blanket, onesie, and a small backpack of goods. A few days, Haïlah said. Just hold him a few days until I get the orphanage set up. So it was up to Ninev, Gaen, and me to make do with this new being and this dramatic and unexpected alteration in courtyard space and energy.

The first line of defense in caring for orphans, who are often in perilous states of health, is to feed them. This is the same line of defense used with all infants. By giving the child nutritious, regular food, or by encouraging interest in meats and proteins at a very early age, the courtyard seeks to bulk up infants. It is also commonly said that orphans should be fed strong, solid foods because if their mother’s had stopped breastfeeding, retreating to milk or formula could effectively kill the child as they had grown beyond it. At three and a half months old, Clajames suffered his first serious illness (Figure 4-8, 4-9). The period of time which the courtyard spent concerned with his health was instructive of how deeply imbricated courtyard persons, food, and feeling
become. There had been an awful strain of something traveling around the village, only affecting the young children. Their bodies would break out in awful klou, or boils, everywhere from the feet to the top of the head. They said it was related to move san (bad blood), something children always got, they said, but this year it was very bad for the dust rolling in from the dry and unpaved street made it impossible to keep any skin clean. Elifèt and Caroline’s skin began to peel, and when they visited the doctor up the road together, they were prescribed expensive vitamins while also having to pay a consultation fee that would have bought enough meat to feed the courtyard for a day. The vitamins did not make any noticeable changes. The toddlers suffered through it for weeks, sobbing and barely sleeping for the pain of it, while Ninev, Nel, Felicie and I applied itchytol salve around the clock to these spots that simply grew larger and harder under the skin, becoming carbuncles with heads that could not be seen. When Caroline and Elifèt were finally beginning to improve, as their deep infections came to a head and drained out, Clajames was making the opposite progress. He was lazy and made less noise then normal, his eyes had a winced look to them, he resisted being woken up. We applied maskreti oil around the clock, blanketing his scalp and chest. He was getting shinier and shinier each time he was passed around the rooms of the courtyard for a newer diagnosis or for new relatives, friends, and networks to be called in. His skin glowed and infused the air around him with a savory smell. He drank formula, he had diarrhea. The pattern seemed inalterable. Piles of soiled cloth diapers, handkerchiefs, pillowcases, were stacked in the side of the courtyard by laundry kivets, for Ninev was unable to keep up with washing them. He could go through 10 a day. They couldn’t be
washed quickly enough to be replaced. He just alternated, bare-butt, on the laps of Ninev, Nanis, and Nel, and Felicie when she was around.

These women, his primary caregivers, sat with their legs spread slightly, his butt cradled between them, so that when he defecated (which was so very often) it would not soil anything and could be quickly cleaned up off of the dirt. The formula was not seen as the cause of the root illness, but something that encouraged the worst of his symptoms—the vomiting, the diarrhea, and the fatigue that they brought. Young wouldn’t comment on the milk. Instead he insisted that stronger vitamins and beef broth be administered to Clajames like a serum, in order that he recoup lost water. Though he wouldn’t fuss, Clajames looked so unhappy right after he was fed. He drank formula hungrily but then became ill immediately afterward. The only relief and sleep he seemed to get is when he wasn’t fed; that way, he had nothing left to pass. He was taken by moto to the doctor at SADA, the USAID clinic, his feet flopping with each rock that the moto drove over, kicking up spires of white dust that coated his body and made him cough violently. The doctor wasn’t any help. After a two hour wait with other sick infants in the open-air, mosquito-filled waiting room, they called Clajames in. I remember distinctly that the tall male doctor never even touched Clajames, just regarded him under his spectacled eyes, motioned for me to lift his shirt with his gloved hands. That day and the next, Nel made him a special thick bouillon with expertly prepared herbs, drenched flour. It didn’t seem to change anything. The milk, when prepared, would be left to sit out and grow old. I was eager to find a solution for food that everyone could agree on, so I abandoned the existing formula and found a rink dink pharmacy far away from the village which had a package of soy formula for newborns. I thought I was quite
clever in buying it; I would no longer call the formula lèt but rather manje. I did this, but
Ninev and Nel and Felicie wouldn't buy it—I continued to explain—its pwa, made of
pwa!

No one seemed to care, and it didn’t seem to change anyone’s mind, but they did
feed Clajames from the formula rather than tossing it aside so it seemed at least a
partial victory. His low fever persisted, and his body broke out in awful boils again.
There was so much snot it was hard to believe he could breathe. At an important turning
point one late afternoon, Sidney stumbled into the house with a far-off look in his eyes,
scanning the courtyard strangely. Nanis, from the back corner of Nel’s house, had
apparently seen him come in and dropping the pan she was washing she shouted for
Nathaima , her daughter.

“Carry that chair, carry that chair for the lwa” Nanis said, reprimanding Nathaima
who was absentmindedly sitting in one of the few courtyard chairs. He was ushered
slowly to the backyard, nodding a salute to Nathaima , Zhedd, Yvon, and Nel who had
been in the kitchen. Evening was just falling, and Nel had lit candles on the rocks and
the trees which flickered colors across the variegated ground.

“A malfektè is doing this to him…and food…that food. That food isn’t good for the
baby…” And Nel inquired, with Ninev, “What food? What isn’t good?”

“The milky food. The food the color of milk. He won’t improve if he eats any white
food at all. Don’t give him white food.”

I was surprised to find myself so livid, so angry at this lwa and the circumstances
around medicine. I knew how final the words of the lwa would be in the courtyard, and it
was a total defeat. “It’s beans, okay?” I said, explaining the soy formula: “Okay? It helps him, it gives him strength and vitamins.”

The lwa twisted his face in scorn. It was rare to sass a lwa, it made the entire courtyard uncomfortable. A palpable anxiety passed through the back yard, as people feared that I would upset the lwa and cause trouble for the courtyard. Kafou eyed me with his eyes wide open as he swayed: “I already said don’t you give it to him. I told you don’t give it to him, do you hear?” In the distance I heard the lwa mutter to Nel and Ninev, he said: “The white food will kill him.” Feeding Clajames was not only a line of defense, it became an obsession of the courtyard, an ongoing argument about who and what and when feedings ought to involve. Like many, Clajames’ case brought together diverse things, beings, and places. Commercial formula became entangled with lwa in the courtyard, distant oungan from the mountains, dream messages, diaper divination and a number of other similarly eclectic objects and practices enlisted into the process of figuring out how, when, and what Clajames needed to consume to survive his tumultuous infancy.

**Waglet**

Waglet is Ninev’s son, and the grandson of Nel; his father, Hercule, is the descendant of the second important Sou Lapwen family, the Wozòn (Figure 4-10). When I first met Waglet, he was barely 8-months-old and yet he already possessed the hot and unpredictable temperament that came to define him in the courtyard in later years. We met each other first in 2011, when I would come hold him on Ninev’s porch while she fetched the laundry to be washed in buckets out front. It was very hot that year. Hotter than most with a summer that never seemed to end and only the lightest and teasing winds. At Christiana’s House, where I had been lodged to teach English for
the first few months, the air was dead still. I would often leave Christiana’s due to the heat and try and find respite in the shaded courtyard Nel had in her compound.

“That house you stay in wasn’t built right”. She would say. I would bounce Waglet on my lap as he scrambled to get away, clawing at my face. “Really?” I would ask.

Christiana’s house, the finest for its time, faced the street and the wall in such a way that it prevented all wind or air from entering. At night, the plastic coverings that protected the mattress would melt with my skin into the crinkled and sticky noise of the bed. The tile was the only somewhat forgiving location for sleep, and even then the mosquitos would come. The house was built differently, for sure, covered in sleek ivory tiles, boasting a real bathtub, an indoor kitchen that no one could use, a sitting area, and such finery as to be shocking on the face of Sou Lapwen at the time. It was the sort of house many diaspora dream of building back home, something to be enjoyed, appreciated, envied.

Christiana’s house is no longer the best on the street, as Sela’s business has done better and now she has the finest, though it is rude of me to notice this. Her son-in-law, the senator, sends money and gifts and she will flush with gratitude if you come to admire her home. Her courtyard now has a truck, a second story, a roof to enjoy kind evenings and chilled sodas underneath the deep blue black of first night.

However, at the time I met Waglet, this was not yet so. And though the evangelical community flattered me with an American-styled house and its finery, I found myself avoiding it day and night because of the unforgiving stillness of the heat, the glass windows. Thus, finding myself more frequently in Nel’s courtyard, I became more acquainted with her treasured grandson - the son of her daughter Ninev, now ill.
Ninev was slower than normal, Nel would remind me, for “she had an operation”. Because of that operation, she was pale and sluggish. The courtyard, with its circulating crew of regulars came to expect my presence and seemed to enjoy watching me interact with Waglet, when they could critique this or that aspect of my interactions. And I suspect they also enjoyed watching anyone with Waglet because it was entertaining to see him struggle, as usual, as the person fought to keep hold of him. Laying him on the ground or a basin wouldn’t work, he wanted to be part of the action. Unfortunately, neither walking nor crawling, he was incapable of moving to his pleasure and he seemed to take that out on anyone who held him, even though it was greatly preferred to being left alone.

Waglet, all would agree, was a difficult child. He was difficult from the time he was in the womb when Ninev lost his twin in a miscarriage. “Gen dyàb nan tèt li” “He has a dyàb in his head” Ninev and Nel would explain, flashing a humorous glare at Odelin, who helped install the dyàb in him.

The magic that Odelin used to keep Waglet anchored in his mother’s womb was nothing short of extraordinary. Before he did it, he warned of the consequences: “this magic will be very hot” “a dyàb is need to make the child better.” In this context, a dyàb is either a bought nanm, similar to a lwa, or a helping nanm which is very hot and dangerous and is to be used for a specific purpose. This phrase can be used figuratively, but in this case it is literal as Waglet’s recover from an early illness and risky birth was attributed to a dyàb who was coerced into fortifying the child. They gave him a powerful injection of nanm by binding him to the dyàb through ritual, and he recovered. It was clear to everyone that his behavior problems were the result of his deep
relationship with an often troublesome sort of nanm. The being which was now his being was strong, angry, irritable.

Like all Marassa (twins) he was given his way. Marassa must be treated respectfully and deferentially, for they are among the most powerful of all the lwa and they demand regular feedings in order to honor them (Bastien 1961). He shifted, moved, and shook. He could not be held, for all his wiggling. And he would not cry so much as scream, pull, kick, and bite his way out of your grasp. His face and arms bore the marks of his endeavors, when he would fitfully roll on concrete at night, slapping his arm against a block. Ninev had learned very quickly that his increasing mobility and control of his arms meant that he would have to sleep differently, swaddled. No one held his behavior against him, no one chastised him except distant relatives who visited the courtyard and were unfamiliar with his history.

Above all, his eating habits were of most concern to the caretakers and visitors of the courtyard. Mothers are not the only caretakers of infants and they do not always spend more time with their own babies than other members of the courtyard do. All babies are expected to eat, all babies are monitored in their eating, and nowhere did this quest seem to lead to so many dead ends as it did in the case of Waglet who—unlike any of the other babies I met—was completely unwilling to touch some of the most staple foods in the Haitian diet. From three months old, when his diet involved a great deal of solid foods, he would fuss and cry and spit out any beans cooked with onions, garlic, or tomatoes. He wanted formula and labouyi or breastmilk alone—a strange thing to Ninev and others, who supplement milk with cooked food very early on. He was appeased.
By three months, nearly every baby has received warm cereals of cassava, labouyi, and other pudding like foods, which are often made with commercial formulas or enriched milks, and many times they have not received them from the hands of the mother but from other courtyard members assisting with infant care. Mothers will not stop others from offering the baby food, and indeed this is an important part of social bonding. Even when babies are in their mother’s care, it is no guarantee that mothers will decide to breastfeed, and when the mother’s themselves are in poor health or have experienced emotional loss they are in fact encouraged not to do so.

He enjoyed juice but despised fruit, he liked rice and beans but could not stand the presence of other bits within them. By nine months old, his mother had learned to pick at his food, carefully removing the carrots, onions, and tomatoes so he might eat. Nel, Ninev, and Gaen were often in an uproar, pleading, begging, and fretting about his eating habits, long after his will was well known. Casseus would too often forget, attempt to feed Waglet food directly from the kitchen, and Waglet would flip the entire plate over to the delight of the dogs.

Waglet’s behavior was remarkably frustrating for everyone. The desire to share food is part of a broader social bonding practice connecting everyone in the courtyard to the precise labor of the matriarch’s hands, to the crackling charcoal fire and large iron pot which are such key foci for life in Haiti. For this reason, extended family who came to visit were often confused, asking why Waglet wasn’t eating more fortified foods—rich servings of black beans with onions, meat, and carrots. Whoever was in the courtyard, either myself or Ninev, would briefly respond that it was decidedly hopeless and what more dangerous to the courtyard wellbeing. If the visitors were simply taking a moment
to rest, we didn’t spend time explaining the whole story of Waglet’s birth, nor did we want it widely broadcasted. So it often happened that Waglet ended up very upset on such occasions, as visitors were often deeply suspicious of the idea that feeding Waglet normally was hopeless.

In a culturally acceptable move, visitors would stage a secret coup if they had food. Slyly taking Waglet aside, they might offer him better food, stronger food. I never saw the same person try this twice. Even looking at the food, even being offered the food without being touched, all of this drove Waglet into a rage. The worst visitors would then try the normal way of acclimating an infant to food in rural Haiti—taking a piece of this or that food and sneakily passing it across his lips so that he might just taste it. Using the most delicious pieces of fruit—like the sweet, ripe kennep, they attempted to pass it in his mouth before he could protest. The conniption fit which would ensue was truly a remarkable art piece of fury and angst. The young boy had the strength of a bull, and by the time he was two and a half he had learned to grab rebar, rocks, anything around, that he might use to throw in the direction of the offending party. His memorable fits reminded everyone, myself included, of some sort of demon, and with great reason: “e dyàb la, dyàb kap fel fou konsa” “that’s the dyàb there, the dyàb is making him crazy like that.” Not even the Petwo lwa were thought responsible for his shenanigans.

So it came to pass that Waglet would eat what he wanted and when he wanted, and caretakers took the normal pattern of leniency and acceptance to the extreme with him. Until he was three this meant that he would wake up at 3am once a week or so, and demand Coca Cola in the pitch black of the night. There was no sleeping through the ruckus—even if one could ignore him (impossible), the fits would drain him utterly
and he would not give up until his voice was hoarse and crackling, his body hot and still kicking. Keeping him healthy and alive was the highest of our aims and so Ninev and Nanis, with whom he slept, would eventually have to rise and seek out Cola. On good nights, they found it locked in the cooler at the very entrance to the house. On worse nights, they rummaged through all the rooms of the courtyard and woke the inhabitants, pleading for cola, juice, anything. Even if there were just a few sips left in a glass bottle, they would explain, they could fill the rest with water and he would be none the wiser and they could sleep. The consequences of denying his requests were known to all of us, but we still dared to hope that sleep would take him. It never worked, though we would wait through 15 minutes straight of the sobbing, kicking, screaming voice of his little dyàb “Colaaaaaaa, Cola Ninev!!!” needing no air and no respite.

In this way, we learned to duck and weave around his fits, coming to treasure those moments when he was satisfied (or at least not irritated) and the sweet and loving disposition of a Waglet could shine through. He would bat his large, dewy black eyes and whisper “mwen renmen w” (I love you), sweeter even than his cousin. He would lay his head across your lap, look back up at you and say “I am helping you, what are you doing, I'll help.”

Now and then Waglet, at 2 or 3-years-old, would fly into fits if someone tore off a piece of food from his plate without asking, or even if they asked in a way he didn't like. When he acted out because of sharing, the courtyard adults and children would react in ways that they did not react when it was a question of Waglet himself eating.

If Waglet protested sharing in the presence of others, all attention would shift to him. Nel, Ninev, and other visitors would tchwip disapprovingly. Ninev tried encouraging
him with sweeter words as the courtyard focused on the interaction: “Ou pa we li grangou? Bay li, bay li!” “Don’t you see they are hungry? Give it to them, give it to them.”. If such gentle corrections didn’t work, Ninev would swiftly say to others, loud so Waglet could hear, “li chich, ou we? Waglet chich” “He’s cheap and greedy, you see? Waglet is cheap and greedy.” I learned to do the same in order to correct him, the rest of the courtyard seemed naturally to have a hang of this style of teaching. We would shake our heads and call out whoever was nearby. “Ou tande Nel? Ou tande Carven? Ou tande Alissa? Waglet pran tout manje a net. Li pa bay pyès moun.” “You hear, Nel? You hear, Carven? You hear, Alissa? Waglet took all of the food, all of it. He didn’t share with a single person.”

Since we ate at the same time as Waglet, our own plates had food on them. Ninev and Nel would often continue to respond to the situation with Waglet by offering a choice morsel to the party that Waglet had refused. Other times, his mother and courtyard family would threaten to tell everyone that he was cheap and didn’t share. It was a social curse to be cheap, and he had some grasp of the situation. Though he did not understand the intricacies of why cheapness was so bad, or what being cheap ultimately meant, he learned that it was unpleasant and merited remorse. He also learned that he would not be called cheap and ridiculed if he simply, even grudgingly, offered food when asked.

Waglet, however, had to learn to share. This much was unnegotiable in courtyard life. His mother and father expressed the most embarrassment when he was di and chich, feeling far less (if any) embarrassment for his fits, which were seen as uncontrollable (hard, cheap). It took him longer than most children, but around two and
a half he finally seemed as if he was steadily succumbing to the social pressure towards redistribution. He would balefully offer food when someone asked. It wasn’t ideal to receive food from a reluctant giver, but the courtyard encouraged the practice and worked on ignoring his frustrated body language when he complied. He tended only to refuse his father, who would mockingly reprimand him, and certain young boys his age whom he disliked and who would frequently stay in the courtyard.

He learned, albeit slower than most, that food exchanges could lubricate social interactions and provide for everyone’s desires. The hunger, bellies, and demeanor of others were his business as a growing person.

Waglet was facing new social tensions, he had to negotiate a cost and benefit system that worked for him. If Waglet refused to share, he would at the very least have more food than if he shared. Perhaps more importantly (I surmise), he would have control over his food, over who touched it, and over who ate it. If he refused to share, he received verbal castigation, he was called socially undesirable names, and people grew to ignore him and reward each other instead.

In time, it became apparent that the alienating costs of his desire to keep food was simply too high. He didn’t want to face the embarrassment of doing undesirable things. His desires, in effect, would make him deeply unhappy if he followed through with them. Fulfilling others’ desires of eating, on the other hand, contributed to the peace of the courtyard, and how he was respected and treated within it. His desires were slowly smoothed over as they played out again, day after day, teaching him that greed led to unpleasant alienation and generosity led to kindness, gifts, and rewards.
His day-to-day desires to eat everything on his plate were, in a sense, gateways that he had to pass through in order to receive things he wanted: whether happy playmates, trips to the river, or accompanying his mother on her rounds. His fits prevented movement, and his willingness to share—predicated on his awareness of others’ hunger—became ways of moving social events forward and reaping the rewards of reciprocal interaction.

In time, at the age of 3, he began sharing spontaneously with those he liked most, including Ninev, Nel, Caroline, and myself. Although he only sporadically and selectively shared food before being asked, Waglet grew to possess a remarkable awareness of others’ hunger, needs, and food apportionment and he knew what to do to remedy it: share. He may not always have executed the last step, but he certainly knew the other steps well. When he was eating he would fall into line with others, watching the clinking plates and cups as the courtyard ate, anticipating and watching as new persons entered and were offered food. In one case caught on camera, Waglet sits with Caroline eating a breakfast of bread and coffee (Figure 4-11). Caroline, who was a bit older, was nearly finished when she accidentally dropped a piece of her remaining bread. His eyes had frequently turned to her face and her plate and her actions, and he quickly noticed that she dropped the bread. Almost instinctively, the hand holding his own bread shot out, offering Caroline the remainder, who happily took it (Figure 4-12). He smiled.

Children usually learn these lessons easily as infants, through repetition and experience. Caretakers eat from babies’ plates, offer baby food to other children, or fling dollops of food to the ground for the dogs to eat. Although Waglet resisted this lesson
on some fronts, he would come to make his own sort of peace with it, and it showed. It was a partial success of the courtyard. Eventually, Waglet (around 3-years-old) could anticipate the needs of his companions, like Caroline, checking how much food she had left, and how he could help.

**Caroline**

Senor! M pa ka kenbe lajan w, m pa ka kenbe kòb w! Senor w se solèy, m pa ka kenbe lajan w…pitit la malad, yon lougawou ap manje l, ede m Senor!

Lord! I don’t hold money back from you; I don’t hold your money! Lord, you are the sun, I can’t hold your money. This baby is sick; a werewolf is eating him, help me, Lord! (Caroline, pretending, August 2012)

Caroline is with Waglet most days of the week. Cassanne, her father, is Nel’s son. As is the custom, Nel (as her paternal grandmother) is afforded long stretches of time with Caroline even when Cassanne lived and worked many villages away. Tiya, her mother, often stays at the homestead as well, helping with dishes and chores and sleeping alongside Ninev. Nel prefers Caroline in her courtyard rather than at Tiya’s, and Tiya understands and agrees with her reasoning. Tiya’s house, on the main street, is quite insecure by Haitian standards. It is *plen* (full) of people, a fact which endangers Caroline, who could fall ill or be injured far too quickly.

Caroline was not nearly so tempestuous as Waglet, her cousin (Figure 4-13). She was only very rarely angry enough to try striking someone, or even throwing rocks, both of which were typical responses for her age. During their toddler years, these two children were two poles around which the courtyard orbited. This was not without its problems. Caroline occasionally suffered great angst in the courtyard, for Waglet’s moods shaped what she could and could not do (Figure 4-14). As is the way with children of the same age, there were often contests over objects, playtime, or bodily
contact, and these only rarely ended well for Caroline (Figure 4-15). The only person who dared to trespass Waglet's will was his sister, Estelle, five years his senior. She only acted as a renegade where it concerned her personally. If Caroline was wronged by Waglet, a play tire taken, the wheelbarrow repossessed, Estelle would not step in except to attempt to distract Caroline and placate Waglet (who, even if he had won, would still be throwing a fit).

Caroline, too, learned to manage her shyness to adapt to courtyard life. At the risk of being steamrolled by Waglet, and without anyone to rush to correct the situation. Caroline gradually devised ways of asserting herself with Waglet. At first, the courtyard regarded her somewhat unconventional methods with scorn. Waglet would ask to share toys, but then wouldn't let Caroline touch them. When she removed the toys from Waglet, he would become inconsolable, and invariably someone in the courtyard would be driven half mad by the noise, as well as terrified that Waglet would hurt and exhaust himself in his fit when he seemed to sense no pain.

However, Caroline cleverly took note of this pattern. She learned to conduct her vigilante raids in private—mastering the skill so well that she had established a private equilibrium with Waglet when contests of will broke out. Her scheme was a variation of the following: Waglet would take something of hers, like food or a chair or an object. If none of the children or adults were looking her way, she would then surgically move to extract the object—or, barring that possibility, retaliate with some pinching or swatting assault— then swiftly run off to one of the countless nooks or rooms around the house. Waglet, flabbergasted, would directly launch into a most awesome fit, a sort of banshee scream which garbled his linguistic capacities, leaving him kicking and hitting the
ground, rolling around, tearing his clothing as if he were on fire. Incidentally, his fits in these situations were so terrible that when the family came running, he could not communicate why he was upset—beyond words, he was merely a tornado of fury that indicated something had happened.

When this wasn’t possible, Caroline learned to retreat into her world. Laughing, speaking to herself, or toying with objects that she imagined were keys to the invisible world, Caroline spent her days in the trance-like stupor of a magical childhood. She could not speak when I first met her, being only ten months old, but she could stumble about and would babble on in child talk. She walked through the courtyard, talking to walls and picking up objects which she would manipulate. She came up to me and spoke very clearly, words that sounded very much like French Creole. I struggled and failed to understand what I took to be the incomprehensible French of her words. It was simply a quirk of my interaction with her until I mentioned my unintelligible conversations with her to Nel, saying how intelligent she was to be speaking at her age and how I regretted I couldn’t understand her.

Nel looked at me strangely, thinking I was speaking of someone else. I convinced her it was Caroline, and she insisted: “Pale? Li poko konn pale, li poko nan laj sa.” (Speak? She doesn’t yet speak; she is not of age to speak yet). Curious she asked further: Sa li di w Alissa? (What did she say to you, Alissa?) I explained that I didn’t know. I had thought it was more French-sounding. She would say it to me and sashay around, as if she were a little woman, jabbering away in her elusive tongue. Nel laughed: “Li konnen se pale lap pale, men e pa vre. E pa Kreyòl, e pa Franse, se lang
pa li. Yon timoun fou li ye.” (She thinks she’s talking, but it’s not true. It’s not Creole, it’s not French, it’s her language. She’s a crazy child.)

With time, Waglet, Estelle, Caroline and neighborhood children grew together, stabilizing in their relationships with each other just as adults were stabilizing their relationships around them.

The adults let them freely do as they wished, tugging at each other, rough housing, solving the conflicts erupting between them, essentially establishing an order of relation that the rest of us would learn to accept. Only when eating did battles become something demanding management.

By the time Caroline and Waglet were walking well, around 14 months, they had practiced enough (and been corrected enough) to know that they ought to be good citizens by sharing any food they had. Caroline was happy to please others by sometimes demonstrating her skills and distributing such things as cookies or sugarcane when she received them as treats. When Waglet was three and Caroline was three and a half, they had codified their expertise in feeding. Among themselves, Caroline and Waglet would share even the smallest portions of food, breaking in half whatever they had even a single, minuscule sliver of almond that they had torn out of a zaman fruit (almond fruit).

Outside this immediate friendship, Waglet usually only shares food begrudgingly with others (a factor in his friendships today), while Caroline offers food to nearly anyone sitting nearby. On days when she does not have others to play with, she cleverly uses food to distract adults from their conversations and gain their attention.
Caroline would even step in to protect Waglet’s palate when Estelle would tease her little brother by ambushing his mouth with fruit. Caroline would try to knock whatever food Estelle had out of her hand and fiercely proclaim something to the effect of: li pa manje kennep, li pa manje sa (he doesn’t eat kennepers, he doesn’t eat that)!

In this increasingly social age bracket, children frequently get into small disagreements, and they learn to find reassurance at the hands of their friends alone. If parents are in the direct vicinity during a fight, at most they attempt to de-escalate it by physically separating children for a moment (carrying one away from the other) or removing dangerous objects and verbally reprimanding both children for being loud and destructive. However, it is unusual for caretakers to caress their children after a fight or speak to them about what had happened. Children might go so far as to seek their parent’s attention after an altercation, but if they are crying or otherwise disruptive, they will likely be ignored.

This means, hypothetically, that children are taught that they have little comfort if they do not actively maintain friendships, especially through food exchange. However, I never observed a child so foolish that they regularly refused to satisfy their friendships. Except certain rough regulations about eating from the hands of strangers, children’s friendships are usually not monitored or limited by adults in any fashion. They are free to make friends with adults as well as children. Often by the age of four, a child is bonded into several multi-age gangs of five or six individuals who would roam around town unsupervised when they were not in school.

When Caroline was around 3½-years-old, she had begun building her strong friendships with other persons in the neighborhood. Her first social group consisted of
an 8-year-old girl and her 5-year-old sister (both of whom were strictly evangelical), Estelle (her cousin of 8-years-old), Peterlay (a neighbor boy of 4-years-old) and Heddou Marco (another boy of 6-years-old).

She was comforted by these friends when she fought with others, such as Waglet (who had a smaller group of friends) or children not in her play group. Fights within the group produced anxiety for everyone, and children learned to resolve these disputes internally.

Comforting Caroline aside, groups do not typically intervene and physically defend their comrades from others, but instead throw insults and commiserate from within their small groups. Justice, like all else, is relative. Early on the children of the courtyard learned to value peace over most things: even fairness.

**Consuming and Sharing Amidst Other Beings**

Practices of feeding imbricate many other persons and beings beyond infants and child caretakers. As we have covered, people engage in feeding behavior, eating from each other’s courtyards, sharing the same pot, on a daily basis. So too do they exchange experiences, sharing dreams that have been dreamt for others, or signs given to warn and benefit the community. Life is connected by substance, experience, and emotion.

The emotional pleasure of dependence and substance exchange extend beyond the bounds of the living. In Haiti’s case, it involves the lwa (a term so broad as to encompass virtually all non-animal, non-human energy), the ancestors, and many other beings besides. Of these, the lwa inspire the most acts of care among the living, and so too do the lwa provide the most protection and guidance for them. Humans offer food to the lwa, and the lwa provide herbal knowledge, medicine, and often appear themselves
to heal the ill. Like all beings, the Iwa are entitled to balanced relationships. They cannot, or rather they should not, that which their servitors cannot afford. If they do, servitors are fully within social norms to object, cry out, or demand that the Iwa provide them with money before they provide the Iwa with anything. The sustenance of the Iwa is a regular task that easily blends into patterns of living. They are an ever-present discussion in village life, always appearing in body as well as dreams, animal sightings, and intuitions. The habitus of feeding these Iwa and providing for the courtyard was reinforced through multiple daily practices of feeding.

The most regular and vital of these methods involved spilling drink and food for the Iwa, which is Nel's responsibility as the Manbo, and my responsibility as an initiate. Not all food would be shared in this manner—but it is crucial to share drinks that are favored by the Iwa—especially alcoholic beverages, demanding a four-point offering, coffee, and clear, fresh water. We share these drinks and small morsels of biscuit both for the Iwa who are known in the courtyard, and for those other Iwa, the unknowns, those who may have been foregotten or may have just emerged (see also Bastien 1961). Ritual leaders, such as Young, Anperè, Menfô, and others from different towns, including a manbo from Nan Dó, all engage in this activity as part of their daily routine. It is the norm on any ritual occasion—whether planned or done in an emergency—just as Iwa would often ask for food and drink in dreams. It is especially helpful when people are possessed, and the Iwa-as-the-person can personally request a drink and likewise be personally satiated by the courtyard. Choice bottles of alcohol are meant to be shared. After the Iwa drinks, they too are eager to pass around the bottle for others to share in the consumption.
This is not to say that all people or all lwa behave identically around food. Lwa and people negotiate their own personal styles of consumption, fulfilling social obligations to share but to varying degrees and with varying skill. Before one even hears a lwa speak, it is possible to know who is there for the lwa inhabit flesh in different ways, revealing their identities through certain postures, attitudes, and bodily movements (Deren 1953: 11). All lwa have different dispositions in this respect—there are incredibly generous lwa who demanded that you drink with them, while others, like Kouzen, can be quite possessive of drinks, holding it close, though he will share and his mood will ease up over the course of a ritual.

Eating and drinking styles were an important part of each lwa’s habitus, as it came through to inhabit every particular horse or take the form of another within a dream. One must manage the hunger and thirst of others, especially their close, local others if they are to live smoother lives. At the same time, one can reasonably expect that these intimate others will not take too much more than they need and that there will be enough left over for the courtyard. Yet not all people act so appropriately in daily life, and there are many persons out there who seek to take advantage of the vulnerability or generosity of others by calling for their rights to be fed. For the unwise and untutored, it is easy to begin courtyard relationships with someone who will exact far too heavy a price with their hunger.

Casseus’s Dream

Dreams, or dream-visions, are one way in which lwa communicate their desire, their intention, and also take what is owed (Figure 4-16). What happens in certain dreams (hereafter called dream-visions) is binding, especially those dream-visions shared with lwa. Given the centrality of food in relating to others in daily life, it should
come as no great surprise that residents’ sleeping lives are also saturated with experiences of eating and food exchange. One’s actions are considered to have happened, to be part of an event, and also to have a meaning, which manbo and oungan or otherwise persons in the community can help divine.

In one such situation, Casseus came to us from up the street, from far up the road near the base of the mountain where the water runs cooler and clearer because it is so near the source. It didn’t take long for him to explain his presence. He sought Nel, who at that time was simply “Manbo” but who would later become his close friend. He began speaking nervously about a snake, a transforming snake, which he had just seen. It took some time for me to guess that he was speaking of a dream. Throughout this tale, Nel was in the small outside kitchen, and Casseus stood at the wall, leaning in, speaking of the events in present tense.

“I am in a field,” he says. “And there is a snake.” “The snake is just looking at me,” he tells us, “not doing anything.” “So I decide to give him kleren. Get it, Alissa?” he asks. “And I run a kleren store, so naturally, I have some.” Casseus continued: “I then went back to the house, and the snake followed me. I offered him kleren, but he refused to take it!” Suddenly the slithering creature uncoiled into a man, a human. The man just stood there and didn’t speak. “Following me, Nel?” he asks.

So Casseus offered kleren again, only this time, the uncoiled man took it and drank every last drop. “It’s a good thing you offered that to me again,” the man said to Casseus. “A good thing. I was going to leave angry, but now I’m alright. And he got up and left, returning to the form of the snake again.” Casseus widens his eyes at Nel. “Get it?” He asks.
Nel’s been listening. But she’s not out front, with us, where I’m sitting and Casseus is gesticulating and pacing. All that we see of her is just a wagging knife blade, her old silver-colored all-use blade, which (in between slicing vegetables) she motions like a conductor outside the wooden door frame. Even the handle is inside. It’s a good effect for her. Another one of her mysterious selves.

There is a pause and then the silver knife blade speaks. “That was me, yes that was me. It’s about the debt you owe me”.

Casseus considers this only for a moment. “Ahhh…” he says, then nods. She begins to say something else, but he interrupts, for the dream was not yet over. “So then, then a man came to me.” He means in real life. “Hmph” says the silver blade.

Nel’s head peeks out from the old wood planks that make her kitchen shack. “Never seen him before?” She asks. He says: “Never in my life. A stranger.”

“A stranger.” Nel repeats, then withdrawing her face.

A stranger, I think.

“A stranger,” says the Knife blade, poking out again.

There is a pause. The rice starts boiling loudly, I can hear it from outside. She clangs around to cover it and bring the temperature lower so it can cook properly. Meanwhile, Casseus explains that the stranger hasn’t yet left the story. “And so this stranger comes in, and he asks for kleren. And I give it. Following me? A bit in a glass. Free of charge. Get it? You never know who is asking.”

“You never know.” Says the Manbo.

“And then,” he continues. “As the stranger is going to leave he says he wishes he had a bottle so he could take some home. I get right up to get a bottle from the back. I
filled it with kleren and handed it to the stranger." "And then," Casseus says, "the stranger says, 'Wow. You're a good man. A straight guy. Thanks so much.' And he walked out." Casseus pauses and sits. He is finished. Satisfied.

The Knife goes “Mmmm”.

The dreams kept coming. Crossing over and changing his life and dealings. Things were hungry, and not only when his nanm was walking in sleep; also in daylight when they came to him. And as Casseus and Nel said, “you never know who is asking.” This skepticism of identity was pronounced in ambiguous interactions, such as Casseus’ s dreams or the appearance of unexpected persons, dogs, or insects in ceremonies. Beings may not be as they seem. Yet they are not symbols, not signs. They are not empty vessels or written things like the augur's liver, which appears only to indicate something else that has been transmitted beyond the border of the visible world. These beings are like the dogs who came during a table offering at Nel’s house: two white dogs, who stood at the door way, just at the entrance. Ninev could have turned them away. Instead, she said: “Welcome. You may eat.” Facing no resistance, they jumped up on the table, garbage heaps of food down and then ran off. Ninev watched and later explained to Nel. “They were the ones the food was for.” She said. “Ah, that’s a good thing. A good thing you did, inviting them in.” Nel responded.

The dog and the snake man asked something of the courtyard, and they took something, and this interaction was a potently, palpably real interaction regardless of the medium or form that these exchanges came to reside in. These unexpected encounters are an important way that persons can interpret relationships with and fulfill their obligations to the many others, visible and invisible, who inhabit the world. People
are connected to each other, and when we feed someone who asks, we can argue that we are also feeding their other selves and other beings. We can point to the tangled lines that exist between us and others, the flows of namm in the food we eat, the drink we enjoy, all of that which we share and which is transmitted down the lines of our affiliations (Figure 4-17).

The continuing dreams that Casseus had required further untangling than the short prior conversation. They were slightly confusing, and though he was a bòkò he admitted he was not as influential in dream interpretation than Nel. I asked him about it later in an interview:

Alissa: You saw the lwa again in sleep yesterday, did you not?
Casseus: Ok. I saw there was a dead man that appeared. Over where I sell kleren. He entered the kleren store, while he is entering the kleren store...
Nel: He is a lwa.
Casseus: He is a lwa, in sleep, get it?
Alissa: Oh, ok.
Casseus: While he is entering where I sell kleren, he turns into a snake. He stuffs his head into the kleren and while drinking I see Nel appear.
Alissa: Nel?
Casseus: Yes. Nel speaks like this: “It’s not right for you to grab kleren, you’re leaving, don’t drink kleren!” The snake goes swoop and pulls his head out. As he was leaving, he stood there, and he turned into a man. Like before. Only with the appearance of the dead. The snake did that, get it?
Alissa: Yeah.
Casseus: And Nel says [to the snake], “Look, don’t drink Kleren, you hear? You love sweet Casseus, he gives you kleren. The day has arrived for him to give it to you, he’s given it, don’t drink it.” And she says to Casseus: “You see? Ha. He would have drunk up every drop of that kleren. If it weren’t for the fact that you were right here, I would have said ‘whatever.’” As soon as the man heard that, he left.
Alissa: Oh.

Nel: Well, it is a lottery number. That spirit, you wanted him to give it to you, he turned into a spirit, and he gave it to you. That was the key number drawn for the lottery.

Alissa: And the day after that, after you had that dream, you went to the garden?

Casseus: Yeah, I went to the garden. Around 5 o’clock, I got up in the morning, and I went to clean up the garden. When I got to the garden, I saw there was a snake there. He stopped, he looked at me, I looked at him. He wasn’t going anywhere. He’s just sitting there. I entered my house to get kleren, I feel like he was going to drink some kleren. So I take a half-liter of kleren, I carried it with a saucer, I emptied it (for him) it is overflowing onto the ground, then I refilled a whole liter of kleren and brought it to Nel to drink. Do you understand?

Alissa: Not really, no.

Casseus: Because it was her that I saw appear. She said that the snake shouldn’t drink all the kleren, do you understand? Look, that lwa, sometimes he comes for good things, or other times he comes for bad things. I saw another lwa there, she came to have my back, to make sure I didn’t lose all the kleren, do you understand?

Alissa: With your eyes open, you saw this? Like with your eyes open, when that guy came [into your store which we were discussing earlier today]

Casseus: Yeah, he came in. That time with the stranger who complimented me. That man who entered to ask me for kleren, that was eyes-open. It wasn’t sleeping, no?

Alissa: What did he say to you?

Casseus: He entered, and he asked me: “Where is Mr. Casseus? Is Mr. Casseus at his house?” Only it was me he was talking to. He says: “Woy! If Mr. Carven were here, I would drink a touch of kleren, I sure would!” I said to the man: “If it’s a touch of kleren that you want, I’ll give you Kleren on behalf of Casseus.” And it was me talking with him. I entered the kleren storage, and I filled a whole half-liter to give him. When he finished drinking as he pleased, he said. “If I had a container, I would put the rest of the kleren in it, I would leave it.” So now I enter the storage again, I find a container, I again filled a whole half-liter to give him, he leaves. The whole time he’s walking away he says: “Woy! Look at this great guy, this great stuff!” It was me who sold kleren, it was me, don’t you understand? That was eyes open, get it, when he said that to me. And I didn’t recognize him at all.
Alissa: Wowwww.

Casseus: I didn’t recognize him. You see this…you see this kleren here? Nel, there is no one that I give away kleren to, ever. You see, the moment I came to sell kleren, my kleren wouldn’t sell. There were two times there, like this, you know that Nel didn’t buy it. I took a half-liter I brought it over to give to her, before that, I alone would drink that, I just about emptied a whole liter between them, do you understand?

Alissa: You have a lot of dreams like that? Do you have a lot of dreams with…(pause) lwa are in your dreams, and you speak with Nel about them?

Casseus: Yeah. I don’t have a lot of dreams. A few…sometimes. Like this one. Sometimes the lwa tells you the truth because that one there was an accurate one. I had a dream, and then I found the guy [in waking life] doing the same thing.

Alissa: [To Casseus] What did you say…you…what did that dream mean?

Nel: [Answering before Casseus] They were my lwa.

Alissa: That dream?

Nel: He’s in dealings with my lwa. You see? He owes something to my lwa. Now, the spirit went and drank kleren and was going to drink every drop, leaving nothing for Casseus. Sweet Casseus, listen, okay? You are mixed up with my lwa. Now the lwa…when the lwa said he’d drink all of it, he wasn’t leaving any for you. Then he sees me appear and apologize for him, for that whole business. Now he has two, three lwa. They went “whoop!” and relinquished your debts. Now you should let go of your debts [that you are owed]. Let go of your debt. If you don’t let go of it, you can make serious trouble [for yourself] one day.

Casseus: Even in the street, you don’t see me when…. Around seven o’ clock I saw that. You don’t see me mess around! ...

Nel: [Interrupting, quietly] Actually you mess around a lot.

Casseus: [Continuing] Because I see, I see people haven’t foregotten me or my debts.

Nel: Yeah.

Casseus: Don’t you get it?
Nel: Yeah, but that’s a, that’s a, that’s an attack they’ve shown you there. You see how he was going to drink all of it? Take precautions so you don’t lose all your money, that’s all I am saying.

The Garden

While sweeping the garden in front of the peristil, I pointed to Legba’s tree, which was dangling with expertly hand-wrapped pieces of magic, like a baroque Christmas pine. I pointed to the goat’s skull, string threaded through it, which was on the tip of a branch. “What about the goat head here?” Nel, who was sweeping as well, took a moment to pause and answer my questions. “Ogun is eating the goat, it’s the head he eats inside. Therefore, when we were done eating, we left the head there, and he eats it little by little, as it hangs in the tree. Understand”

I nodded and continued, pointing now to a woven wreath of grass and plantain fiber: “And the circle magic tied to a tree. What is it for?” Nel said, “Ah, that magic?” She smiled. “I did it for a woman who had a man elsewhere in the world, and he never wrote her or talked to her, and she did this. She also put a bottle of rum elsewhere and put Ezili Dantor with it. He asked Ezili Dantor to find the woman’s husband and make him return. He did. One year ago. I hung it there so it would hang and balance the person.” Curious about the long distance involved in the transaction I asked further: “What person was this for? Someone local?”

Nel responded, “No, someone who wasn’t from here, she came with someone who was known around here. She came to me for Ginnen business, not the contracted-Iwa business, that stuff isn’t Ginnen.”

I had heard the distinction before: this is Ginnen, this is not Ginnen. The relational distinction would shift depending on what was being asked. Petwo Iwa, when compared to Rada Iwa by a Rada oungan, are said to be “not Ginnen,” and “they don’t
mix.” The same Rada oungan, when asked immediately thereafter of Chanpwèl (secret society) lwa, explained that Petwo lwa “are Ginnen” but Chanpwèl lwa were “not Ginnen.” There was no implied contradiction (Figure 4-18).

I asked Nel specifically: “What is not Ginnen, who of the lwa are not Ginnen?” Nel said, “Contract lwa are hot, not Ginnen. They eat you quick, when you don’t pay them, you get killed. They go far away to find them, even as far as Arkayè. The hotter oungan, they will make lwa contracts like that. When you get a bought lwa, it works much faster. It is more dangerous. They can eat you.” I wanted to clarify the intentions of such lwa: “They consume people? Why do they consume people?” Nel responded, turning back to sweeping “They can gulp down people quickly. If clients don’t come pay, they can kill them.”

Feeding Lwa

Although manbo and oungan will respectfully offer sips of their drinks (coffee, water, kleren) upon the ground for the lwa, food is not usually given every day. Often lwa come to request a particular feast or to remind a person or make it known that the lwa is hungry and seeks the respect and honor which can only be granted through food preparation and distribution in their name. It is said in Murray and Alvarèz (1973) and Herskovitz (1937) that these once were very grand affairs Sou Lapwen, great feasts do happen yearly, and many community members contribute to them. Smaller feasts occur regularly, however, usually once every two months at least.

Food is the largest major expense at planned ceremonies, which were familial obligations and the most elaborate regular feasts in Sou Lapwen (Figure 4-19). At one event, the feeding of the ancient familial lwa in Lamanay (a subsection of Sou Lapwen towards the North) demanded that a massive amount of corn gruel, soda, drinks, and
platters be prepared. Individuals requested photos with their plates of food, their sodas, their tobacco. These ethnographer-mediated self-portraits were very popular in town, as I had gained a reputation for reliably returning with copies and many villagers (at that time) only had a few photos of themselves.

After the feast, going through my photographs from the entire month, I noticed how often persons requested pictures when they were holding or positioned near food—not only at feasts, which were food centered, but during everyday activities as well (Figure 4-20). Whether in gardens showing off a harvest, or at home displaying a plate of freshly cooked sauce and rice, or posed with a bottle of Waglet and pressing tobacco up one’s nose, people overwhelmingly requested portraits in real and (even more often) feigned acts of consumption. At this familial feast, Casseus asked for a portrait with the perfect pumpkin brought from his garden, while Carmelite and all the other women took turns pretending to be the cooks of large vats of pumpkin soup for the camera. When food was ready to be served, everyone excitedly came from the Sou Lapwen houses nearby, and no one was turned away. This event happened yearly.

In all such ceremonies, children, parents, adults and strangers who came are all eagerly invited in (not that there aren’t community grudges or rifts—(those in fights will simply avoid social gatherings) (Figure 4-21). At these ceremonies, children are not only learning that the lwa love them, but they are also learning that sharing, offering food, and consuming food with others—even those we cannot see or touch—is a joyful task. A necessary task. A job that creates plenty and does not diminish one’s resources—for it is important at such events that the food seems to be an endless stream. Food is
placed at the poto mitan. Food is organized on tables on the road, in fires and pots at the main intersection, in the slew of plates and gourds and cups that lined the altar space of the ancient kay lwa in Lamanay. At one night event on the other side of town, a party and a lwa-feeding by another courtyard head and Oungan, participants prepared an especially memorable pot of food. This pot, still steaming hotly, was placed into a dug hole—lid and all, and covered with dirt (Figure 4-22). The children peered their heads in nervously, cheering, laughing, learning. When lwa came, the two young boys who stood closest to the food were pushed forward by adults into the hands of the lwa, who gave them a ritual handshake and then placed food in their hands.

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Children also learn a great deal from fetching and offering food to the lwa themselves. The lwa speaks directly to adults who have individual relationships to the lwa, or adults like myself (who a lwa takes an interest in out of novelty—at least at first), asking: “Where is my food? Where is my portion?” The proper response is to hand over what one has, and if necessary, find a way to acquire their preferred substance. Even if an exact match can’t be made, it is proper etiquette to respond to lwa requests with some portion of what is available and an eager and attentive gaze. If nothing is available to offer the lwa, children will be called and sent to purchase food. Children are the couriers of the countryside. They endlessly run to and fro, visiting friends and forming gangs on the way, fetching news and items to distribute to people at home. Estelle, Ninev’s daughter, may be evangelical (she decided to convert at 5) but she is still eager to attend ceremonies in case she can be chosen to run back and forth with supplies. Wherever a ceremony occurred, some interested children are allowed to mill
about in the center or at the edges as they wished, waiting to be utilized in some way (Figure 4-23).

At another event, by the ancient spirit house, Wilvarde and Young banded together to create a feast for Kouzen. The brother and sister team prepared an elaborate spread for the lwa and called everyone from surrounding streets and subdivisions of Sou Lapwen to attend. It was a delightful event where, as usual, food was the central pole around which the ceremony orbited. Nel, who prepared and sold snuff from Columbian tobacco, brought plenty of tobacco to give away, shoving tobacco into her nose and offering it to us adults, as well as the children observing. Children would normally not ingest tobacco, but under the circumstances and obligatory generosity, Nel used it herself and then offered each child who wanted a few tiny scraps which quickly fell out of their nose but which nonetheless delighted them. Immense amounts of food were brought out into the courtyard of Turin, the courtyard head of Lamanay.

Turin is an older, wiry, but still strong man of seventy with a young wife of forty and seven children, all under 16, still living with him. They have always been quite poor in comparison to other families, which is saying a great deal given the general scarcity of food and money in the region. During the off-season for cassava (which Turin would otherwise grate and sell), the family would sometimes go quietly hungry for a day or two each week, except for whatever few handfuls the children acquired from other houses also poorly off. He was the head of a courtyard, but his rule had become largely symbolic as he was financially unable to provide large meals for the neighbors around him. Turin might have asked for food, by simply going to sit in another's courtyard
during lunch time or dinner, but he was too proud and would not admit that he was hungry. His young wife would work in various household tasks at neighbors in order to procure food for herself and children. I had seen their children eagerly attempting to lick oil collected at the bottom of oil jugs.

On this occasion, however, their courtyard was a place of plenty. Plate after plate of corn gruel was brought out, mixed with meat, candies, sweets, and ice cold cola were prepared on a table. A chorus of children scurried in and out of the courtyard happily, sitting underneath the large kennep tree which shaded his house and the stream of the irrigation canal in front, which ran low. It was a sight to see.

Behind the house, in view of Young’s kay iwa and the ancient kay iwa of the clan, the figure and form of Turin emerged, but not as Turin himself, rather as Kouzen, his other self. This was the iwa who cherished Turin the most. His bodily movements give him away instantly in ceremonies. His arms were held inward, shy, tentative. He clutches a characteristic woven bag close to himself. The typically slow but powerful Turin became a spry, mischievous figure. He gathered his hands to his chest, reducing the space he took up in the room. His fingers darting and touching each other while opening and closing his mouth though words wouldn’t come out. He was too shy to speak in front of all of us, but he showed he was eager to join in and keen to entertain the children. Quickly his hat and his basket were brought out and place on him, which he smiled dearly for. Before being offered food, he sought out Wilvarde and Young, who were the key contributors to the meal. He embraced each of them with deep love, rubbing his forehead and face on their own faces as a sign of blessing.
From the background, another woman of the family had water and salt that she sprinkled on Wilvarde and Young at Kouzen’ s invitation. They danced together, the three of them, kicking up their legs. Wilvarde tried to keep up with Young and Kouzen but was, as usual, distant, tired, anemic, and somehow unavailable. Neighbors brought out the food that they had prepared, using produce provided by Wilvarde and Young. It was a delight when they had Kouzen sit down to eat, in the center of the small crowd behind Seville’s house. He was presented with a large kivet of gruel, the size of a small washing basin. He ate it hungrily, greedily, appreciatively, as is his fashion. Now and then he took a handful of gruel and gave it to children, who were leaning in and giggling at the sides. They eagerly ate from his hands, and the adults laughed amongst themselves. All eyes were trained on Kouzen, observing and adoring his presence. As the peasant’s lwa, he was exceedingly important to community life. As a person, he was kind, funny, unpredictable.

At one point Wilvarde attempted to disappear back into the crowd, scooting back on her haunches (Figure 4-24). She clearly disliked being up at the front. Kouzen grabbed her ankle immediately, pulled her to the ground, brought food to her mouth with his own hands. When he had finished eating this enormous mountain of gruel, of which he only gave a portion away, he drank two sodas down as quick as a person could clap, and everyone laughed (Figure 4-25). A few teased him from the sidelines, calling him greedy, cheap, for drinking so much. He shrank back in the pretense of embarrassment.

Looking in his bag (which is otherwise hanging in a special room for such occasions) he produced a 50-gourds note and attempted to offer it to a guest at the feast. 50-gourds is enough to buy a cute new tank top, a fair share of greens, or five
cold, imported sodas He looked at the note quizzically, a note that had been left in another ritual at another time by someone who had been either treated or who needed to consult Kouzen. Who knows when the ceremony took place. Money accumulates in sacred bags and is offered from them. He turned around and offered the money to Nel, who retreated and swiftly shook her head. None of the adults wanted it, but when he turned to a young child who placed out his hand, Nel and Carmelite encouraged the child to take it. His face was flushed, a boy of only 6-years-old or so, not understanding exactly what happened but being assured by the adults that it was all right. Quickly he ran off to give it to his mother, as is the custom with money handed to children.

Kouzen began taking from another plate of cracked corn stew, *tchaka*, that had been brought out. He shoveled handful after handful of wet food into his basket, placing crackers and treats from the table as well, pouring coffee in, drinking what remained. Food encrusts the basket, makes it heavy with organic matter, just as it fills bellies. Kouzen made sure to offer tchaka to everyone, so that each person would receive at least a bite. Soda and kleren were passed around so everyone could share in sips of sweet drinks as well.

Shared feasts for lwa, such as this one, tend to happen five or six times a year in the community—depending on the economic conditions and on whether not there has been an illness. At some, drums beat loudly, music filling the night sky. At others, like this one, it is familial, peaceful. In all cases, these ceremonies are intimate.

At one memorable event, a basket was baptized. A wealthy man from out of the area had come for Anperè’s consultation. During the ceremony, Anperè became Avadra, and demanded his fair portion of kleren. The colossal bottle of kleren, which
was full at the beginning of the ceremony, had now started to run dry from being passed to so many observers in the community. Things should never be left to run out at ceremonies, at least not before it is heated up, and Avadra became rightfully frustrated, slapping Sidney’s hand away when he tried to grab the last few drops. Nanis had sent her grandson for a small bottle earlier, but he had not returned. I looked for a child in order to send them after a small bottle of cheap, syrupy wine. As I pulled out the correctly counted change, a swarm of children crowded up behind us, pinching each other, reaching to offer themselves as couriers.

I chose Shelove, a young boy around 8-years-old and a child of Nel’s second cousin. He proudly sauntered off, going back and forth numerous times to clarify and acquire the precise drink, as the alcohol supply had slowed in the town. These bodily tasks of requesting, exerting oneself, and exchanging food are repeated many times over the course of a year, then over the decades, then over a person’s life. Coupled with their own experiences of being fed and being so carefully attended to, and their experiences of feeding and attending to a broad community of human and non-human others (which start very early), the process of reinforcing an ethos of food as the most important social obligation—indeed the very building block of sociality—is formed.

Feeding, Sharing, Becoming Social

The shared substance is also shared experience, and sociality is built on action and everyday practice rather than on ritual events or deeply held beliefs. Family, social members, Iwa, magic, and even dyab compulsively feed each other and are owed food from one another. They invigorate and strengthen one another through these vital biosocial exchanges. These collective practices of feeding/being fed come to shape how and with whom people surface as bodies in their world (Figure 4-26). I argue that
personing in Haiti is instilled early on as infants grow into being in tandem with existing courtyards. Infant dispositions, combined with caretaker practices, rituals, and modes of perception nourish an intrasubjective experience of body-selves as bound to each other as the courtyard, which is in an ambiguous and shifting relationship with the bitasyòn.

As in Murray (1981), the patterns I observed in Sou Lapwen showed that dispersion of food and equality of consumption was a much stronger force than personal hunger for most people. However, not everyone is so calm and compliant to social joys like sharing. This is also the collective nightmare of the hungry person—the one who demands more than can be given, who eats more than can be shared, who retaliates against those who have foregotten them. This collective nightmare is painfully real in the experiences of many in Sou Lapwen, who have struggled with individuals (living and dead) that make demands that cannot reasonably be fulfilled and that threaten to leave them destroyed.⁷

Luckily, beings ask before they become angry. Such relationships can be avoided. The Petwo Iwa, as well as Rada Iwa, and Congo Iwa generally do not “expect” more than you can give (although they may ask for it as a formality). Yet it is not only these named Iwa who inhabit the landscape alongside humans—there are animals, invisible beings, creatures at night—who are all linked to the courtyard as part of the courtyard. The earth of the courtyard is made up of layers of many others—it holds infants who died in infancy (four of Nel’s), but also mouths that demand feeding, things, people, promises that may have been foregotten. Through offerings, these beings are

⁷ Bastien 1961:490 describes this hunger and dispossession as it applies to family relations and unexpected heirs, illustrating that peasants in Marbial are willing to sacrifice significant and necessary material resources in order to preserve bonds among relatives.
fed when needed. Courtyard Iwa in Nel’s house are fed regularly with food underground and choice morsels suspended in trees, usually after they call her attention to it.

Lwa, humans, beings, nanm, all of it is hungry. This hunger can be treated as an opportunity to create peaceful social bonds and establish health and wellness as in the cases above. These are ad-hoc mechanisms that teach people to be cognizant of hunger in others, and to attempt to remedy it. However, as we may also be hungry, we are always negotiating how much we ought to share in order to appease everyone but also to satiate ourselves.
Figure 4-1. Cracked corn soup, prepared for the ancestors and residents of the bitasyòn during Kouzen's festival.
Figure 4-2: Lunchtime at Nel's, showing her separating food in the kitchen while children, friends, dogs gather.
Figure 4-3. Sidney’s son finishes up his serving of cracked corn soup during the ritual bitasyòn feeding. Note corn on ground to his left, which adults scatter on the ground from their plates for the lwa.
Figure 4-4. Felicie shows off Nel’s groceries, which she will help prepare into a special legim sauce on the event of Toro’s baptism.
Figure 4-5. Toro helps peel corn for dinner.
Figure 4-6. Casseus feeds Clajames while repeating “Papa, Papa!”.
Figure 4-7. Nel plays with Clajames, aged 1-month.
Figure 4-8. Clajames, a sick orphan, lies on Ninev’s lap with a charm strung around his waist to ease the diarrhea.
Figure 4-9. Ninev applies a topical salve and mouth ointment to Clajames, who is severely ill.
Figure 4-10. Caroline and Toro playing in wheelbarrow.
Figure 4-11. Caroline and Toro drink morning coffee and biscuits.
Figure 4-12. Toro offers the biscuit to Caroline when she drops hers.
Figure 4-13. A cousin plays with Caroline while sharing her plate of food.
Figure 4-14. Caroline and Toro quarreling over the tire.
Figure 4-15. Toro has won a quarrel with Caroline.
Figure 4-16. Felicie holds a black chicken, which Dantor has requested in a dream. It is killed, plucked, and then offered in a three-legged pot in front of her door.
Figure 4-17. Bull heads hang from Bossu. Bottles include offerings of special food, and special potions and concoctions made while Iwa visited in person.
Figure 4-18. The feeding aesthetic of Petwo Magic. A multitude of magic for varying clients hangs from ceiling. Oval bundles are plates with organic matter and silverware inside, bound lip-to-lip. The bundle has been fed with a slaughtered chicken.
Figure 4-19. A cauldron of food, one of many, boils at a crossroads during the feeding of the lwa during pumpkin season. Another pail holds washed pumpkin pulp and a wide tray holds a cup for food processing.
Figure 4-20. Young's wife asks to be photographed with the food she has prepared.
Figure 4-21. At the house of a Oungan Oto, a tremendous offering was made for the local and familial lwa. Gathering manioc, rice, beans, meat, the elaborate spread was placed in calabash containers around the poto mitan. Children again stood at the frontlines, and were among the first to happily dance. People ate and drank afterwards—there were perhaps 70 people present for it was one of the largest peristils in town. Holes were dug for the food, where it could be placed and consumed by the dead and the lwa and the others in the courtyard who could not be named or who had since been forgotton.
Figure 4-22. The Iwa Brav, as a merchant woman, proudly displays her enormous platter of food at a feeding of the Gede Iwa near Kwa de Misyon.
Figure 4-23. Kouzen, as Turin, learns and plays games with children during his feast.
Figure 4-24. Kouzen packs his basket with food. The basket will be hung in his sacred quarters until he appears as someone else again and requests it.
Figure 4-25. Kouzen, the hungry and hardworking peyizan lwa, licks the bowl of tchaka clean while Wilvarde, who paid for and helped prepare it, smiles.
Figure 4-26. In a Monrouis kay lwa, food is placed in sacred calabash dishes. They are brought to light with local beeswax candles alongside delicate oil lamps made of orange peels at a lapriyè and feeding of the Ginnen-Iwa before a large gathering of sosyète (Vodou societies) the following week.
To inherit the land is to inherit the bones of the ancestors and the duty to honor those ancestors as well as to serve the lwa represented in the cult house. Conversely, to be separated from the land is also to risk one’s access to [this] power and protection (Brown 2006: 1).

In this chapter I consider the experiences of dwelling within Sou Lapwen in relation to the word most commonly paired with Sou Lapwen: “bitasyòn.” This chapter treats the bitasyòn as the point of intersection between a multitude of processes. However, the terms “realm”, or “habitat”, or “domicile”, or even “dwelling” (which I will use) still leave a great deal to be desired; names and geographies change, but the dwelling remains. So too does the bitasyòn live, love, and breathe (Figure 5-1). The bitasyòn is the larger dwelling place of the community, but it is also and especially the sensory drama created by a multitude of intersections of nanm, persons, places, times. Dwelling is crafted in the unlocalizable state of crossing rather than being. One is never finished becoming a person, just as one is never finished with one’s baptismal ties, nor is anyone truly, perfectly well; the world is filled with negotiated interactions, or crossings. Someone who learns to live well is someone who has learned to manage their ongoing crossings (and those of their shared selves and courtyards) with style and grace, nurturing the relations which sustain these crossroads. In this chapter, I explore the bitasyòn as a key site of crossings and interactions in Sou Lapwen which keep persons embedded within the meshwork of courtyards described in Chapter 2 and 3.

This chapter is about crossing, janbe, but also the crossroads, Kafou, and the cross, the kwa (Figure 5-2). In some of its aspects, the dwelling is a gravitational enchantment which pulls inward all those who reside within it, pulling beings into daily
contact with each other, whether land, trees, persons, or ancestors. In other aspects, the dwelling is known as and through the Mèt Bitasyòn, a stern embodiment of ancestry and land relationships. In another sense, a dwelling is the space where one partially dwells, given connections to other ancestral homes. It can also be circumscribed and refer only to the ecological space of a single courtyard.

The word bitasyòn, or less commonly zòn (zone), poses a unique problem of translation. Adam McGee (2008) translates it as “homestead,” Schuller (2016) calls it a “rural neighborhood” Yves calls it a “vicinity” while Murray (1973; in conversation 1) has cautiously offered the translation of “hamlet” or “dwelling place,” to retain the holistic and ecological sense of the term.

Thresholds of the Bitasyòn

Kafou O Ile E
Janbe nou pral janbe
Kafou o Ile E
Janbe nou pral janbe
Gen twa Kafou bare m la
Jodi a nou pral janbe."

O Crossroads (also, Master of the Crossroads) Ile E
Cross over we are going to cross over you
O Crossroads (also, Master of the Crossroads) Ile E
Cross over we are going to cross over you
There are three crossroads which are blocking my way
Today we are going to cross them."

Fertile soil. River silt. White limestone dust choking the roads. We have already crossed over from feeling and nanm (Chapter 2) to tasting and nanm (Chapter 3), and now we have moved to rooting nanm: back at the dwelling where it starts. Back at the fertile black earth, which is a joy right in the deep-down of your stomach. Or the
opposite of that happiness: jealousy, which is a pinching, stinging hangnail. Black powder out of place is poison. And so forth

Like senses that crisscross our eyes, hearts, ears, and mouths, the town itself is a series of crosses. We cannot speak of colors or of what can be seen without passing into a conversation about how it feels, tastes, touches, and what it means. Green is a feeling. Cool shade is a drink of water (Figure 5-3). The sun is everywhere. The sun powers. The green grows. The water comes, and if God wills, it will be crystal clear as if a pool of glass or a thin line of cellophane. People escape the sun in the cold drink of shadows, where a tree grows as a friend, an ally, a god. Birds twitter and squawk, the loud swish of the brightly colored lizards slip across the yard (they are fighting) the red blossoms throw a slow and lazy veil across the earth.

This is one side only of the shape of life here. There are many others. The delicate lives of the ants and the birds, which cross each other as food, the savage and ebullient life of the howling dogs, the brief life of the plantain trees that they run between, trees that rise and fall and scatter their jewels into the mouths of the town.

The bitasyòn itself is a crossroad, just as people become hubs in possession, just as everything is a crossing of other things, a passageway for many different material destinies (Figure 5-4). Personhood and wellness are “inextricably tied to social and geographical locations” (Farmer 2006). This bitasyòn, Sou Lapwen, is a crossroad of mountain and valley. It is a crossroad of one family, , and all the others who have come to join it in marriage, mating, and friendship. These things are real, felt, and known.
After the sun falls into the ocean East of here, the creatures of the Bitasyòn’s night emerge. The scuttling shapeshifters. Those who cross worlds and forms in the most awful of ways. The smell of the street is different then. The bitasyòn undergoes a change in smell, sound, feeling. It becomes dry, and old. It is missing the persistent daily scent of charcoal fires and the savory smell of cooking beans and rice. No pattering of children’s feet, every which way. Daytime’s feeling of abundant noise, touch, thoughts, illness, are all gone but the night is not simply restful. Speckled with strange noises, it is often hungry and unsatisfied. It can swallow people up. Its breath will follow each passerby home; it means they ought to sleep outside their doorways so as not to drag in the poison night airs. In the morning humans are free once again.

Things are always crossing each other. Night crosses day. Infants are a cross of their parents, who are crosses of their ancestors. Then babies are born, but they don’t cross all the way into the world all at once, no, instead staying with one foot in the Other Place and one foot among the living. They remain not on either road, but at the point. The pwen of the kwa (Rey and Richman 2010: 292). The spot at the center of the crossroads where it is both lines equally, where passage can go either way (Desmangles 1977: 15). In ritual, the oungan is the pwen, the pole is the pwen, the patient is the pwen (Desmangles 1977: 20, 21).

In Sou Lapwen, the patient is surrounded on four sides by the dim orange flickering of wax within hollowed out limes. Surrounded on four sides by the flicker of a candle and burning kleren. Surrounded on four sides by the lwa and by the living. Surrounded on four sides by cornmeal, underground magic, poles that reach upward to
hold the leaf roof. When partaking of drink during a ceremony, the drinker is the point of the crossroads. Tossing a drop of kleren North, a drop South, a drop East, a drop West.

But: North, South, East, West in reference to whom? The drinker. The drinker who is the poto mitan of possession, who can become the exchange between the dead, or the lwa, or the living, or illness, or health.

When a fire is lit in the courtyard to call Ogun, he comes up through the fire, which is the point of crossing. He is called up, four sides with crackling salt, four sides with the salute, four sides with the machete. When food is offered upon the doors to feed the dead and the lwa, it is smeared into a cross; they drink up from the point of crossing. They are honored. Underneath the three rocks, which hold the pot that holds the food for the lwa, there are marks made in black charcoal, crosses. The point is at the center of the rock, the center of the stone supports the base of the cauldron, the cauldron holds the proceeds of the field.

The bitasyòn is this intersection of crossroads—it is the gravity created by these intersections. Pass its event horizon, and it will pull you in. There are so many intersections that they almost become meaningless to think of, meaningless to speak. Almost paradoxical. Almost, but not quite.

Life favors thresholds more than it favors either of their colliding states. Thresholds can turn us around, turn us back to ourselves, or while turning, turn us into lwa (Martin 1995: 101). Are you really baptized? Are you actually living well? Have you truly grown up? Is he or she possessed? Is this, or is this not, in balance, with the ancestors (Brown 2006: 17)? This is why the bitasyòn is a dwelling, a meshwork. It is a series of thresholds rather than a collection of beings and things in various states. There
is both an un-finishedness to life and an un-finishedness to knowledge, and this means that humans occupy an ever-shifting position in relation to an ever-shifting reference—in short: the passage is complicated. Perhaps it’s not so much about states of being sticking to bodies as it is about crossroads being social fly traps. The threshold likes to hold its witnesses; it doesn’t let go easily. And it’s no matter, for who can claim true wellness, true knowledge, true Ginnen, without it simply being an exaggeration or boast?

Thus, rituals like naming, baptism, and marriage do not invest beings with agency, for even the most un-living, basic fragment of life-energy may possess that rather will and desire that we call agency. These acts provide something other than agency, they provide affiliation, relation, and enmeshment in a broader collective. This collective is ruled not by the whim and passion often attributable to singular actors, but ruled by ethics, obligations, and responsibilities. Baptismal engagement, dwelling practices, and illness treatments in the bitasyòn create people as political beings. Such acts affix individuals within social systems where they are subject to, and given recourse to, a much broader and expansive set of relations than the family group allows. Such acts transform individual agents or familial members into social persons, deserving of fair treatment, attention, and social care. When beings are baptized, or when they are ritually treated, they are in effect attempting to leave a death-embattled vacuum of non-existence or illness and move on towards social personhood, a move that necessitates the creation or reaffirmation of bonds, a move that demands the knowledge of others’ and others’ awareness of oneself.
All estates have their loa, their Vodun deities dwelling in a mapou tree, a large rock, or some odd natural feature…Such loa are not to be confused with the family loa who came with the founder of the lakou and are inherited by his offspring. The spirit or lwa of the estate were there when the peasants came; at times, it is said to be soul of the white man or simply the stranger…The spirit may also be the soul of the founder of the lakou, the gradet, the do, the great-grandfather, the lord raised to the category of demigod (Bastien 1961: 495)

Bitasyòn have masters, but bitasyòn are also one with these masters. Even if we do not know their names, the land gives evidence to their existence. This air, these rocks, the undulating path through a neighbor’s planted fields, each of these iterate rhythms and personalities which emerge time and again and give the dwelling its character and its tendencies. Names, in fact, are not terribly important in the process of dwelling. Names are foregotten far easier than other things, things like roads and smells and landmarks. Sou Lapwen was not always called Sou Lapwen. Before the time of Duvalier, it was known as Tyoudie, but residents changed it to the paternal name of a prominent leader in town whose last name was Sou Lapwen. Although these once-Sou Lapwen’s have since become other families, the name has stuck. As Nel and Carmelite have said, it is simply “much prettier.” Thus, the bitasyòn of Sou Lapwen is that demarcated medium of interaction which was Tyoudie, and is today Sou Lapwen, but which also was a French plantation, a site of rebellion, and so on.

In his opening quote, Bastien speaks of the lwa which reside within the landscapes and towns throughout Haiti. In Sou Lapwen, these lwa of the landscape are known collectively and specifically as Mèt Bitasyòn, or literally, the Master of the Dwelling. Mèt Bitasyòn are stern, powerful, and deeply respected nanm that are co-extensive with the environment of given sites and spaces. They are often described in
moralistic terms, joining notions of dwelling with the conscience, mutual obligation. He or she appears in daily life both in the depths and undulations of interactive spaces and in human form in dreams. Mèt are a powerful figure and force among the lwa in Sou Lapwen, they are an important iteration of nanm that all who dwell within must respect. In this way, the Mèt connects the various courtyards in Sou Lapwen together, weaving together different time periods, spaces, and families, as all inhabiting a shared landscape with at least one Mèt. This is in direct contrast to lwa-as-selves, or the lwa-person assemblage that each Voudouisant has with their unique escorts. Those lwa can skip many generations, or even disappear altogether. Thus, the Mèt Bitasyòn of a given region is in each family, person, and stretch of territory because of their perpetual copresence.

To be part of a dwelling, to be under the purview of this nanm, is to be alive, it is to be rooted and emplaced. And for all of those who dwell in Sou Lapwen (and many others, who have had to leave), the bitasyòn of this Mèt is where their roots grow strongest. Johnson (2014: 211) identifies the Premye Mèt Bitasyòn as the beginning, the heroic ancestor, the land itself, while Menneson Rigaud, in Richman (2007) defines the term simply as the “Master of the house” (2008).

Lina is a budding manbo in Nan Dó who sometimes lives with Cassanne in Sou Lapwen. She had the following to say about the Mèt Bitasyòn:

When you enter the great Bitasyòn, it’s like, the ancient, ancient ancestors that died, they came and formed a mystic, they formed something, they made something together, as they were the Mèt Bitasyòn. Just as Sou Lapwen is an ancient Bitasyòn, it has a Mèt Bitasyòn a Mèt Bitasyòn.

There was an ancient people that had…an ancient people that had been there before we ourselves came and arrived, and they made, they made, they placed, they installed and formed one [Mèt Bitasyòn]. They
subscribed to it, they installed it, they beat drums upon it. You, Alissa, have seen [such things], remember?

They always start fires around it, they water it with kleren, just like... if the Mèt Bitasyòn was a tree, they would light a candle in its branches, pour kleren inside of it. If it is a lwa, if the [being in question] is a Bitasyòn, they always pour out water for it.”

The Mèt Bitasyòn dances upon people just as, just like when someone has lwa. Before everyone here came to live in Sou Lapwen, these things had already happened, [like the] cross [in the public plaza in Sou Lapwen], its the Mèt Bitasyòn Sou Lapwen.

Bitasyòn are not isolated places, cut off from each other through clear boundaries. Bitasyòn are multiple, just as our ancestors are. One has two parents, four grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins besides. One also has many dwellings. In a similar vein, there is never only a single master of the bitasyòn, for the bitasyòn itself is not a single thing but a dynamic ongoing encounter. There is one very important Mèt Bitasyòn in Sou Lapwen (represented by the cross at the end of the main crossroads), but it is only appealed to as the “Mèt Bitasyòn,” a name which can individually refer to all the mèt bitasyòn within a region (Figure 5-5). This Mèt Bitasyòn is the being that unites the nam of the first human inhabitants to all the human inhabitants who have come after and who will ever come. Similarly, there is a Mèt Bitasyòn of Nel’s mother’s family in Lamanay, which unites the first of her mother’s relatives to dwell in the land with all the other relations who will come after. Yet not all Mèt are so human-centric, or human-focused. Within and through the dwelling of Sou Lapwen, runs the residence of many, many Mèt Bitasyòn with overlapping purviews. Most of the Mèt Bitasyòn are known to be unknown—that is, their existence is theoretically certain but they have yet to make contact in a significant way which would record them in the current histories of the place. Another Mèt Bitasyòn who is known, and what’s more known by name, is
Manbo Magalie (Figure 5-6). Her dwelling is rooted in Sou Lapwen and many other towns, terminating at the water source in the mountains to the West. From a lovely dam, down a hot and rugged mountain, then through the canals and the river wash, her hair follows in liquid rivulets behind her, her eyes when iterated in images are bluish-grey (a color all in Sou Lapwen would otherwise find ugly in a person, but which no one dare say of her image). She takes what she wants of those who bathe nearby: clothes, money, food, or soap from the clothes washing occurring ever on her banks. She has taken children, too. Stories tell of those who have disappeared in the canal or their riverbed, only to appear seven months or even seven years later, enriched with mystical wisdom after passing another lifetime in her enchanted underwater realm.

Jalo, who brews sugared coffee beans every morning to sell to farmers and merchants, frequently encounters the masters of terrain. It is not surprising that she does, for her work keeps her on the road, and also directly across from three very sacred trees who have intertwined at a crossroads made by the canal going under a footpath and tiny bridge. She speaks of the things which can be seen from her vantage point in the bitasyòn:

You see zonbi, you see Chanpwèl, you see goblins at night on the road. You see the Master of the Water, Manbo Magalie, who goes under water. Every time I have seen her I have been crossing the water. I see her when I pass over the water. Once, I saw a frog there. You don't know about the things they play for money around here? I see a five marked in the black of his eyes underneath the water. Five little dots, like a domino piece. And the frog was white. The water started rising everywhere. Each place I went to walk, it was getting high. A voice told me: ‘It’s the Keeper of the Waters. It’s her yellow goblin, with the spots of dominoes in his eyes.’

Where the Mèt Bitasyòn Sou Lapwen is felt as stern, humbling residents, Manbo Magalie is feared for her unpredictability, but celebrated in the overt creative myths of place which come about in Sou Lapwen. She was most notably featured in unplanned,
emergent, improvisational ‘plays’, where residents (myself included) would become other characters for fun and act out emerging scenes (usually about fateful trips to Oungan). The first film I began working on came about because of Gaen, Nanis’s daughter, Paul, a spirited older man (a songwriter and musician whose works all the Sou Lapwen peristils knew how to sing), and twelve other young women and men. They spoke for several hours on benches in the public plaza, and planned out a story line for a dark comedy of errors, where a man was bedded unknowingly by Manbo Magalie. She met him at the bar (an old hospital tarp from the U.S. which covered a few tables and often played music on the radio) by her canal, not speaking but enticing the young man to lay with her. After explaining his wonderful night to friends from the area, the man discovers that the young woman he lay with was the embodied water, the finicky river. He became fretful and deeply fearful, having entered a game to which he presumably did not know the rules. At the same time, he could not insult her. This is as far as the story went before other obligations and passions scattered the crew. One presumes that the story reflects what it is like to mix with the Master in human form.

Some also suspect there to be a Mèt of the irrigation locks, on top of her realm; however, this stands as an unconfirmed suspicion (Figure 5-7). Manbo Magalie is too real to ignore; she comes from the water to brush her long hair on the cement blocks. She swallows whole tables on the edge of her territory, gobbling down the offerings, leaving nothing for Carmelite or her others. But we should be happy she ate at all.

On the other hand, for the original, first Mèt Bitasyòn of this dwelling (as they are called), there is a large black wooden cross at one of the main crosses (cross paths, really) in town. It is next to the town plaza, an open cement platform which is raised
several feet above the ground, with a waist-high cement wall that lines two of the walls. It used to be a very busy place, in 2011 and long before, but it has been gradually abandoned over the past four years (Figure 5-5).

The change can be traced to Siméon, an entrepreneur and an utterly unique social butterfly. He became a dear and compassionate friend to me personally, introducing me to his sister, Nephertarie, who had just announced her pregnancy who I also grew close with. Later, she gave me her son as a Godson. Nanette, an equally bubbly evangelical confidante, eagerly introduced me to Siméon during my first season in Sou Lapwen. He was only 19-years-old at the time, and two years prior in 2010, he lost his young and healthy mother of 40-years-old. Most, including Siméon, considered her death to be unequivocally the result of sorcery, pointing to the intense negative emotions swirling around her house before her death.

In a fit of anger at a recent decision she had made, one of her teenage daughters lit her church clothing ablaze in the street, a brutally damaging move considering the value of fine clothing in rural communities. Completely beside herself and blinded with anger, she found a stick and stalked through the community attempting to find her daughter, at the time hiding at the house of a young male friend and protected by another one of her sister’s. Everyone sick with “move san” (bad blood) at the time, feeling the rage, the screams, the ash, pump through the immediate region. Not a week later she was dead, the skin on the soles of her feet was entirely stripped off (dekałe), the sign of an attack of poison. Siméon was a mother’s boy to the bone, and her death was shocking, sudden and deeply painful. After her death, he took over the operation of a large merchant stand directly adjacent to the cross of the Bitasyòn, and
many young adults and children would gather by his fire at night, in front of the cross, where he sold fried food and many other packaged goods.

In 2013, Siméon was hit and killed by a tap-tap (a bus) on the highway, traveling to purchase juice for resale. Both his passengers on the motorcycle, Nanette and the driver, survived. His closest sister, my co-mother Nephertarie, took ill immediately thereafter and has yet to recover, as of the time of publication. Her legs and arms are constantly swollen, she breaks out in strange rashes that peel her skin back, and she has no energy to care for her three young boys. Added to her considerable troubles, my godson kept falling ill, there were awful noises in the house, and she finally decided to relocate to Nan Dó (the town across the gorge) to escape what seemed to be the continuing poison of her land in Sou Lapwen. Her sisters and their children remained behind.

Nephertarie’s two oldest boys, 7 and 9-years-old, took up most of the housework after Siméon’s death and the relocation, and cared for my godson, Ed, when the mother was weak. Then, not a year after Nephertarie fell ill (which was the same year Siméon died which was a year after her mother died), Ed began acting strangely. After a two-year struggle with blood transfusions, hospitals, aid groups, and oungan who had conflicting stories, Ed was diagnosed with AML-5 childhood leukemia and treated with chemotherapy in Tabarre (his mother slept at the foot of his crib for six months). After the round of chemotherapy was completed, Ed was released. He died a week later, almost reaching the age of four. With each illness and each death in Siméon’s family, who live closest to the dwelling of the Mèt Bitasyòn, the number of persons who gather at the plaza falls. Today, you will only find a few people sitting there throughout the day.
Offerings can still be found at the foot of the cross, but it is no longer surrounded with laughter or the smell of cooking food or the bustle of trade.

Yet people never have only a single bitasyôn (Figure 5-8). By virtue of the hundreds of ancestors coming before us, people have roots in multiple bitasyôn, multiple realms, and multiple worlds. Persons in Afro-Creole religions are transnational persons, as Matory (2008) has pointed out, and they have maintained complicated and intersecting ties to many lands and many worlds. So how and when do people claim allegiance to the bitasyôn, marking their ties to the land and to the first ancestors who dwelt within? In the way of identity politics, it can be strategically advantageous to highlight certain ancestries and background others. In certain contexts, it can be necessary to claim that one's roots lie only or mainly within this place or that place. In the case of Sou Lapwen ritual practices, this shifting allegiance to dwellings entails no direct contradiction, but it takes ritual work to solidify new ties and revive old ones.

For example, when Nanschmide and later Gedulien Fal came to Sou Lapwen for treatment, they came as children of the dwelling although they both lived far away from the town. As children claiming this as their dwelling, this particular dwelling at this particular time, they seek better relationships with the dead and the land here which are expected to bring better relief than the dead elsewhere. They lay claim to the land as their own, yet were born elsewhere and have lived mainly in those same “elsewheres,” even though each had spent time in Sou Lapwen. They are thus not, strictly speaking, children of one family, but children of many. The realms that one claims at any given moment are precipitated from several life circumstances and a number of needs.
Just as Nel whispered to Waglet as she baptized him: “You are the child of sixty-four or more tribes, of one-hundred-and-twenty-eight groups and ancestors, of nations that stretch out behind you. It’s impossible to say how many. It’s impossible to know where one will end up.”

So, when you ask: “where? Where does the Mèt Bitasyòn reside?” It is no surprise that someone will point you to any number of crossroads where a cross has been crafted and placed upright. There is the Keeper of the Bitasyòn. The crosses are surrounded by a speckling of rum bottles, painted with black and white stripes, given a proud base of cement, given a notched head, outstretched arms, and feet straight, together, which plummet into it. At these places, the Mèt Bitasyòn is called to, and he or she speaks. At these sites, an archaeologist would unearth innumerable gourd bowls with hundreds of coins, each and every one a personal request.

Tethered/Untethered

In the case of children, being born entails belonging to a set of caretakers and having been produced by a set of ancestors (Figure 5-9). It means being loved by family members, it means possessing a set of dispositions. To be born is to be a human being with a particular assemblage of proclivities, just as such individual dispositions and familial love are present across species lines in our observable worlds. Adult hands swaddle, wipe, hug, and fret over human infants. These infants do not understand all this activity, families say, and hence they cannot grasp the value of this dedication though they cry out for it. Infants are adored, but they are ignorant. They have not been habituated into the kinesthetic and affective knowledge about how to wisely form social bonds. Centered firmly in themselves, they exist in the same way that other temperamental and unbaptized forces of the world exist, acting on whims and bound to
no loyalties or obligations. Baptismal acts, both formal and informal, are the ritual moments when given beings are installed within a web of broad, reciprocal relations with social expectations and benefits.

It was an object and not through a child that baptism first became salient to me, as a researcher. I had just barely moved in with Nel. I spoke to her again of a lovely Vodou statue I had come across, which depicted a woman in a two-tone velvet dress with army boots peeking out from underneath. In her hands, she clutched a baby doll by its ankle, with beeswax candles in her other fist. The statue suggested a magical realism, an intense and ambiguous scene, and it evoked strong emotions from those who had seen it.

I told Nel that I had noticed (in a photograph of the statue) that there were two distinctive black scars on her cheeks, below her eyes. For a long time, I assumed the figure was Gran Brigitte, but I now asked Nel if it might not also be, or perhaps might instead be, Ezili Dantor and not Gran Brigitte.

“It is Ezili Dantor,” she said. Ezili Dantor was also Nel’s shadow, she was also the fierce manbo of the courtyard, and a sensual male lover.

I nodded and continued my story. Did I tell her, I laughed, that I had tried to protect Dantor’s statue earlier in the year by keeping it in a box? I was quickly assailed by nightmares. In the dreams, the statue was a woman. Powerful, impressive, angry. She protested her ignominious cardboard abode, her eyes flashing. Finding it an easy enough task to partake in (also one that might satisfy my subconscious anxieties as expressed in the dream) I stood her upright and afforded the statue more respect.
The nightmares, however, did not stop as I expected. New nightmares led me to place her upright and on an end table. This led me to give her the end table and some dried flowers. Afterward, I had pounding nightmares and restless, anxious dreams demanding a door, so I placed the statue in a special closet. The nightmares continued, and I decided that anything that touched her probably shouldn’t be taken away and that my husband ought to offer her beer if he bought a twelve pack for the house, and ultimately we have another effectual being in the house.

At the point that I was reflecting on this with Nel, I had been participating weekly in this instructive performance which did ready me for affording respect to the so-called inanimate objects in the field. Her eyes grew wide, surprised, and then relaxed. She let out a single laugh. “Dantor chose you,” she said. “With that statue, she chose you.” Nel, sat back, stuffing tobacco in her nose. And sorting out the tobacco in a half of a gourd. She instructed me to make a nice stove for the statue, light it, feed it. I couldn’t do it on my own; she reminded me. Well thank God, I thought, I have a problem knowing when enough is enough with these sorts of things, like all novices. So, she says again, seriously, “You can’t do it yourself.”

A pause occurs, and she laments: “I would have been excited to do that when I came for the wedding in December.” She sighed, “but the Visa! Oh, the Visa didn’t come through, remember? I didn’t wrap my hair; they told me to cover my hair, in that dream that came the days before.” She looked far off, perhaps towards this unrealized future, and then back at me, shrugging nonchalantly.

“Well, whenever we get back there we will baptize it.”

“Baptize the statue?” I asked
“Baptize it.”

I saw her baptize her grandson, a private ceremony after the church ceremony. Nel tosses a shipping line between infancy and the statue with her words, and I struggle to secure the end.

I ask her, “Why do I need to baptize it?” She looks at me as if I am a fool and do not understand statues or baptisms very well at all. She says in a low voice, a voice not meant to be heard by others: “You have to. We baptize it, you choose the godmother (marenn) and the godfather (parenn), you exchange rings with the statue, and then you sleep by yourself every Tuesday.”

“Godparents? Like among the lwa?” I asked.

She laughed. “No, not the lwa. Don’t you have friends? Choose some who you trust to look after her should something, you know, happen to you. They should bring baptismal clothes for her. Beautiful clothes. Then she will do things for them too. And they will bring small gifts when they visit. And you sleep alone on Tuesday so she can come to you. Tuesday: that’s Dantor’s day. She will come to you at night,” she says, “caress you under the covers. Strong armed.”

As I am still listening and running that Creole through my head about a second after she says it. What is this that happens under the covers? She carries on: “Dantor is what you want; she can be a man, a woman. To you, she will come as a tall and dapper man. Keep that night for him, give him nice things, do sweet things to remember him, and he will do things for you. You give to him; later he will give it back to you. Baptize her, the statue” she says. “It’s a fragile thing, we will baptize her, I will direct you over the phone.”
In Sou Lapwen, baptism is normally the first ritual act that connects persons to a
given bitasyòn through the construction of a kin relationship solidified under a ritual
authority figure. Relations within the bitasyòn cocoon the promised-being in certain
protections, in the courtyard (as in McAlister 2001: 365).¹

When one asks why a child is baptized, it is often said that it is because “Bondye"
or “Lwa yo…poko rekònet li,” (God or the lwa have not yet met him). The implicit
meaning of this common utterance isn't that in baptizing the child, the child will be
recognized, known, or seen more saliently by God and the lwa (Figure 5-10). God or the
lwa may know of the child, and the mèt têt may even know the child intimately, but
through baptism, this knowledge of the child becomes a formal social acceptance. The
same is also true of the child and the broader bitasyòn.²

Although pre-baptized infants or some rocks, trees, or animals do have certain
relationships with each other and are the subject of many ongoing social processes of
diagnosis and speculation, they are ultimately not conceived of as social. In one sense,
this can be read pragmatically. He or she who cannot care for others in material or
tangible ways has little of a social existence. They cannot create persistent bonds with
non-family, and they do not yet practice and understand an ethics of redistribution.

I don’t know the word for unbaptized in Creole, and it has never been used in my
presence, but others have assumed that I ought to know what the difference is. I know,
a handful of things which are considered unbaptized—that have never been to church,
and do not have these social ties. Among them, you will find many dogs, baka,

¹ McAlister (2001) provides the full text of a baptismal ceremony, identifying the relational ties with the lwa
as the most important components of the ritual.

² Bastien (1961) offers a thorough explanation of baptismal practices and baptismal ties in Marbial (93).
malfèkte, most insects, etc. All of these things have agency. They can do things on their own, or act on their own devices, they can reach out to connect with other beings, and they have secret lives (desires, names, thoughts) concealed from our view. Most of them, unless otherwise acted upon by lwa or humans, are unbaptized.

Baptism creates permanent, inalienable social relationships among all of the parties involved. They bind together separate courtyards vis-a-vis the subject being baptized, whether human or not. However, since virtually all families in Sou Lapwen are related by blood, ancestry, and the bitasyòn, it often is the case that godparents have multiple roles in a human child’s life. Among these roles it is the role of the godparent as created kin that is most important in the early socialization of the child outside the courtyard.

The ongoing practice of baptism, or what might better be called “having godparents” does more than introduce beings to a larger world. It provides an ideal model for the way future social relationships outside the home ought to be conducted (Figure 5-11). It teaches a child that they have sincere obligations to others in society, and that these bonds, in turn, become the debt relationships that they can go to in times of crisis. Likewise, to act cheaply as a god-relation is to invite the anger and chastisement of an entire community. In a milder sense, it is to claim for oneself that which is rightfully owed to your social ‘other.’ It is a swift way to remove one’s social

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3 In the case of non-human persons, including sacred baskets, crafted beings, trees, and the like, it is less likely that these will be dual roles and the godparents will be chosen ad-hoc during the course of the ritual by the presiding lwa, oungan, bôkô or prêt savann (informal priest).
safety nets and risk being cast into a lonely world of chance (sometimes tantamount to death amidst the scarcity here).  

Under the guidance of ritual authority, the godparent assemblage builds a very special four-fold bond, a crossing, between the mother and father, and godmother and godfather, the lwa of all the families, with the infant at the center. The relationship between the godmother and the mother and father (and often all other adult females in the mother’s courtyard) is acknowledged in the mutual term makôme (co-mother), used by all parties to address each other. Likewise, the relationship between the infant’s courtyard and the godfather is acknowledged in the mutual term konpè (co-father). The infant is the child (pitit mwen) to his parents, but he is both fyèl (godchild) and pitit (child) to his godparents.

Besides the relationship between infants and their mothers, the most significant association built is that between fyèl (godchildren) and marenn (godmother). Each infant of three months or more has been promised to a particular girl or woman in the community who will be the marenn (godmother) and likewise a particular boy or man who will be the parenn (godfather). The familial decision of god parentage often occurs during pregnancy, though some may wait a bit longer to see who shows interest in the child. In the case of a human child (or a special statue), parents, grandparents or other kin suggest and choose godparents from among those living in the region who are not close family.

From one angle, the godmother is a relation who is not from courtyard kin. More rarely, it is someone who is courtyard kin but becomes, in relation to the child, a sort of

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4 Most parents prefer formal Catholic baptisms for their children, although they usually will have had multiple non-Catholic baptisms by the time they are presented to the Church.
alter-kin through the bond. A marenn has different obligations to her godchild than a close-kin would have. For one, there is a profuse exchange of gifts, other formal-intimacies of address, and then also the expectation of returns.

The first gift is provided by the godparents, who offer baptism clothing. However, these godparents and godchild and family will engage in more reciprocal exchanges as the child ages and can carry and even acquire gifts to present to his marenn. Ideally, the fourfold relationship involves a good deal of material benefits, a practice that requires regular contact and socialization with each other and each other's courtyards. This reciprocal bond forms the foundation of crisis insulation outside of the courtyard; it is to your godparent, or your godchild’s family, that you go when you are in great and unexpected need (Murray and Alvarèz 1973).

Furthermore, a godchild has the right to expect a good deal of services from their godparent, as does the godparent from the child. In turn, each is supposed to fulfill certain responsibilities, such as continuing the relationship and providing anything one has available (such as labor) if another party asks. It is a cause for pity; such as a friend explaining that the godmother of her child had not even sent a dime to help with feeding or clothing the baby. The godparents had still not baptized the child, and she was approaching her second year. No one else could be of service.

This relationship teaches the child how essential a temporally extensive attitude is to social success; one cannot think that giving something today will keep them at a loss. They must understand that the strain one experiences in giving today will pay off substantially in the future, with the unforeseen and expensive circumstances that regularly befall the small island nation. Any gift, assistance, or generosity afforded to a
god-relative is an investment, not a loss, as it guarantees and sustains the continuance of one’s line of social credit.

In this way, relations within the bitasyòn cocoons the child from a young age in the protections, rights, and responsibilities of a communal body. Baptismal engagement in the bitasyòn creates a person as a political being permanently engaged in, and with recourse to, a social and political system of guarantees and obligations. Each party is expected to be eager to give and willing to ask should they need something. And breeches of conduct in behavior are regarded very poorly by greater society.

This is different than the less formal bonds of family. In a family, close-kin do not expect their children to feed them. In my kin relationship, it is the Manbo who tends to feed me, Ninev, and the grandchildren. We do not usually feed the Manbo unless she is ill. When I visited my godson’s compound, he offered me food, instructed to do so by his mother who prepared the food or treat and told him to bring it to me. I say thank you to him (as well as his mother). When they come to my place, I ought to offer them food prepared by my hand or my mothers, but it is I who offer.

These relationships—konpè to makôme, makôme to konpè, child to marenn, and so forth—are social-material bonds bound together with emotional support, gift exchange, and mutual concern. The most elaborate relationship is that occurring between the marenn (and to a lesser extent, the parenn) and the child, with smaller gifts exchanged between co-parent groups.

**Known/Unknown**

By changing our relations, we can respond to and intervene in crisis in various ways. This is notably true if we create new relationships to solve specific problems. Such relationships are frequently founded based on sudden illness, calling upon the
unique lwa, saints, and bitasyòn to “recognize” the patient as a member of the family and community (which, given the construction of familial relations in general, implicitly involves interceding on their behalf). Infants and young children are frequent the patients of these ad-hoc relational ceremonies, but they occur at any age and involve many sorts of beings as patients. These treatments are also called “baptism” but they are clarified with the caveat “not a sacred baptism” (pa batèm sakrè). Rather, these baptisms represent the formation of social ties in a time of great stress and illness. Social ties provide one of the best recourse methods for dealing with any life problems in Haiti; people install each other within social ties, and then they appeal to these social ties with aid.

In the case of infants and non-humans, relations are formed and manipulated through ad-hoc medicinal treatments to benefit the patient (Figure 5-12). These relations seek to establish a state of health and harmony, something that must be carefully crafted as health is not the natural physiological state of being (Sommerfeld 1994). Health is defined as a state of “well-being in connectedness” including humans, non-humans, spaces, and situations (Mariette 2013: 263). For sick infants, medicinal baptisms are used as an intense treatment, a treatment-as-introduction, during which families and ritual experts plead with and cajole ancestral, divine, and uncertain forces to grant recognition to the child (or other being) in question.

Infant-treatment baptisms only occur in Sou Lapwen in the period of life before formal baptism is possible. This appears to be the case across much of the rural Arkayè region, unless caretakers have serious reason to doubt the efficacy of the original baptism. These ceremonies of baptismal care are repeated as needed, often many
times during the first two years of life as parents seek better blessings or stronger approval, and they are finally completed when the official, planned baptism within a church (and a Vodou courtyard) takes place.

Infants are known to be extremely sensitive to heated waves of jealousy, malevolence, ill intention, while they are also known to lack the social resources of reciprocity that protect older children and adults from the same threats. Compared with the death of adults, infant death poses serious existential problems. Infant death is conceived of as a particularly awful death which is, in a sense, incomparable to nearly all others. Unlike the deaths of adults, baptized children, and virtually everyone else, infant death was repeatedly said to be absolute and final. When an infant dies, it dies. There is no possibility of persistence in a recognizable form. There is no chance of reunion.

In the same way that infant formal baptisms extend the social world of infants, infant treatment baptisms are explicitly intended to extend infants’ social worlds of non-human others before the same sort of formal baptismal ties are possible. In this way, the infant can act as “many” rather than “one” for at least a short time. These treatment efforts reflect how crucial social personhood is for survival; when babies are seriously ill, manbo and oungan treat them by bringing them into the fold as much as is possible given their social ignorance. As we have seen, in the most important treatment ceremonies, manbo and oungan elicit non-kin, whether humans, lwa, or otherwise, to baptize them and figuratively take up the role of spiritual sociality, or godparenthood. In so doing, they strive to strengthen the nanm of the child, forging social links that
distribute caring, adoration, and protective nanm upon an actually pre-social or unsocial infant.

Due to the immediate nature of the situation, godparents are selected from persons nearby, often those in the ritual expert’s retinue of friends and family. Infant treatment-baptisms do not carry nearly the same social weight as formal baptisms, and society does not recognize the godparents used in treatment ceremonies as official godparents with the requisite social, economic, and otherworldly linkages. However, the ceremony does still demand that two members of the opposite sex stand in as godparents, and their role is most akin to godparents of the ritual rather than godparents of the child.

The routine is also different in many ways from formal baptismal ceremonies. Participants do not generally feast or exchange gifts but instead bathe the given being in alcohol, herbal leaves, and salt. For infants, participants chew the salt and leaves together, and apply it to the child by aeration. After the ceremony, the parents leave, and although they are technically obligated to update ad-hoc godparents on the child’s status they often do not. This is considered exceedingly bad form, as well as a way to avoid a ritual expert who might desire compensation should the child have improved.

Infant treatment baptisms are most similar in tone and structure to non-human baptisms (Figure 5-13)(Figure 5-14). However, infant baptisms are notably more emotional, poignant, and frantic than non-human baptisms, which are often planned ahead by at least three or four days. They are considered a powerful tactic for pleading with ancestral, divine, and uncertain forces to grant recognition to the child or object in question (as in Bastien 1961: 94).
The following text is from one such non-human baptism, where Anperè organized the baptism of Kouzen’s basket and in so doing had to cement ties between the basket’s patron (the patient, Gedulien Fal), the patron’s bitasyòn (Tapyon Nasyonal) and the bitasyòn of Sou Lapwen (Figure 5-15). Notice how Anperè cajoles the Iwa and the bitasyòn to accept Gedulien Fal as a homegrown resident of the community, speaking of how close the bitasyòn of Gedulien Fal is to Arcahaie:

Anperè: Great Master, we understand that it is you who is master of all masters. Today, today is Wednesday. Labors amount to little without a master to oversee them. That which this man has come to do, he is not doing it for evil. Come do a little work with him. They acknowledge God’s son on earth. But does that mean they must eat like a dog?

In his defense, let him be. Was it the Great Master who was upset and took things from him? No. He knows there are Ginnen Iwa on his mother’s side, his father’s, taking things from him, causing difficulty. It’s here he has come to sit in front of his Ginnen. He has come to speak with his Ginnen. To grill food for his Ginnen. To bring them herbs. And for all the rest of the things he is doing. Let him do them. He doesn’t need anything from anyone else; he wants what was meant for his hands. He works, and he sees no reward.

If he is to do anything, O God, he must do this. He must see it through. Because there is evil upon the earth. Even God says people fan the flames of evil. But he has come before his Ginnen. He doesn’t understand what little things he might do to help. But he must seek them and understand them.

I have come to guide him. I am Anperè. I am not a sorcerer. They are not shapeshifting devils. They are not swindling diviners. They are not mystical persons involved in powerful battles. For these reasons, they have come to find me. I have spoken to Ginnen for you, Gedulien Fal. So, I could make your Ginnen understand. There is one that is your master, your master in Ginnen.

You know, after we speak with Ginnen, we will recite dwellings on his mother’s and his father’s side. We know him in this dwelling. He’s from this dwelling, here.

Look here, dwellings of Gedulien Fal. Look at your child. He has come to grill food upon your earth. He knows when a child calls his mother, his mother appears on the same earth. And we all know it. We know he has
seen Ginnen, they have called him on the telephone, come to see him in a car, but he hasn’t listened. He hasn’t returned. But now he is here. From that dwellings, that dwellings (What is your dwelling called)?

Servitor: Manisyon.

Anperè: Manisyon. It is our child that has come here; we know all the roads lead to here. We just take one step, bam, and he’s in Arkayè. So that he can speak to Ginnen. But he has not come to do anything questionable; we will take him into our arms. We will embrace him. He is on his knees before us like a child born and raised here. As a Child of Ginnen, that which he is doing, look at the reasons he is doing it.

And before us, he is on his knees before us. He is, he knows, our Ginnen. We ask that for grace and mercy for that which he is doing. We say Grace and Mercy.

All: Grace and Mercy.

Anperè: And look at all these people. We had to appear, to come, to support him. We are going to do the great prayer, for that which is happening here.

We know that guy Kouzen Zaka, he is a guy, a man of commerce. We are going to see if he will do some work with us. Now Ginnen will know him. He is the one selling molasses. And here, all that he has done, all of it is good. That guy Kouzen can’t even give me a little something to give him? Look here at Ogun Fèray; I have a sip of Kleren to give you. Look here at your work. All that you do it is for us that you do it. This sip is for you. It is for us all.

Outside of ceremonies explicitly designated as treatment baptisms, or non-human baptisms, there are healing rituals to cajole, remind, and induce bitasyòn lwa to acknowledge and remember the existence of patients within—whether that person has foregotten the bitasyòn in the meantime. Healing is not a mystical power which oun gan and manbo know how to control with a suite of rules and mysteries, rather, in Sou Lapwen at least, healing comes from the land and the ancestors themselves. To be healed, one must seek the channeled power and strength of the bitasyòn as well as the ancestors, a prospect that is difficult if one has foregotten or neglected them for a length of time.
Yes, so the Mèt Bitasyòn is like, it is, it was your ancient, ancient, ancient family, long past your grandmother, long past your grandfather, they made a Bitasyòn, if they are going to feed the head waters, they feed the head waters in your mothers Bitasyòn, your father's Bitasyòn. They made them, like, a lwa, a lwa they ascribed to, they ascribed to a certain mystic[ality]. They put [the lwa] in a place, they installed it in a place, they said: 'Mèt Bitasyòn.' He or she is the Master of the Bitasyòn, when [something goes wrong and] you need to feed the head waters, you feed the head waters. (Lina, Interview, 2015.)

Lina spoke of this further in another interview:

Alissa: I have heard the Mèt Bitasyòn is like, they can always see, they see all that you do, as if they are inside you and know you and judge you.

Lina: Yes, it's the Mèt Bitasyòn exactly who sees it, for example, when you do something that isn't good, you ask, you ask forgiveness and pardon, you feed the heads of the water. If they are a tree, or something like that, you go stand and look inside, you ask forgiveness, you pour water for them.

This was the case with Nanschmide, whose full story is addressed in Chapter 6, but which is excerpted below to address the way that relations with the bitasyòn of Sou Lapwen were employed to heal her.

Anperè: To all: "In the name of the father, the son, the holy spirit, Amen. Hail God, Hail the Virgin. Today is Monday; it’s the day of the Marassa Ginnen dead. I commend us to the Master of the Sou Lapwen habitation, though it may be small. Myself, I am called Anperè , I am not a sorcerer, I am not a shapeshifter, I am not a diviner or a mystic. You are entangled, at war, with mystical things, you need a lawyer to mediate [e.g. someone like me].

I know that Ginnen will handle this. Ginnen as a mother, Ginnen as a father. They don’t crush people. If I have a problem, we know Ginnen comes close to us, we know, Ginnen can do something for us. But if it falls in someone else’s name, and we have left Ginnen, that illness might not be inevitable. We must pass our hands and take it out. And we know how to find a person useful to us in such a situation. If a malfektè is doing something to us, we must stand together with each other.

She is ill. She invited us all here. There is Ginnen on her mother’s side. Ginnen on her father’s side. Ginnen female neighbors. Ginnen male neighbors.

She has invited us all. But she did leave us. However, if we had needed something she would have given it to us. Just the same, we ought to give
her something. Even if she has entered Evangelical church or done anything else, we still know she is our child. She is Ginnen on her mother’s side, Ginnen on her father’s side. We would never leave her so that she would just be lost by the wayside.

She has had dreadful bodily inflammation. That inflammation, we don’t say it’s an evil doer, we don’t say it’s Ginnen, we don’t say anything. All of that is something God alone can look and know what is happening. For that reason, we are doing an illumination with Ginnen on her mother and father’s side

All of us Ginnen, together we must protect her. If I needed something in my life, it would have been her that gave it to me. Sometimes we needed things, and she provided. Put your hands together with mine so we can figure this out. She is here; she invited us in. There is mystical knowledge on her mother’s side. The dead on her mother’s side, the dead on her father’s side. There is mystical experience on her father’s side. She let us know that she would not let any of us die, we are not going to let her die lost and alone.

We were to die a death of inflamed stomachs, but the death passed by us. We were to die a death on the road, but it passed by us. We were to die a death under rubble; it passed by us. We were to die a death in the cane fields, it passed us by, die a death of the stomach, it passed by us. But look at what’s happening here, she doesn’t understand. She invited us into that which is going on. She is suffering a great deal. But understand that she is a child of Ginnen Africa, on her knees here. Ginnen can do anything it wants for her. Grace and mercy

Response: Grace and mercy
Anperè: Grace and mercy
Response: Grace and mercy
Anperè: Grace and mercy
Response: Grace and mercy

Sleep/Wake

The bitasyôn is also created through the collision of sleep and waking life, when one is neither actually “unconscious” (a state that is recognized, similar to je femen), or dreaming (reveye), or awake. This vision realm parallels the sensorial landscape of the town, but it is also more than that landscape, more than the interactions and persons
within it. The vision realm makes it easy access to a wider ecology—one that is trans temporal, trans spatial, and yet still connected in word and deed to the bitasyòn of daily life, the bitasyòn of the living.

I call this the vision realm of the bitasyòn, which exists at the intersection of conscious/unconscious or dream/wake. I take the term “vision” not from anthropological conceptualizations of shamanism and the like, but from a typical local Creole saying: “mwen we l je kle” (I saw it with clear eyes). Haitians in Sou Lapwen use this phrase to contextualize their state of consciousness when there is confusion as to whether one is reciting what was dreamt or what happened in daily life.

As in dreams, the vision realm allows the vision realm allows lwa, messages, intuitive conclusions, Ginnen, to be, smelled, embraced in this very well-known though less well-traversed landscape between worlds. However, this vision realm is more closely linked to the bitasyòn than ordinary bitasyòn than dreams. Dreams are often set elsewhere and incorporate strange and tangential elements, which are useful for lottery numbers but not much else. Among other things, the vision realm is often identified because the person who visits it remembers doing so. Additionally, people may have a sense that they were fully conscious of their strange state.

At the same time, this vision landscape is not Ginnen, though Ginnen can certainly be assessed through this landscape. It is a parallel world, a place that sits on top of our own. If one finds themselves conversing with a lwa in the vision realm, they often start out conversing from their beds where they are lying down. Many explain this problem of both a sleeping body in daily life and a parallel moving and living body in the vision realm, because the “gwo bonnanj” or else “ti bonnanj” can travel from the body.
However, as it is practiced, there is no division between two actors: the gwo bonnanj, for example, or the real body. What happens to one in this vision realm can most certainly affect one’s body in the everyday world, though it does not always and it does not have to.

Then, the vision realm operates under poorly known structures of time and space; what happens there may be what has already occurred, or what is going to happen, or what is happening now. In effect, this requires an expert interpreter to make sense of it. Thus, when one has visions of death or illness or other terrifying events, they are likely to make them known to a manbo, ounshan, or another ritual expert. Sometimes these visions represent the exit of negative forces, while other times they forbade great illness and fear.

Manbo and ounshan gather much of their intelligence in the vision realm, especially those who (like Anperè, Nel, Menfò, and others) have set aside a date to meet with their lwa familiars on a weekly basis. It is no secret that this state is a place where only the truly talented persons (those who act as many) and experts can find their way (and this is done largely through flying). Others can stumble upon gateways to the vision realm, either through accident or through necessity. This is usually the case when a lwa-familiar breaks through to a rather non-intuitive person to either warn them of illness or treat them for existing disease or make some demand known.

In any case, there are very few persons in any given community who are expert travelers or workers in this strange and awesome realm. Likewise, few can adequately interpret the goings on. Some within it, such as the sorcerers, go so far as the planets and stars, Jameson reiterates, they do not walk but fly. Then, there are many who visit
this space but do not remember it. They can be told of their travels by a visiting lwa who fondly recalls an interaction in this space. Those who manage this realm are the lwa, and to a lesser extent, the dead. However, given that they are fond of bringing visitors there, or else sending messages out from this realm, or else appearing and observing humans from this space, it is reasonable to assume that many or most adults within a given community have been there, though all know of its existence at least.

As opposed to more gentrified and cash-dependent regions of the country, initiation is known of but very rare here; “ah, those things are for diaspora,” Young has said, “you can buy knowledge or you can grow up and find it all around you.” Much of this knowledge is transmitted directly through the vision realm. The mantle of healing and vision is passed within family lines and often per courtyard heads. At the same time, people often discover their duties to the lwa well into adulthood, as did both Anperè and Nel, as well as Menton and Menfò, who all became practitioners through lwa initiation in their 30s or later.

Nel’s own “initiation” began in the vision realm, a common place where lwa first make known their intentions to claim a given individual. In fact, before she was a manbo, when the lwa were making it difficult to live, they very nearly killed her. Her stomach had become painfully tight, twisted. She needed an operation. At night, she would only see fire. They would come to her, angry with her. In her visions, she sometimes saw her dead brother, but he wouldn’t speak to her. He turned away. Desperate for relief, she went to a oungan for guidance. She was 30-years-old, tired, and had lost every one of her babies so far. The oungan considered her life and said she was being called to serve. “To serve?!” She asked him, “I didn’t know anything
about Iwa. I always practiced, we practice, but I’d never served. And this oungan tells me I needed to become a manbo, a proper manbo, to leave food out, to have a peristil. But I’m embarrassed. Who am I? Who am I to do this? So, I refuse,” she explains.

When she refused, her illness got worse. In her dreams, a creature came, and it told her to put food out. She did not. She couldn’t sleep for a week. Every night she spent suffering through the pain, she tossed and turned. It only became worse. When she finally put food out for the Iwa, as the dream told her, her heart and her feet became much lighter. She closed her eyes, thinking she could finally take a rest. Instead, one by one, the family Iwa came to her room and said they would provide help in a clinic. They soothed her, put her in a tap tap (public bus), took her to the clinic. Three women met her at the clinic; each was a doctor. One rubbed her belly with oil while the other two prepared the sonogram machine. They rolled the probe across her stomach gently until an image appeared on the screen.

“Here,” they said, “look.” They showed her on the sonogram where three red masses are sitting, directly in her womb. Explaining this to her, they said she must go into surgery without delay as the masses had to be removed. “Will you go into surgery?” One asked. Nel assented and the three doctors put her under anesthesia to perform the procedure. When she woke up in the vision dream, the doctors were standing over her. They explained that they made her ill to remind her of the family Iwa, to see that they have been neglected and foregotten and cast aside. Although they made her sick, the doctors explained, she has now started to serve, and the Iwa will not make her sick again. Her eyes open, in daily life. After the vision.
That same day, her underwear was bloodied and she felt a pain in her stomach. Three masses fell out by themselves, three round and bloody balls of tissue that she found at the toilet in her underwear. She discards them. Finally, she found herself a bit more at peace. For a time, she was relieved, healed by the medicine.

The illness was not over. Some months later, the pain in her stomach returned, and it returned with double the strength. Again, sleeping became impossible, and her tortured body just rolled around on the bed, shifting positions. When her eyes managed to close for a few seconds, she saw in them two men approaching her body. “We are here to heal you, ma’am,” one of the men said.

It occurred to her at this moment that she knew who this man was. Once before he had asked her for food, in daily life, when he came as a goat. She was sure she remembered him, and it was the same being. And she had fed him during that interaction; she had offered him food from her table. Now, he stood before her as man and said he was there to help. “Take these,” he said, offering a handful of small white pills and a glass of water. “Drink them now, in front of me.” When she does, he nods and smiles kindly. “Now you’ll be fine, ma’am,” he says. Her eyes opened, and she felt a great, refreshing feeling pass over her. Perhaps it was the relief of the pain, she wonders. “Then and there I learned that you serve when you are asked and that when you are asked it is real and not imaginary.”

Overstating the salience of interactions in dream space would be difficult. Economic exchanges can occur which bind people together or bend them apart; medical formulas can be described, hospitals visited, and in all ways, life can be affected from this world. Furthermore, very important rituals can occur in this interstitial
space. Eyes closed, we extend into another real world with expectations, evaluations, and relationships. This other world is not a child’s plaything—we are responsible for the choices we make and the interactions that we have with others. But who are we? We are certainly not always ourselves, for the lwa, so love to dance with our faces. And where are we, what planet? Our mirror world is not the ghastly, darkened strangeness of forests and several-headed creatures. It’s sonograms. And advanced equipment. Diagnosis, comradery. Metaphysically speaking the world is naturally complicated, blocked, painful, swarming with different assemblages and intentions that steamroll loners. To move through the world well and survive within it, we connect to others and make their needs our needs, and vice versa, and so on, just as Nel and the lwa. From humans to lwa to stones to roads. We are reliant on these many others during both health and illness. Only in relationships with these many others can we open paths through this clogged world, finding a niche where we can prosper and gather.

**Here/There**

On one trip, we made to Nan Dó, both Nel and I were nervous. Persons outside the courtyard insisted she not go, but her daughter and sister and other shared persons grudgingly accepted it because she would be traveling to see Menfò, her friend, and mentor. In this case, there were horrific crimes reported throughout the region but especially on those paths which surrounded town. Human skin and entrails found in the river, with a wallet nearby. Corpses with the hearts cut out. Children’s hands. Men, young men, we heard, were running around seeking bodies. They preferred the healthy, active heart of an adult, but there were also rumors that children had been taken. Many distinct stories were circulating: people encountering gangs of dangerous, violent,
armed young men in the river basin and the gardens. They were out to cut out people’s 
“sim cards”\(^5\), their hearts and toss the bodies aside. Hercule explained to me:

They fillet the person; they take their heart to make a lottery number. They 
grab your sim card. Like that young man who came here frightened 
earlier. He found things at the top of the Nayè A basin. He found people’s 
clothes, a wallet, the wallet even had money in it. He found shoes. And 
parts of a body. Entrails strewed where the water had been.

The hearts could then be turned into lottery numbers by sorcerers in Artibonite.

So Nel and I were walking in a time of danger, crossing the road that separated the 
bitasyòn of Sou Lapwen from the other bitasyòn, the other arenas of interaction. Each 
other bitasyòn possessed unfamiliar and non-allied lwa, malfektè who preyed on 
outsiders, or Chanpwèl groups who established security for the town at the expense of 
wanderers who were eaten alive.

I remember this trip best for I was traveling with Nel, who rarely traveled 
alongside me, but it was one of many times when the bitasyòn became particularly 
closed off to strangers. I had visited Menfò many times before. I had watched Menfò 
and Nel sit together, catching up, reminiscing, and trading tactics. Menfò was an older 
man, of 65 years or more at that time. He was wise and, along with the lwa, had taught 
Nel a great deal. Their conversations were natural when they met after many months of 
absence, they still slid into each other presence without friction, revealing one of those 
profound bonds between persons that is somehow impervious to time and 
circumstance. In his elaborate and impressive peristil, his 10-foot long altar held bottles

\(^5\) A small card inserted into telephones to provide network coverage. Without it, the telephone does not function.
of all sorts as well as his sacred text, an old metal bound notebook with pages the color of old tea upon which were recorded the songs and vèvè designs to invoke the lwa.

To arrive at Menfò’s home, we had to walk across the Nayè A and into the larger dwelling of Nan Dó, where several oungan friends of Nel’s resided. Nel was nervous this time, quite scared that I would be attacked by the heart thieves. She insisted on wearing several layers of clothing, carrying a bit of gasoline in a bottle, toting matches, insisting that she would light anyone on fire should they attempt to cut our chests open and steal our hearts. Nel also carried with her (in the same infinitely deep purple purse) a collection of three large butchering knives collected from other members of the courtyard. Likewise, she insisted that I walk with my small can of mace, one which I kept tucked under my mattress at night.

On this trip, we decided to cross using the lower side of the Nayè A. We first passed behind Nel’s house and a row of other homes, past an irrigation ditch the width of a hand, into Jonel’s home, and then the garden where Anperè planted all his plantain trees, now at their most beautiful phase—fully formed, tiny, eager with the promise of fruiting many months later.

From Anperè’s garden, we scaled down the side of the cliff at a part that was more passable and lower than others, but which could not be considered a trail. It was approximately a 25 foot drop to the basin, but a partially collapsed side wall of limestone would help us get down. To descend, I took a deep breath and ran down the very steep and rocky side, used my rapid forward momentum to prevent myself from falling. I then scaled halfway back up to help Nel, whose knee was recently injured, but she shooed me away. The long walk across white dusty emptiness seemed even more intimidating.
when we were at the bottom of the cliff, exposed. However, our outright exposure also meant we had a long view shed on either side of us, capable of seeing anyone approaching from the North, South, East, and West, though we would be unable to do much except run should they come at us from the cliffs above.

Nel walked ahead, glancing to both sides, periodically looking behind to make sure I was near and then glancing ahead again to scan the long line of the cliff. A moment is forever etched in my head when Nel, who had moved ahead a bit, looked back at me to order me to walk quicker. She had a broad rice sellers hat on her head, and though her face started stern she was caught off guard by the *whoosh* of a wind barreling through the wash and cooling our hot, dry skin. The wind completely folded the brim of her hat around one side of her face, threatening to rip it straight off, stopped only by her other arm, which darted up to swat the cap down. For a moment, her face, stern from the danger, broke into a smile and then into a laugh, her shouting: “I almost lost my hat!”

The breeze ended and we continued, renewing our wariness, checking ourselves, given the heart thieves on the prowl. Shortly thereafter, I heard several feet rapidly approaching us from behind. I was startled as three of Nel's house dogs raced by my sides, bolting after her, yapping and biting at each others' heels. With these dogs near, her feet moved even more confidently forward, her shoulders lowered a bit, and we continued quickly and worriedly through the open expanse of the Nayè A, the in-between space of Sou Lapwen and Nan Dó.

A certain wariness, attentiveness, and hesitation came to inhabit thresholds as they were being crossed. This included all those thresholds where Sou Lapwen
intersected with places that were not Sou Lapwen—the Nayè A, the market, the mountains, the highway. All had their named and specific risks. This sense of surveillance—both of surveying others and being surveyed oneself—would sometimes explode into short-lived panics based on circulating rumors, stories, and witnesses who knew of sorcerer-criminals hunting those along the threshold for their body parts, their blood, their nanm.

When we finally crossed the dusty Nayè A, and scaled up the steep sides (Nel struggling to pull me up) we began towards Menfô’s peristil which was not far into town along an empty dirt path between the large, joined stretches of cultivated fields. Menfô’s garden was a full open courtyard with three magnificent trees from which hung a multitude of magical arts and spells most which were concocted months and years before, but were not yet finished working. The otherwise cleared courtyard created a wide-open stage for not only the three twisted trees, but the pile of old magic becoming dirt, and the iron bar for Ogun. Standing guard in that courtyard were those many hundred persons who sought him for help or advice, which was not always explicitly good-natured, each person represented in a little sculpture or wound herbs or bottle tied to an outstretched branch.

The collective interplay of trees and magic and bird song and spider webs created a magnitude of sensations: impressive, beautiful, scattered, abundant, thick, strong-smelling, fearful, and on and on. Each piece could open into a whole world of desire and affect and skill, each tree into the endless personality and history of an ancestor god, each square foot of earth an installation of indeterminable depth wherein lay the most secret and dangerous magic he and his courtyard could craft.
He was a tall, thin, handsome older man who walked slowly and deliberately. His face was worn and creased with wrinkles, which his smile refolded into a familiar pattern of kindness. He was happy to see us after so much time had passed, some months since our last visit. He greeted us, quickly noticing the weapons Nel was obviously toting given her treatment of her bag. We were treated to seats and quickly joined by his young apprentice, two other young boys who were sent for refreshments, and an old man and friend of Menfò’s who had been sitting inside the peristil when we arrived.

Nel began with her story to explain the knives, one of which she produced from her purse. “A few days ago,” She said, “[those Sim-thieves] trapped Guelo in his garden up the road.” Menfò leaned in, slapped his leg, saying “O! O!”

Nel nodded at his show of shock and continued, speaking in a low tone that was called for by stories of suspicion and fear. “They trapped him right below where the water collects. Guelo was sitting. Over by the courtyard of Madam Salon.” Menfò was even more surprised by the proximity, “Oh, like right over here, nearby?” Nel’s eyes widened as if to say: “Exactly. So close.” But her mouth said: “In the garden, where he was sitting, you hear? He was looking around; he saw a young guy come out like, over there.” The old man was leaning in as well, now, attempting not to miss a word.

Aware that she was performing for an audience, she now leaned down and picked up a small pebble at her feet, tossing it a few meters off to demonstrate the relative direction of the boy if she were Guelo. Nel narrated quickly “But he looked, he saw one there” She pointed behind her, ”another one over here” She pointed to the side of the stone, ”Another one coming from the other side, too.” She gesticulated to the side of the peristil.
Menfò inhaled sharply: “And his house was like so close to where he was.” The elderly gentleman agreed, saying “really close.” Nel continued. “So he sees one come here, one there, another one there, and one behind. Now one of the guys starts coming in on him. And Guelo says: ‘what’s your problem? What’s up?’ He asked him what was up?! Can you believe it.”

The old man shook his head, everyone waiting for the story to unfold. She shook her head and paused for effect, “So the guys just started coming in on him. Now, quick, Guelo stuffed his hands into his trousers and ‘gwip!’, pulls out his weapon.” Menfò repeated, relieved, “He pulled a weapon on them.” Nel’s face went wide-eyed, imitating the expressions of the men, “Those guys were like…” She darted her head back and forth, as if looking around, pulling her shoulders low and back as if she were retreating “Woy! They were like: Where is Mr. Guelo so we can beg his pardon, sorry, we didn’t mean to bother you!”

Menfò, the old man, and the apprentice didn’t move for a moment, obviously a bit flabbergasted by the story. The young boys who had been returned with refreshments from around the corner and then motioned as if he would have broken the legs of this gang of guys, at which the old man snorted and shook his head, admonishing the children: “You’re just bullshitting.”

Nel carried on: “Me, myself; I would have killed them! I wouldn’t have scared them, I wouldn’t have warned them, I would have been with other people and we would have gotten all four of those thieves.”

Menfò clarified “And you heard this while crossing over here [to my house]? You didn’t just turn right around?” Nel said “No, we heard it earlier. Us, we…when we were
crossing the Nayè A, we passed down there." She motioned to the most occupied side of the town. "We heard they might be looking for sim cards in the Mate a, but farmers are watching out." She added: "A few days ago a couple of the thieves chased kids in the Nayè A."

Menfò again reiterated the proximity of the events, "Just down there?" The older man piped up again too: "Just there, the Mate a?" Nel tilted her head knowingly, raising her eyebrows and dropping them: "Yes."

Menfò said, "People are gonna be lost over this." Nel nodded and repeated, "People are gonna be lost."

I jumped in and explained, "Now, you see, we are walking with machetes in hand."

Nel clicked at me as if I were being somewhat silly. "Machete?! Ha! That’s not all we have on us. They are gonna think they have us cornered, but as soon as they try to throw water on us. We’ll say: ‘Halt!’." As she said "Halt!", she produced a knife from her purse and a bottle of liquid, and with the same hand holding the liquid, went back in to clutch the small mace canister as well (Figure 5-16). She then held all three above her head, closed her eyes, and smiled a bit while humorously shaking her hands as if spraying weapons around: "If you don’t stop them, they will throw it all over you, that poison water, and then attack. But this stuff" She lowered her hands, set down the machete and her liquid, holding only the mace: "This stuff, your stuff (to Alissa) it’s not a weapon because it’s stronger even than a weapon. It blinds you; it might even kill you, in your eyes, in your throat."
Menfò leaned in, examining the canister in her hands, which she then gently handed over to him, “Good lord,” Nel finished, "just doesn’t let the kids here run around and spread out. Don’t let those kids run around.”

During my tenure in Sou Lapwen, the story of Sim thieves had taken the countryside by storm, as had stories of vampires (vampir) but such stories were always circulating. They could shape community behavior for a good month after the final story circulated. Radio stations reported original incidents, and friends in police stations would verify them. The bitasyòn contracted, tightened at these times. Persons spent time exchanging stories and advice about how to protect themselves. Teenagers playfully practiced escape techniques. Adults carried knives, machetes, screwdrivers with them nearly all the time. Children were restricted from visiting water supplies for fear that they would be taken. Stories of thieves who had been apprehended also molded the community; in one case an armed delegation left Sou Lapwen to travel to La Dig to determine if and how the thief had been caught.

I have said that the bitasyòn has its own gravity. It pulls everything to everything else, wrapping residents together, crossing them over, with relations, feuds, money, history. In truth, the bitasyòn is only magnetic for certain people, ideas, projects, products, etc. The bitasyòn repels outsiders far more often than it draws them into itself. Strangers are not welcomed in town, invited into courtyards, or spoken to honestly unless they are accompanied by a resident or friend. On the one hand, there is simply nowhere where they fit. There was once an American in Sou Lapwen, a man, who decided he wanted to set up a cooperative planting system and sell produce profitably. He sought a place to rent—one of the several empty houses scattered through the
town whose residents lived elsewhere—but no one would agree to rent to him, even at
the beneficial rate he offered. They were suspicious of his motives and he simply didn’t
bond well enough with anyone to merit the arrangement I had with Nel. He eventually
roomed up in a single-room mud house with another young single man, a farmer, who
had since left his mother’s home and was on his own as well. He stayed for nearly a
year in that mud home, trying to “find a wife” he said, but none of the young women he
wanted to court would let him get close to them. He complained, pleaded with the
pastors to say good words on his behalf, and finally gave up and returned to Miami.

Suspicion and fear haunt the boundaries between bitasyôn, at that line between
here and there, the crossroads which divide the many-layered Sou Lapwen crossings
from those in all the other bitasyôn. This is a dangerous intersection, one populated with
fears as well as real experiences of wanderers, vagabonds, and unaccountable acts of
aggression. In this border zone, Sou Lapwen residents regularly run into strangers
whose past acts and future intentions are entirely unknown. Stories circulate throughout
the year, telling of new sorts of violence that are becoming popular and passing through
the community.
Figure 5-1. A window in a newly constructed church building looks towards the Nayè A basin.
Figure 5-2. A oungan’s assistant marks the first vèvè, forming an intersection with the poto mitan at the center. Later in the evening, the ceremony strengthened and rejuvenated the Gad (guard) Iwa which each servitor was related.
Figure 5-3. Looking up from ground in Sou Lapwen at Dusk.
Figure 5-4. Hand-drawn map of Bitasyôn, according to a forum of locals (oungan, manbo, laypersons) in 2014. This map highlights the various dwelling spaces of important regional lwa. At the bottom left is Ginnen, the land of lwa and ancestors, the bottom right is Hell, above Hell is the ocean, above that is the earth and various dwelling zones (fires, trees, mountains, fields, cemeteries, crossroads). Then there is earth’s sky, including air, clouds, rainbows (also lightning and thunder). Above earth’s sky are the planets, and above the planets and stars is Heaven’s gate, where God, Jesus Christ, Peter and the saints live.
Figure 5-5. The cross for the Mèt Bitasyòn of Sou Lapwen, stationed next to the public plaza, before it was reconstructed with cement in 2014.
Figure 5-6. The path of the canals through the heart of Sou Lapwen, framed by plantain gardens on either side.
Figure 5-7. The water locks that control the flow of irrigation waters through the town.
Figure 5-8. A Met Bitasyòn cross on the West side of Sou Lapwen, at a crossroads, before it was replaced by a newer wooden version.
Figure 5-9. Natalie embraces her infant sister Malika for a photo on Natalie’s eighth birthday.
Figure 5-10. A fierce and unnamed Iwa of the land, as Sidney, holds each of the infants (unbaptized) of the courtyard in turn to confer a blessing and protective incantation in a time of illness.
Figure 5-11. Diagram depicting the exchange of nanm through ties of baptism, from among various lakou within a single dwelling.
Manbo Nel takes a special brush, crafted of beeswax, chicken feathers, and thread, and blesses all the courtyard children in turn, making cross after cross upon the points of their body.
Figure 5-13. Infant’s mother, Carmelite, Nel and other women assistants offer a baptismal treatment to an ill child from a nearby village.
Figure 5-14. Ogun prepares to baptize his new machete, and has asked Marimoz to stand in as the godmother as he seeks kleren and a candle from within his bag.
Figure 5-15. A fragrant bath of perfume and flowers awaits Gedulien’s basket, which will be sprinkled and blessed with the liquid.
Figure 5-16. Nel shows off her weapons during a time of wandering heart-thieves.
CHAPTER 6
ASSEMBLE

Going Places, Becoming Something Else

Between life and death there lies not a boundary but a space, differing, certainly, from culture to culture and from historical period to historical period…and across this bleak and contested space, the corpses stream, on their way to becoming dead, for the most part, but sometimes taking up residence in it, or heading back to make new contact with the living. (Baglow 2007: 223)

“Watch out, don’t look inside!” Nel says, You let the manbo pull you back and return to sweeping the leaves from the garden with a grass broom. Meanwhile, the hanging bottle swings from tree arms outstretched in glittering light. The siren call of the weaver birds, dust billowing up from your footsteps, it all brings to your senses the dramatic renaissance of early morning: the wet, yellow yolk of the sun cracked open across the plantain leaves and all of creation besides. Golden streaks strike the hanging bottle, the swinging bottle, the bottle that dips and climbs back and forth on the lowest branch of Legba. It is swaddled tightly in a tapestry of brightly colored strips of red fabric, a red fabric that is soft to the touch, like crushed velvet, and crisscrossed by an ever-transforming complex of black and white and red threads with neither beginning nor end. They are a whirling mass of hair around the flesh and blood of the bottle. Hanging there from the braided strips of plastic, the bottle is a black widow, sparkling in the strokes of dawn, a beauty for all but the hand that disturbs it. Animated by the residual energy of the dead, this is zonbi. The manbo will let you touch it but you cannot look inside. “No no no no, it’s no good Ali, there is a nanm in there. Zonbi. A fragile thing.”
Since before Nel’s mother’s mother was born, zonbi have dwelled among both the living and the dead of Arkayè, Haiti, altering flesh and twisting in bones. They come as colors, as feelings, as cloth wrapped and wound around glass bottles that cannot be stared into for too long. Since that time, too, Nel’s ancestors have worked to ritually manage their presence in the bodies of Arkayè residents. With old and new Haitian Petwo technologies at their disposal, they sort out and rearrange living patients as a critical matter of life or death. In the case of zonbi, this can mean banishing invading zonbi who were sent by other sorcerers to poison a victim’s flesh, healing patient’s own zonbi who have been damaged or weakened, or fetching more anonymous zonbi from the graveyard to protect, punish, or assist in numerous other works. Zonbi are not one “thing” or “actor” in Haitian life, nor does there exist a zonbi “essence” that can be teased away from the world and examined wholesale. Zonbimake sense in Haitian life because, as Haitian Vodou experiences would have it, they are but one ambiguously energetic force that comprises bodily assemblages in Haitian Afro-Creole metaphysics.

General problem: This paper follows three case studies that demonstrate in detail the role that zonbi-nanm play in everyday Haitian life in the town of Sou Lapwen. Two of the cases describe the experiences of women who were relentlessly attacked by zonbi and sought aid at the hands of oungan and manbo, and the third and most detailed case describes a man who crafts a zonbi in order to get his life back. Through these case studies, I demonstrate how zonbi act in unison with the broader bodily assemblage of which they are a key part, exploring how zonbi work involves assembling, disassembling, treating, and reusing selves. This bodily assemblage is
itself generated through relations with beings, forces, and processes in a social world where jealousy and love intersects, where divine inspiration, creation, and greed occur side by side.

Practices also mold bodily being into something that is permeable, unique, durational, which reiterates the fractal assemblages of communal being. These multiple discrete experiences of zonbi, from the re-animation of the living-dead to invisible ekspedisyon, are phenomenologically unified experiences within a Haitian Vodou metaphysics that posits embodiment as an active process in/of the manipulable body assemblage.

McAlister (1995; 2002) is among the first to offer a preliminary etiology of zonbi rooted in touch, feeling, and embodiment. This stands in contrast to dominant analysis of Haitian zonbi that implant a simplistic Cartesian model of bodies and souls as essential fixtures that are neatly separable from one another (Davis 2000: 186; Ackermann and Gauthier 1991). Thus, zonbi have often been treated as either zonbi of the soul, referring to bottled or encased fragments of persons, or zonbi of the body, referring to the walking, breathing, living corpse discussed by Davis (2000). This dualistic approach to zonbi fails to account for the multiplicity of practices and experiences of Vodou life in Haiti and embodiment experience in Afro-Creole populations more generally.

**Method:** This paper specifically highlights data gathered while exploring the networks of things, people, and places which wind their way through zonbi phenomena, drawing from roughly 32 zonbi incidents in all. Other data from there paper are drawn from audio-visual and written diaries at magical ceremonies, in a local ban Chanpwèl
(Chanpwèl gang), daily participation in communal child-rearing practices, and nighttime ethnography. Other data was gathered in a variety of informal interviews, problem-solving forums, chant and ritual memorization, a household infant care survey, and collaborative audio-visual diaries of security and mediation practices. I collected complementary data in periodic visits to three other communities, including Kafou (an urban neighborhood in Port Au Prince), and two farming towns with higher living conditions known as La Charitab and Nan Dó.

**Curating Body-Selves**

Underlying the work of Vodou practitioners are a series of tacit assumptions: bodies are the locus of a multitude of relations between selves and ecologists; embodiment accumulates over time and relations; bodies can be pushed together and pulled apart; bodies attract as well as repel substances; bodies perceive and act on the outside world (e.g. McAlister 1995: 25, 2002: 108; Degoul 2006: 241; Sommerfeld 1994: 84). In the course of their individual and group work, practitioners must understand the lived, carnal phenomenology of the body. Practitioners contend with body selves who always becoming other bodily-selves, given that at any point they may be constituted and altered by a variety of others, or that components of the body are regularly removed, re-emplaned, and can be reused. Their work relies on adapting patient’s bodies and bodily vectors in relation to the struggles that they are enduring.

By studying heterogeneous Haitian bodies as assemblages, we turn ethnographic attention to the sorts of internal and external relations that maintain bodies as whole and coherent over time, and the relational circumstances that allow for their dissolution, i.e. what keeps this living body together in the midst of other things, bodies, assemblages, and how does it or can it interact with them? How do internal relations
change, and what sort of change in internal relations causes the living body to cease
being thus?

The work at hand strives to illuminate Haitian Vodou bodily experiences of zonbi
vis a vis practices of assembling, disassembling, and treating bodies (Figure 6-1). It
narrows its focus to how zonbi act in relation to a bodily assemblage, which is itself
generated through the relations between its various parts, and how this interacts with
beings and forces in a broader world. Nanm, like bodies and utterances in general, exist
in a relational and shifting context rather than in an idealized abstraction. The nanm-
body assemblage includes components which are time-delimited specializations in what
is actually a unified complex during life. It by death, violence, or the socio-temporal
suspension of ritual under the careful hands of an ritual specialist. In unison, these
specialized fragments of the body produce one of the most powerful, and likely
universal, emergent experiences that humans can undergo—the feeling of a cohesive
self that is both here and elsewhere, localized but shared, part of the great social chain
of cause-and-effect, which can both be its joy and its undoing.

When dealing with zonbi and zonbi-crafting, we are dealing explicitly with the
primary force for movement, action, and vigor in bodies both living and dead (Figure 6-
2). The zonbi-nanm is responsible for mobilizing the body towards action in the world,
and pushing the body to interact with the world. Yet it does not only move the material
and visible aspects of the self, it also is involved in mobilizing invisible layers of bodily-
being. The context of the zonbi, this particular specialization of nanm, is most often one
of action. It stretches the body into work and movement, propelled by the will of other

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1 The fact that zonbi is also a term attached to wild, inedible versions of more common plants in Haiti may
also point to an underlying material semiotics of fragmentation and diminishment.
constituents, whether hard field labor, or the batting a fly off when one sleeps, or nailing a board. It is akin to the physical habitus of the body, honed by repetitive behavior into a skillful motor force, though not a willful one. A time of rest and gradual diffusion, namely death, becomes a time of work for at least one component in the assemblage. In life as well as sorcery-related deaths, the zonbi aspect of the body gathers from key reservoirs of power in the fingernails, toenails, and crown of the head.

Although there is no easy cognate for the zonbi-nanm in English or Euro-American metaphysics, a useful parallel concept exists in Latin, the animus (associated with wind, voice, breath) used heavily in Ovid’s poetry. Both the animus and the zonbi are invisible yet substantial forces that propel bodily actions, movements, and proclivities without being self-aware, and without being under the self-conscious control of the body in many cases. Zonbi and animus also have a similar capacity to exceed the limitations of the body, passing out of it and onto the world, and then returning, like breath exhaled unto the wind and then inhaled again.

Zonbi specifically act by precipitating movement and physical action from the congealed whole of the body-self, while other forces in the body manage contemplation, attraction, ancestral connection, etc. The zonbi thus moves the body in the world, and also takes things onto the body from the world, such as loads, labor, habits, particular illnesses, etc. We can rightly imagine the zonbi as a mechanism for and by the self which orients the corporeal elements to external beings, forces, and states of affairs, and then incorporates this world in turn. This has the surprising effect of metaphysically establishing the for-otherness in ourselves, making us all a condition of each other’s realities. The inescapable betwixtting that the zonbi facilitates can therefore be deeply
ambiguous—allowing contagion to enter in one breath, while moving towards a lover’s kisses in the next.

Zonbi are thus not actors in a reclusive, solitary, ensorcelled story, but rather key characters that emerge and are acted upon in the very midst of social, ancestral, and household livelihoods (Figure 6-4). They are also spoken of as much as they are experienced. In the case of Madanm Aline, Madanm Nanschmide and Hercule, communal investments and social ties were a key part of the particular zonbi phenomena. Zonbi incidents merit attention and involvement from members of the community. Unlike more private divinations or herbal treatments, zonbi are a source of inter-subjective concern in Sou Lapwen, seen in the discussions taking place during Madanm Aline’s progressive illness, the nostalgic solidarity in the wake of Madanm Nanschmide’s treatment, and the practical cooperation when Simbi directed zonbi work for Hercule (Figure 6-3). Those persons in Sou Lapwen were communally invested in the well-being of the afflicted parties, expending energy, time, and resources to assist them in their moments of trial, and lamenting when such help was not accepted (as in the case of Madanm Aline).

Across Arkayè, songs relating to zonbi are often sung in Chanpwèl contexts or during the month of Gede in November, and they frequently commemorate the force of the zonbi while also paying heed to the embodied style of zonbi. The songs contain movement and power coupled with a distinct lack of human personality or lyrical depth. Songs are made of single words and a mix of single-syllable noises that beautifully follow the melody of the music but lack a deeper sense or intention in comparison to
songs for lwa, the bitasyòn, and much else, where lyrics are a vital instrument in the movement of the piece.

Because zonbi are particularly susceptible to supernatural attacks during life (and also useful for attacking others.) As a result, many Vodouissants have their zonbi voluntary transplanted into secured vessels during life, in an effort to protect themselves from unnatural attacks and illnesses to which they may be vulnerable. From this guarded vessel, often magically concealed, the zonbi can continue animating the patient’s body. This does not forestall death in a permanent sense, of course, but the patient will be able to die of natural causes—those ordained by God. The result, upon death, is that one’s bodily assemblage falls peacefully apart in an orderly, expected way. The zonbi container can either be destroyed and the zonbi take flight, or the zonbi can be made into a helpful assistant, or an oracle tool.

In Afro-Creole practice more generally, force and action work on a non-spatial continuum, things do not need to occupy shared spaces to have direct action on each other. The zonbi thus often defies the limits of flesh and like a breath or wind can act on the visible and invisible world while still having a localized base within the assembled whole of bodies.

**Disassembling Bodies: On Being Attacked**

Okay, oungan are the one’s there to call the lwa. Like in Arkayè. In their house, they serve. Gede. Bakat. You hear of Ezili, Dantor, Freda, oungan can call those lwa. In this zone, I can’t talk about Malfektè, that is for oungan, that is for oungan, ok. That is for oungan I am telling you can go to peristil and get treatment if you have a problem with malfektè, they handle it. They can do a treatment for you if someone sent an evil spirit upon you, if it’s an evil spirit that they sent towards you, you call a zonbi, they’ll raise up that zonbi, that’s the zonbi they send after someone, the zonbi that enters into the person’s nanm. You can see the zonbi with your eyes, you can see the zonbi walk around, pass by, when he sees you in order to get you [for he was sent]. If I’m a zonbi, I make you see me, and I
show you myself, and I enter you. When I enter you, everything I would have, you will have, every single thing. Then the spirit manipulates you, manifests in you in a certain way. (Ronald, Forum, Kafou, 2011)

Young is an especially gentle-spoken magic freelancer in town. When taken by the lwa, his calm and steady voice grows louder and cracks, and it reminds you how quiet the man usually is lwa. He is the gifted connoisseur of zonbi wares and other magical pwen in Sou Lapwen (and many surrounding towns besides). Sensitive to the more arcane needs of the town, Young’s evolving office went from cloth over posts to a small, sweaty lean-to made of beat up graphic advertisements, and will one day (soon) be built with wood. The tarps carry a sun-faded images of various deals from an American fast food chain, and a friendly, clean American hospital promising prompt care. They are suspended on high sticks over the dirt of the courtyard.

When inside, you will find very little natural light even in the hottest part of the day nor breeze even as the evening deepens. A lone candle often flickers from somewhere in the towers of accumulated god-wares, on the small altar table, while strung above your head are bottles of the most brilliant compositions of flashing blades, bright plastic, exotic perfumes, t-shirts twisted and held together with cords of black and red. Each is a complete pwen, made for a specific case, and they are used to heal the divide between what life is like for the patient and what life could be like (the question of what life ought to be like is for times other than these that we live in). Young is wise enough and strong enough to host masterfully numerous hot, proud and generally elusive lwa that possess him to work. He helps out in the complicated and extreme cases in town where hope has all but fled.

Simbi Makaya, the lwa of leaves, tinctures, and sorcery, has a great fondness for him—and thus for his courtyard, and those most intimately connected to it. He is the
patron lwa of many freelance workers, Chanpwèl societies, and extreme healings, and is known to facilitate the strongest, hottest sort of medicine. His magic is the kind that kills lougawou in their midnight treks between houses harboring newborns in town.

When zonbi find you, on the other hand, they pop up in your life as rocks, pieces of paper, fallen leaves, goats, always keeping you guessing and transforming the nighttime world into a realm of second-guesses and half-knowledge. Not that they exist only at night, either, for they are in the road crews, the gardens, the soil of the rural world. Many a Haitian has thought a foreigner (blan) naïve for refusing to believe in zonbi—perhaps they have not seen one on the town, but surely they see them everywhere else, yes? The crossed sticks? The burnt spots in the road? The lifeless stupor of a healthy woman taken suddenly ill? The whip crack of the Rara band leader? These and many other instances of experience bring zonbi to Haitians, not the story of the zonbi. These materials and practices surely have metaphors attached to them, but only because they possess that tightly formed soil in which metaphor can take root. If the zonbi, for example, has latched onto a patient, it must be unlatched to save their life—this unlatching is best done when the patient can issue a return blow to the one who sent the zonbi.

Ninev

These alien lwa [the dead] are usually sent by a human enemy of the sick person. The alien lwa never act on their own accord; a person who becomes ill under their influence is the victim of the sorcerer. In rural Haiti, these alien lwa are the principal tools of sorcery. (Murray and Alvarèz 1981: 25)

The word “Zonbi” can be found scrawled across the varied landscapes of Haiti in ghostly white chalk, appearing both on the rusted tin doors of rural pit latrines and the elegant wooden surfaces of doors in Petionville estates (Figure 6-4). These words seek
to turn the restless undead away from their families homes, bidding them to take their ceaseless, terrifying wanderings elsewhere. Before independence, zonbis were spoken of among the revolutionary masses of Sainte Domingue, and these conversations (as well as the experiences they conveyed) continued to transform and maintain relevance into the 18th and 19th centuries; now, zonbi can be digitally procured and sent via the convenience and ease of a sorcerers cellphone call to Baron Simitye.

Ninev nearly met her end at the hands of a zonbi ekspedisyon (sent zonbi) early in her life. She and others report that was attacked by seven zonbi which were sent in a ceremony by her then-husband Kol’s other lover. The slighted woman was enraged at Kol’s continued association with Ninev, and had long said to many in the marketplace that she would kill Ninev. At the time Ninev was pregnant, nearly full term, and families on both sides of the dispute were seriously agitated and bent on justice for their kin.

Ninev became critically ill over a period of a week, running fevers, collapsing when walking, and many other troubling symptoms of which her husband was dismissive and which she didn’t recognize until it was almost too late. In retrospect, it was clear that this case dealt with zonbi crafting and zonbi assault, for Ninev was most seriously affected in her capacity to move, to act on her own, to retain vigor in her body. The part of her body that was necessary for pumping blood, moving muscles, controlling basic functions, was rapidly deteriorating.

Meanwhile, her husband disappeared for several days, leaving her to meager devices and without money for a doctor’s visit. At one point, she even stopped breathing and turned blue but was revived by a friend with nursing training. At this point, she knew the illness was not sent by God. She asked to be carried to her uncle’s hounfò in
desperation. Under careful divination using cards and water, he saw she was attacked by seven zonbi. Seven of the dead. Seven, the number of those who were attempting to consume her own body.

Motionless, and barely breathing, she lay on the dirt floor of the peristil for a healing. By the end of the ceremony, her color had come to return. In the seventeen years since the incident, she has bought and killed two goats for Mèt Kafou, part of her commitment were she to survive the incident. Ninev then left her husband permanently, protecting herself from the wrath of the woman (her husband’s lover) who had sent the zonbi, and also for his callous lack of care for her in a time of great need.

At a much later date, when I first began entering Nel’s courtyard, Ninev was doing poorly at the time. Her face was perpetually drawn in an expression of complete exhaustion. After several days without change, Ninev was carted off to the hospital in Arcahaie, still ill. As it was now, she looked awful. Her lips were the same color as her face, drained of the pinkish hue. Her skin had taken a yellowish color, she looked weak, slumped down in the chair. The stitches were swollen and bulging, but hadn’t taken on any greenish or yellowish hue, and nothing was coming out.

We sat around, a child tugging at me, Nel appearing here and there, busily working. I asked her what she was doing, and she explained “ah, I am preparing a medicine.”

A short time later, the tough young man from earlier entered to sweet talk me, offering up “Doudou, Mon amour” and other professions of affection for me to see. He said he was having a problem with his girlfriend, he was ready to leave her. Would I
come to his side? He was a tall and cruel-seeming who I had to send away in the midst of the medicine, Nel laughing as she heard, and beckoning me to the back.

All the way past the third house in the courtyard, I made my way down the narrow foot path to the peristil where she was working. There were several people seated there, surprising me. They must have slipped by unnoticed. Chairs that I did not recognize were pulled up to the poto mitan, and I realized that they had come from the lwa rooms which now hung agape. A jug originally used for kitchen oil leaned up against the old wood pole marking the center of ritual activity in the peristil, and supporting the palm roof. The plastic jug was filled with gasoline and several clean, new-looking glass bottles of kleren were gathered around, along with a smattering of candles and a bag of sea salt.

Young and another young man jumped over the tall concrete wall and into the back courtyard with the peristil, presenting a large chicken and a medium-sized chick, nearly full grown. They sat in two plastic chairs by the poto mitan, tying up the feet of the chicken.

The visitor, Sidney’s father, proudly wore a dark button-up shirt plastered with images of dice, of liquor, of money. He wanted a picture next to the metal pole and the fire. And I photographed Walken as he hollowed out a gourd, holding the bottle of Kleren. The night started to get darker and Nel, along with Sidney’s father, Richo, worked hurriedly and excitedly around the poto mitan, speaking to each other rapidly.

An audience gathered and gave me a seat. Nel, finishing preparations, sat next to me. We would be doing a healing for Ninev, who was still ill, who had yet to recover from the zonbi attacks of many years earlier. I was glad to see her illness was taken so
seriously, given how poorly off she seemed. A roll of dead and dried banana leaves was rolled out, revealing itself as a mat, in line with the poto mitan. In walked Ninev, looking weaker than ever. With the assistance of Young and Walken, she was laid out on the mat, crossing her hands on her chest. Walken tied the chicken on a white string, suspending it but allowing its beak and breast to rest on her chest.

Young stood up, taking the string the chicken was suspended on, and swung the chick in a cross over her body, twice, before spinning the chick in circles, and then a horizontal line over her pelvis (where the scar was) and then her feet. He pushed the chick away, now letting it swing freely in the air. More people had now come, one gentleman reclining in a sleeping position on the benches in the peristil. Others brought up chairs or stood, hands balanced on the poles at the entrance. Nel went to work arranging three salt piles around Ninev’s body—one at the feet, and two at sides in line with Ninev’s pelvis. Ninev was still, except for an occasional head swing to chase of insects. A large white sheet was brought in to cover her body, chicken stuck to her chest and all.

By the poto mitan, near the other items, a gas lamp had now been lit. The visiting Voudouisant began a prayer and a song continued, eliciting responses from those nearby. At the end of his long prayer, collected guests made the sign of the cross. The singing was beautiful. After some singing, as Richo poured out liqueur on the ground, taking draughts of it himself, and removed the white sheet over Ninev. The priest produced a ball of white string and tossed it to the gentleman in red, posed at Ninev’s head. They passed the string back and forth, creating a woven network of strings in the air above her body.
The chicken still sat on her chest. Richo took the string and began making knots as he stretched it over her body with Walken helping. He stretched the string from her foot to her knee, tying knots in it, working his way over her body in this manner as those seating sang: “tie the illness, tie the illness”. He worked up this way, going up each leg, paying special attention and time at the space near her stomach, holding one end of the string down and stretching it tight over the body, then lifting and knotting it. Working his way up her body, he reached her mouth. He leaned over, grabbing the bottle of kleren, and taking a swig. In his next movement, he spits the kleren over her body (Figure 6-5, Figure 6-6).

In the meantime, the candles had begun to go out, and one’ of Walken’s friends came to pour kerosene on them, making the flames burst upward, creating piles of burning earth. I looked back towards the path and saw that it had also been lit with two white candles, adding an elegant, bridal quality to the tiny trail. The ceremony continued on, and Walken finally reached Ninev’s lips where he tied knot after knot, working his way to the top of her head where more knots were tied. He poured the Kleren freely over her head at this point, right where he had tied the knot. The attention now went to the chicken on the string. He was brought forward, swung around the body again, and taken roughly and made to touch his beak to Ninev’s lips. There, over her throat, a wing was ripped off as he fluttered wildly jerking his head back and forth, then another wing, then all of his skin—in one go, it seemed. Blood ran down Ninev’s neck. The young chicken was brought over the body where he was entirely disassembled, and it seemed there was still movement in the broken bits.
The entirety was stuffed into the gourd, now with a candle inside of it. The smell of burning feathers began filling the room. A sweet, not altogether unpleasant odor as smells of meat and skin and burning gourd mixed in. Several attendees came to help Ninev up, the mat being rolled up behind her as she sat up, and was finally pulled to a standing position. The mat was rolled up, placed on her head as she reached the door of the peristil. Richo took the gourd and placed it on top of the rolled mat as she went to walk, Walken, Young, and Marimoz in front of her, beckoning her—Nel, all the while shouting directions about who was to go first. The gourd fell off, creating a small argument about who placed what wrong, and Ninev paused as it was fixed. She continued walking down the path, and the assembly carried on, following her to the crossroads where she hopefully left the dead who ahd been inside of her. Color came back to her cheeks the next day. She wasn’t allowed to speak that day, but the day after she seemed to be much improved and her condition gradually seemed more and more promising until she was finally smiling and joking again.

**Nanschmide**

The pinnacle of the ceremony comes—the exorcism itself—at the moment of the ekspedisyon, the sending away of the food and the rope...when the food bearing the evil spirit leaves; it is at this moment that the patient will either get better or die. (Murray and Alvarèz 1973: 57)

When Nanschmide finally made it to Anperè’s doorstep, the disease was serious, and she was no longer walking. Her eyes were filled with a fatigue and far-off stare that many folks get as they approach death. When we were alone, she would softly say, “I am dying, Alissa,” although she graciously permitted all of our ministrations—especially those of her once-trusted friend Nel and of her sweet daughters. She wanted to heal, and she came here because it was a place of healing. Here there were strong Iwa and
old friends. She believed that the lakou a could remove the invading zonbi from under the folds of her skin.

The ceremony would seek to knit back together the threads of her life, the loose thread from when she left Sou Lapwen and the sacred courtyard decades ago to convert to Evangelicalism, another one from her new illness, and the final thread from her return to the courtyard for healing just today. By staying here, she strove to show the lwa her renewed willingness to serve. She had once cared for them all, and for their people, although all of that care was part of a past which she decried in order to join the church. It was now, at her most desperate moment, that she sought refuge in the arms of her lakou yet again.

Anperè confirmed it was zonbi during a divination with Nanschmide and her daughters. The small room sheltered the participants in the coolness of shelter, a welcome relief from the scalding light of day. The dirt walls and rafters were covered in intricate forms of magic that grew densest on the concrete pier of his altar, where heaps of matter undulated in the darkness and finally at their surfaces became knots, pins, papers, irons, bottles, powders. By his chair was a flag with the Chanpwèl society name scrawled across, then dolls here and there, a skull to the side, a dirt floor and several chairs that were worn and broken but could be stabilized easily enough by an accustomed sitter. He was in the wicker chair of the oungan, shaking the rattle in the tight space, and for a time he rattled off the Catholic Saints’ litany, the names of lwa deliberately emerging in the midst of obeisance to the trinity. When the time came, they listened carefully to the lwa which used Anperè’s body to speak, in turn.
Legba came, and then Avadra, the lwa guide of Anperè. It was determined in due course that the disfigurement and swelling was an ekspedisyon. The prognosis he gave was the worst I have ever witnessed to date. There were three three zonbi in Nanschmide’s body bent on killing her, forcing her body to engorge, to become misshapen, making her flesh hard as a rock. Their job was almost done, Avadra said. She may not be able to be saved. A treatment was needed, a strong ceremonial treatment with rare medicines and expensive herbs that he listed off, all had to be gathered from deep in the mountains. This was her only chance, Avadra said.

Anperè explained to me that it was complicated to acquire the poison and the antidote necessary to get the zonbi outside of her body. It was incredibly expensive, he said. Nanschmide could not afford it, and he could not afford to do it as a favor. The network of relations in the hills would need to be paid, and who knows what processing would be needed along the way, with each person requiring payment to move forward. This was not something that could be whipped up by going to a powder merchant in Hinche; it was a special order. The ingredients had to be collected one by one, at special times, processed by an expert, and then protected and passed down to Anperè with adequate care. It was highly specialized medicine of the sort that foreigners and anthropologists know very little about, he told me. It is the exclusive science that enslaved ancestors carried with them from Ginnen. He decided it would be best to work something out, something less expensive, but still good medicine.

It was during those days of waiting for medicine to arrive that we got to sit with Nanschmide and her daughters, hearing their hopeful voices mixed in with Nanschmide’s resignation. On the 4th day, the medicine came, and the other
ingredients had to be fetched. There was a slew of food and drink items that would be necessary to cajole the lwa to work with Nanschmide. Anperè’s friends, and a few of Nel’s, as well as Nanschmide’s daughters, all went in different directions in search of merchants who would carry particular pieces of the material puzzle they needed in order to work the lwa. Alcohol, both kleren and Sou Lapwen Rum, then imported snacks, limes, coffee, sugar, cola, crackers, cane syrup, kerosene.

Anperè, clothed in a bright red blouse, prepared the ground in front of the poto mitan by digging three shallow holes of earth in front of the poto mitan. Later, he sat facing these holes, directly facing Bawon’s room across the way. Underneath this row of three, he dug another. As the day turned into dusk, he lay out a white sheet in front of the holes, arranging a plate of snacks, coffee, and other delicacies, with considerable attention to their evenness and overall aesthetic appearance.

There was a distinct bustle of a ritual’s beginning, with people coming and going, arranging things, moving this or that, finding seating. Marimoz went into Anperè’s badji, bringing herbs with which Nanschmide would be bathed at the end of the ritual. Anperè kept in his hand the wrapped bottle that the lwa always drank from when they mounted him, but which in particular was for Avadra. With this bottle in hand, he took the first of many lit white candles and walked outside of the peristil, placing it on a stack of rocks, directing me to pour alcohol over the rock, then drinking from the bottle after saluting the lwa.

We walked back to the interior of the peristil, and right at the entrance he poured another libation of kleren from the sacred bottle. I sat with Marimoz, Anperè’s other sister, and several others against the outside wall of the peristil. After saluting me and
Marimoz ritually with the bottle, Anperè moved to light the twisted cotton mesh floating on top of a bed of kerosene in a tin plate. They let out a soothing and lovely orange light in the rapidly approaching darkness.

Together we made somewhat of a cross, all facing inwards at the floor, with the poto mitan as the fourth point. Other people sifted in and sat down as the night wore on, eager to share in the libations but also seeking to heat up (energize) the affair by singing and doing as directed. Nanschmide was lead out to the chair and sat down in a white Vodou dress, of the sort that hounsi wear. Her face was lit with a glow, carried up by the burning cotton wicks in the tiny lime lamps at her feet. Meanwhile, Anperè poured syrup in a winding snake design that encircled the holes and table setting on the floor.

As the night wore on, food, coffee, cola, and candles were buried inside the holes for the lwa to consume whilst Kouzen, Fèray, and Avadra danced in turn in Anperè’s head. Nanschmide complied to the sometimes difficult demands of each lwa, saluting the peristil with hands held high, lighting candles in the badji (the private consultation room), dancing for the four points in the jumping style required, eating when asked, all to the perpetual jingling and rattling of the asòn (sacred rattle). She received a massage given by Avadra on the most swollen regions of her body, where Fèray had before slapped her with the sides of a machete. The music swelled, and it receded, and it swelled again with the addition of more food and drink.

She was directed to the crossroads at about 11:00 at night, where Marimoz helped her dig a hole and deposit a candle for Kafou, a White candle, the candle that is used to make requests. At 1:00 in the morning, the detailed service began to wind down when Avadra finally directed Marimoz and Sidney, a oungan who came much
later, to bathe Nanschmide in the prepared bath of herbs, perfumes, and sacred secret things in Kafou’s chambers. When she returned, her clothes were turned inside out, and she retired to a prepared bedchamber without speaking. In the morning there were four marks on the ground where the holes had been, now swept over, with the pockmarked appearance of earth that had been regularly disturbed and replaced. The mark was the same as the permanent one in the crossroads, which never truly receded into the flatness of earth around it.

Reassembling Bodies: On Attacking with Zonbi

Casseus: This zombie hits anyone who enters the garden without permission with a large rock. Female – male zombie. The female zonbi is always in the house and the mail zombie is always in the garden. They will kill anything that takes shit from the garden. And then the zombie in the garden will bring dead person zombie to them. There’s no longer any needs for a whole body to make a zombie.

Alissa: How do you know when such and such a person was killed by your zombie?

Casseus: You want two zombies. One is female, one’s male. When you see the one at the house, the female, starts boiling, bubbling [kimè] getting really angry, you know at that moment killing someone.

Zonbi help make up the body during life, providing effervescent work energy which mobilizes. After death, the Haitian bodily assemblage radically changes when certain forces present during life flee the new cadaver. The forces making up the deceased person follow their own fates, while the fragment known as zonbi usually remains in the keep of the cemetery and can be harnessed for any number of ritual projects (Figure 6-7).

Zonbi nanm endure in the metaphysical-cum-geographical space of graveyards—the locales of their decomposing bodies—until Bawon Samdi (the patron lwa of death) allows ritual practitioners to put them to task. Post-mortem zonbi nanm
can be fragmented and collected, and when collecting these zonbi, practitioners consider themselves to be recycling things that are no longer needed, and ostensibly put to waste when the person dies. The technological and medicinal procedures needed to capture a zonbi require a team of collaborators: they are no more an individual patient and doctor act than an organ transplant is. The tendrils of these procedures draw from various terrains of Afro-Creole metaphysical life; they require borrowing from the dead to give to the living; they require promptness, care, delicacy, intense focus, and a strong sense of ethics.

Being rural Haiti, where electricity has yet to reach, there is little possibility to store provisions of any importance: the string, pieces of cadavers, machine oil, manioc stocks, and the rest of the supplies that a given operation requires will be gathered as needed by other members of the extensive family network, and the things that are needed are always a matter of the specific case to some degree—the desires, losses, pains, flesh, and experience of the patient—although there are generic sorts of procedures that servitors are familiar with. The ingredients must be precise; they must be checked.

In the past, human bodies were known to be reanimated after death, or a death-like-stupor, becoming a human shell inhabited by a similarly single-minded zonbi which could be used by the maker or handed over to someone else as punishment for the gravest and most anti-social behavior. This, I have been informed, either no longer happens or is incredibly rare due to a number of reasons, not the least of which is charged to changing technologies—both of death practices that make embalming much more accessible to the rural poor, and those that sorcerers use to raise the dead in far
less risky ways. Now, if a zonbi is needed it must be fetched and embodied in ritual in order to carry out the servitors task from a crafted matrix of glass and string, a task that often involves recourse for grave harm, or the bringing of luck, or the prevention of theft, or the assurance of a good harvest, or any number of other specific tasks.

What is left behind in the graveyard is only the breathless blind cadaver, and a few glowing embers of that which once animated it with action. The rest of the person, such as their vital identities, dreams, or knowledge, flee off on a personal path. Sometimes they go to the trees, where they watch, or below in the watery underworld of Ginnen where manbo and ounsan break bread with the long dead figureheads of distant tribes for a time, or perhaps, into space, or to the wise and omnipotent God of Gods from whose loins was born the son (and his mother) who saved the world.

Hercule

When a wrong has been done to an individual or family by someone from outside that group, a simple ritual performed in the cemetery calls Bawon to send a mò, one of the souls of the dead, to avenge that wrong...what complicates the discussion of morality and the uses of power within Vodou is the fact that it is not always possible to keep the categories clear. What is sorcery from one person’s perspective is no more than what was required for an effective treatment from another’s point of view (Brown 2006: 22).

I asked about her life. What came out was a story of tremendous illness, another surgery which left a rough grey scar running her pubic bone to her bellybutton, straight up like a machete. Jalo’s illness was amorphous and always shifting cause, undifferentiated. It was unclear what the problem was, but this did not prevent her from trying to treat it. At first, she seemed to speak of a mass, a cancer. But there were dreams, too. And her illness rippled out into the world around her, too. A rash of lost lovers. Things stolen from her. She went on, telling of the Vodou healer back home that kept making her sicker. About the economy of Vodou medicine, payment plans which would stretch on for decades. All of this work, she said, and she was still in the dark. Couldn't pinpoint the illness. And it wasn't getting better. Somewhere, she said, there was a sample of her body in a laboratory. But she couldn't pay to have it analyzed. And distant relatives in Port Au Prince had dragged their feet, and someone had written the
clinics name wrong, and all that remained was a frustrating and futile knowledge that answers lying in the tissue sample were locked in some NGO's clinic somewhere, never to be unveiled. (Jordan, 2016, Fieldnotes)

Although zonbi are magnetically bound to bodies—both living and dead—they are not equivalent with the body nor with the self of the individual. Thus, when ritual practitioners say she or he has raised a body in the course of orchestrating a magical act, the sense of body can be quite ambiguous even to the seasoned anthropologist. It calls up a multitude of associations which are dealt out contextually in both conversations and actions of zonbi-making, and the sense of the body eludes the sort of concrete specificity that an anthropologist would desire. Understanding the emic specificity of such an utterance is tangential to what the oungan means when he says body, for things slur into each-other as a matter of fact in Vodou life, and the oungan is striving for efficient action and intuitive resonance with her or his fellow actors rather than a perfunctory exactitude.

Hercule was a servitor seeking a body, seeking the dead, whom he might use to his own ends to save himself. When I met him, he was a terrified young man with a wife and two children whom he had left at home, and he sat shaking in the chair that Manbo Nel offered him in her courtyard. The courtyard was cleared and freshly swept even at this early hour, and the chair faced the clearing in front of the peristil, right at the back of the yard, it's back leaning against a mound of rocks some two meters across, which covering the roots of the two magnificently large and healthy trees that had grown into each other over time. At the back of the yard was the sturdy cement poto mitan, along with adjacent poles for holding up a now-absent tonnèl roof in front of the row of rooms that made up the lwa houses. The roof had blown off in a storm, but by now
preparations had been made for various connections to donate rebar, wood, and other supplies to the cause of rebuilding it. The long rectangular row of rooms for the lwa was bracketed by a narrow garden of herbs on each side, including a slew of medium-sized spirit trees, and along the east and west perimeter was a cement wall some 10 feet in height.

Nervously, Hercule explained that he had been framed for the theft of a very large sum of money a day prior, leaving him without a job and in a police interrogation that virtually promised he would go to jail. The accounts showed that his login was active when the money was taken, making all signs point to him as the culprit. He had but one recourse before the jealous and mighty world of finance and lwa that had descended onto his household. So he walked those old dusty roads in order to visit Sou Lapwen, the land of his ancestors as well as his living cousins. Here, he hoped that the attention of the lwa might offer him a way out of this potentially deadly predicament.

Manbo Nel, his cousin, brought him a steaming plateful of beans and black rice from Artibonite, and sought to calm him in the frantic state. “You will find relief,” she told Hercule, “the lwa will not abandon you, for they speak clearly to me, and I have seen this coming.”

Hercule noted that immediately after the theft several young men with computer skills went missing without so much as a goodbye or an explanation. It became clear that he was framed. His entire life hung in the balance, as well as the lives of his family. If he were to go to prison, there wouldn’t be much hope of him recovering his prior life or even returning alive at all, given the atrocious conditions and the stigma that will be seared into his name. After an intense and brief divination, Nel and Young (who had by
now come) decided that there was only one option. A zonbi must be sent out to locate the perpetrators, collect the lost money, and force them to turn themselves in and exonerate Hercule.

Using her cellphone as well as Hercule’, along with several young boys to act as carriers, Manbo Nel called together a sturdy group of servitors in her lakou a who were equally pained to see their excellent fellow reduced to such a state. The most important person invited was the 30-something Bòkò Selvandieu of renowned divinatory powers whom Simbi Makaya always dances with. Spritely with wide, clear eyes, his arms were lean and knotted from a lifetime of labor under the sun.

So too came another older farmer, Walken, who was Hercule’ cousin, and the brother of the Manbo Nel and oungan Anperê to boot. The black stubble of his chin sprinkled with grey made him look strong somehow, though it may also be that he glowed with the underlying power of Marassa, given that he was born a twin. Hercule’s final cousin who attends is the makeshift midwife of the village, who, in the absence of more formal midwives, pieces together the ritual knowledge she has to help women give birth in a place without nearby or affordable hospitals. Although well into her 50’s, age has made her more beautiful, with a gold front tooth that surprises her dark and delicate mouth and eyes, both of which are always full of laughter.

Success rested on the leaf-wreathed head of Simbi Makaya, the fearless leader of the whole ordeal, who took over the bòkò’s hands and tied strings, asked for medicine, showed the attendees how to position the papers and the oil, and finally knotted sisal in great, fist-sized bundles. Bawon Samdi’s permission is no less vital to these events, for he is the master of the graveyard’s dead and it is he who decides
whether to allow or prohibit zonbi work in his garden of bones. All cooped up in the wreckage of old and new bodies in the graveyards, Bawon’s zonbi are without task or form, waiting to be released by the pale fingers of Bawon in response to a oungan’s request (should he see the task ahead as somehow fit for his involvement.)

Walken and Sidney left to dart around the local market collecting some of the materials for the ekspedisyon with Hercule’ last dollars, while the rest of the materials are donated from the other attendees. Throughout the day, other members of the extended lakou a come, they are friends or family who in some way have been sheltered by the trees and the healings over the many decades it has been operating.

**Bringing Other Selves**

In the midst of the preparations, Simbi left Hercule to his troubles while other newcomers chatted, ritually passing around a glass bottle containing raw sugarcane alcohol, kleren. Simbi, in ritual form, then turned his attention to the others of the courtyard, especially those among the fellowship who tried their best to avoid his attention (having knowingly ritually neglected him and eager not to engage in a loud argument with a god.) The masisi from Gonaives (as she calls herself) is the first target of Simbi’s unwanted affection. Wilmine Bèt sassed Simbi, who was preoccupied with giving her something to “make it by” with; Wilmine Bèt won’t have it. She is quite adamant she isn’t there for the money, it’s a man she has been asking for, again and again and again ad infinitum. A good man. Everyone laughs, and Simbi takes note of them, scolding Marimoz the merry bachelorette who is Manbo Nel’s sister and can curse up a storm with the vocal swagger of a domino champion.

Leaning back against her particularly beloved courtyard rock (one with a zonbi inside, mind you) Marimoz swigged down raw kleren in response, which had just
reached her in its circular trip around the attendees. Simbi shouts that she is a loud mouth gossip, a “jouda,” which she acknowledges with a short “wi, Simbi”, before Simbi returns to Wilmine and asks why she hasn’t yet bought rum for him, good rum, Sou Lapwen Rum, which Wilmine responds to with an embarrassed silence.

Pausing for a moment as if channeling something, Simbi begins muttering the opaque language of initiation and possession, telling Wilmine Bèt that she is going to go back, going to kill the first, the second, the third, and then Simbi trails off into an even less decipherable rhythm of raspiness and lingam (the sacred language) that everyone glances at each other and furrows their brows while trying hard to listen. Marimoz attempts to translate Simbi’s wandering voice, turning excitedly to Wilmine Bèt and concluding that the lwa are very interested in her development: “Gade, yo avè w, yo avè w, tande!” Simbi nods, meaning the jist is more or less correct. More divination will be needed later, but not now.

The scattered conversations, bodily orientations, and sharing practices that precede events of the zonbi-crafting may seem trivial to an outsider, but the truth is that they are an important aspect of the event in many ways. All the small talk, cooperation, and chastising occurs within the frame of ritual, and also as a vital element of the magic about to be performed. This talk lubricates the ritual, diluting the underlying unease and anxiety that might exist for participants.

Mixed with fear and the urge to act, participant’s feel duty and love for their comrade; each person is linked to Hercule, Manbo Nel, the Iwa, and each other in unique ways in the lakou a. They seek remediation not only for the sake of Hercule and his family, but also for all of those relationships to people, things, and effects that are
bound up with Hercule, like Manbo Nel who called the convention, Bawon Samdi, Simbi Makaya, the rest of Sou Lapwen. The laughing, joking, friendly banter in the courtyard demonstrates their mutual imbrication just as it offers a good but ultimately momentary distraction from the cruel scenario Hercule has fallen into.

**Concocting the Assemblage**

When the supplies finally arrived, Simbi called Hercule over to sit in front of him. Simbi began spreading and organizing the slew of items from the overturned rice bag which had been used to collect supplies. On this makeshift ground govern, there were candles, a three-legged pot, four kinds of liquid in various reused plastic bottles, as well as notebook paper from a student’s writing book, black and red thread, a long portion of sisal, baby food jars, Vodou powder, *brik* (red powder), and other wares.

Looking at the assembly, Simbi asked Hercule to write a story out on the notebook paper, telling each event as clearly as he remembers it—starting from the time he was suspected of theft until today. Hercule points out that the manbo already requested it during a prior conversation, and he had already written it. Taking this as arrogance, Simbi quickly interrupts him, demanding a second paper and chastising him for the breach of etiquette.

A sudden strong gust of wind danced in the courtyard as Simbi began mashing the red hot peppers, and he called out for a blanket to block the wind so the hot peppers didn’t burn the faces of the guests. He placed the mashed pepper into the new three-legged iron pot that Walken brought from the market. Into it, Simbi added a variety of other ingredients in carefully measured amounts, taking several ounces of motor oil, specific powders in pastel colors from finely folded paper sachets gathered in Hinche, earth, and other substances. Marimoz meanwhile fashioned a wick from a blossom of
cotton on the backyard tree, licking and twisting it so it spiraled upwards. Finally, she placed this wick on a small boat made of an old cigarette box, attempting and failing to light it. Simbi keyed in on this small failure and reminded everyone that, without exception, the wick must be lit before entering the graveyard.

Meanwhile, Walken and Nel had begun the process of knotting strings to add to the assemblage. Simbi supervised, then interrupted them to show that their knots were not being made carefully enough: the twine ought to be doubled over, moved differently, and furthermore—each fold must be the same length! Between six hands, the long thread was crisscrossed back and under and over like a magnified spider web dancing over the dusty earth. Simbi sat back down to fish out a black, knobby, hand-dipped candle known as bouji, which he handed to Walken and Nel, showing them how to cross the knotted twine over the black candle again and again. He set this creation aside, moving back to the three-legged pot which seemed to need a bit more of the bright red brik.

Adding other things in precise amounts, and then comparing the main three items—the pot, and two knotted string, candle and powder creations—he seemed to be satisfied. Finally, he instructed Walken and listeners to light a particular cord on fire within the earth, and then bury it when it gets really sweet and hot. To one of the objects he said: “This is for Gran Bwa, tie it in the tree, light the fire below it.” Simbi added that the person who makes the trip to Bawon Samdi’s domain ought not walk by the Gran Bwa artifact.

Requests for the gods

Within twenty minutes Renaud returned, bearing the message that Bawon accepted. At this point, it was clear that The Bawon would let a bit of vital energy out, a
nanm, a zonbi, one available to Hercule for the task at hand which has not yet exactly begun. Renaud, Walken, and Simbi quickly set to work with the others in the courtyard, breaking large pieces of wood apart and setting them against Ogun’s iron in preparation for the fire. The Manbo and Renaud both spill kerosene on the wood and set it ablaze while placing in special ingredients that crack and sizzle and bring the fire to even more colorful life. Periodically, the participants offer little tastes of raw kleren into the fire, some salt too, then a bit of gasoline. In doing so, the participants implicitly invoke the hottest of the lwa around the iron poto in the midst of the fire.

These hot lwa—like Marinette Bwa Sech, Lisifye, Danbala La Flambò—are not evil, but it would be accurate to say that fear and terror are among their favored forms of reverence. Here, they were called upon for their power to exact justice by punishing wealthy and otherwise unreachable evildoers, a brand of person that they quite enjoy dislodging from their pedestal. In this case, they are told to help exact justice for Hercule, to allow this work to go through with swiftness and severity, like a secret military court in the midst of the flames. It is only with the greatest magic and the strongest control that a situation so dire can be turned around.

Renaud, Walken, Hercule, and the Manbo each took turns saluting the four points of the fire in a special, ceremonial way, and using the knife, a ceramic plate, and other supplies, they activated the zonbi and gave it a mission. This ceremony gave the zonbi the task of forcing the perpetrators who have the money (whomever they are) to give themselves up or die a brutal death. It is a zonbi attached to the money who will punish whoever holds it. The zonbi’s singular aim will drive it with a knife to the throat of these unknown targets and, should they not turn themselves in, the zonbi will assail
them without relief until blood wells up from the stomach and causes the perpetrator to vomit in red, hot streams until all souls have left his body or have been consumed.

Hercule was told not to return to work, and to lay very low and very quiet for several days while the magic works itself out. An hour or so after the ceremony began its work, Hercule received an unexpected call from a friend at work, saying that the charges against him have been dropped by the owners. Weeks later, he still had not returned to work although several people have come forward claiming they know the assailants, who have ostensibly disappeared to all—whether to their death or their fortune, no one knows, but everyone suspects. Hercule, meanwhile, started at other jobs and began supporting his family, even getting a recommendation from his prior work establishment.

**Conclusion: Zonbi Styles**

The tree bows down on the limb where the new bottle has been strung, glass and affinities of matter wrap around each other, slyly suggesting that the coke bottle you see is one step on the journey only—it could become another sort of body altogether, no longer one of empty air or bubbling drink but instead a body of bone and sinew and herbs tied together to make a cross. Wrapped on the outside of the fabric are tangles of thread, one for each of the colors, and the lid is off, leaving the bottle neck open to a mouth frozen in an “o”. It is not surprising then, that these tangles of matter and magic which are called zonbi speak very little although they can moan and mumble when pushed about. In their outward exertion, like a road builder, a woman in labor, there is little time to talk for all the energy is pointed towards the doing, the acting. Their concentration is focused sharp and tight, as precise as the head of a pin.
Zonbi are palpable and embodied, belonging in the kinetic realm of multiplicity, partability, bodies, forces, and things. Zonbi do things: sometimes they kill people, sometimes they make people rich, sometimes they just make you cross the road.

Having thus considered the various life paths of zonbi, we see that zonbi are not actors in a reclusive, solitary, ensorcelled story, but rather key characters that emerge and are acted upon in the very midst of social, ancestral, and household livelihoods. In the case of Madanm Aline, Madanm Betine and Hercule, communal investments and social ties were a key part of the particular zonbi phenomena. Zonbi incidents merit attention and involvement from members of the community. Unlike more private divinations or herbal treatments, zonbi are a source of inter-subjective concern in Catarina, seen in the discussions taking place during Madanm Aline’s progressive illness, the nostalgic solidarity in the wake of Madanm Betine’s treatment, and the practical cooperation when Simbi directed zonbi work for Hercule. Those persons in Catarina were communally invested in the well-being of the afflicted parties, expending energy, time, and resources to assist them in their moments of trial, and lamenting when such help was not accepted (as in the case of Madanm Aline). We also find that zonbi are specifically and intimately related to the bodies of their targets. Hercule sends his zonbi against the throat and mind, and the zonbi itself is drawn from the prime intersections of the body, the crown of the head, the ribs.

The self-forces making up humans in Sou Lapwen do not only act on the outside world vis-a-vis the bodily whole. Though melded together into a self, certain forces still individually maintain relations with other forces and selves, leading to a profoundly intrasubjective experience of personhood with one’s closest relations, or as in Haiti,
Thus, social persons experience themselves more as inter-networked, emergent systems which share profound capabilities for action as well as serious vulnerabilities to remote attacks, glitches, or disruptive internal states.

By treating bodies as an assemblage, we ontologically treat them as aggregated things with a particular genealogy, containing heterogeneous constituents (with their own genealogies) whose relations with one another give the assemblage shape and gravity. Through a coherent network of relations among constituents, assemblages express properties and potentials that are more than simply a sum of their constituent pieces. At the same time, ‘assemblage’ or ‘constituent’ are merely relative terms which allude to, and strive to translate, Haitian experiences of their bodies and of others. By framing bodies as assemblages, we gain entrée into a world of sense whereby bodies are crafted, accumulative, non-essential, and they can stretch across distant territories, and sense things from afar. Instead of the standard, corrupt body of Cartesian dualism, we find a bodily assemblage that continually emerges through processes of insertion, deletion, and transformation.

The bodies of Vodou servitors are rich conceptual categories which contains but exceeds the fleshy, bony, inanimate remains of limbs, trunk, head, arms and feet that mean “body” to an English speaker. We can consider the Vodou body a fleshy matrix which is composed by at least three forces which, by virtue of their mutual reactivity, form the living, breathing, moving, visible entities we recognize as each other. Informants in my study frequently mention that the zonbi, gwo bonnanj, and ti bonnanj are three of the primary such forces, or nanm, which merge together to form the human body as we experience it. These forces can be surgically compartmentalized, spliced,
and treated separately from each-other during the liminal space of ritual (healings, magic, protection, initiatory practices, lucid dreaming, possession, etc.) but they otherwise tend to act together as a unit. When the fleshy matrix is permanently disconfigured (as in death), the most visible and mundane aspects of their relationship come to an end.

As Maya Deren (1953), Hurston (1938), Price Mars (1945) and other early scholars noted, Taino, maroons, and African enslaved ancestors were circulating knowledge of poisons and powders on the isle of Saint Domingue during the time of the French colony. At least by the end of the 19th century, Europeans codified their narrative of Haitian zombification in the literature of several Western European nations. The idea that the beloved dead could rise as enslaved ancestors for the living was sufficiently lurid to appeal to Victorian tastes, tastes which oscillated between eroticizing the para-mortem state and striving to exorcise it. Although there is good reason to suspect the veracity of these sensationalized accounts, they do seem to indicate a shared sphere of technology on the island that channeled strategies for crafting matter and fragmented mobilizing-energy (nanm) into some version of the walking dead.

Vodou scholars have long acknowledged that Afro-Creole personhood is very different than personhood as imagined by/in Western States. However, scholars have been less decisive in seeing bodies and embodiment processes in the same relative light, resulting in scholarly discussions of embodied phenomena like possession or zonbi that rely heavily on superimposed Cartesian dualities. Not unique to Haiti, this Cartesian metaphysics obscures the analysis of many non-dualistic experiences of flesh and matter by Western scholars, though studies of traditionally ‘mindful’ phenomena like
personality and personhood are more flexible. Far from being merely a coincidence of scholarship, this pattern seems strongly tied to Western values and metaphysics and mirrors a deeper binary hierarchy in Cartesian systems in particular.

Like James (2008), I found that Haitians bodies are more extensively intermingled with outside relations and flows. Yet, for many in Sou Lapwen, merely the way that bodies and persons work—they are socio-ecological, produced within and through each other in a coextensive space. This quality of corporeal permeability does not set Haitian metaphysics apart from Western metaphysics, for Westerners too can be scarred, infected, cared for by the outside world, but the extent of this permeability does. Practitioners and servitors do not relate to themselves or each other as essential, singular, entities bound within flesh by laws of matter as known to Western scientists.

Zonbi disregard Western epistemological divisions in many ways. Zonbi are part of servitors prismic selves, but not equivalent to them. Parted after death, they can be taken from graveyards like a generic resource and deployed for the benefit of others. Zonbi attacks sent to you are considered sorcery, but when sent away and towards others they are really a treatment, and in both cases they are presumed to require communal participation and consent of kin, ancestors, friends, distant networks besides. All the while, zonbi are like tools through which people can extend their reach into other bodies, but zonbi are also simultaneously known as independent things wandering listlessly like shades at midnight crossroads, or leaving the living body for a few moments like a breath, only to scurry back in. The zonbi of the dead can also take up residence in you and your family’s yard just to find a moment of respite from their particular invisible wanderings, in such a case it is quite rude to do anything but find a
bit of food for them, even if the children and the dogs are a bit unsettled by the affair. Thus, many of the most immediate and commonly accepted facts about zonbi disrupt traditional anthropological divisions between individuals and collectives, bodies and minds, selves or others.
Figure 6-1. Map of potential paths taken by body-selves after death (highlighting zonbi nanm, flesh, and various destinies)
Figure 6-2. A young woman holds a chicken that will be used to feed her gad lwa, which dwell within her and protect her.
Figure 6-3. Young, the oungan and horse of Simbi Makaya, sits in Simbi’s work room.
Figure 6-4. Zonbi, scrawled in chalk on doors, prevents the undead from entering.
Figure 6-5. Ninev, during the second set of treatments for zonbi attacks.
Figure 6-6. The zonbi who are attacking Ninev are coaxed out of her and into the chicken held by the oungan’s hands.
Figure 6-7. A newly crafted zonbi hangs from a tree in order to attack passersbys who have been stealing from the lwa, Legba,’s siwel fruit.
CHAPTER 7
REMEMBER

After pulling a particularly interesting rock from the beach, I showed Nel where
she sat in her tiny wicker chair on the dirt courtyard of her home. She took it, looked at it
for a moment, turned it over in her hand, then said it was a lovely gift from Lasirenn, the
manbo mermaid who haunted the deep: “Do you see Lasirenn there in the rock? Just
there, don’t you see here? It’s her rock.” Some weeks later, I woke at night with
pleasant dreams of the entire courtyard floating under water, human figures hovering
and swaying above me. The plates and the dishes on the tables swam back and forth
like clunky fish. In the darkness, I told these dreams to Nel, who was (as always) half-
sleeping in the next room.

She grunted in a deriding sort of way, shuffled herself out of bed, and then came
to collect the rock from my bedside. After struggling to open the secured wooden-door,
she slipped her sandals on and placed the rock clear in the center of the courtyard. It
had become too greedy, she told me in the morning, trying to pull me down to the water.
She laughed. As the freshly disciplined rock now lived outside, I picked it up at some
later point and showed it to Anperè. I did not tell him what Nel had said about it—in
reflection, in part because I was still seeking to be complimented on a stellar-job of rock-
finding. After smelling the rock, he touched it against his cheek, and then lowered it and
watched it during a long silence. Finally, he spoke: the rock was Simbi’s "Ah, Simbi’s
rock, that one is Simbi’s."

At this point, I was frustrated with an apparent inability to impress my teachers,
and it struck me that both Nel and Anperè cared little for my explanation but instead
went directly to the rock. I took my rock back, sometimes carrying it to contemplate this
budding interest in metaphysics and materiality as a totem for Ingold (2007). During one such time, it was in my back pocket and had to be removed so I could sit down and take notes during a treatment ceremony conducted by Simbi (who was, in this case, possessing the sorcerer, Jhonson). I showed it to him in passing, hoping he would take interest. He was mildly interested by the rock, and reached out for it so he could hold it, blinking very slowly in the way he normally did. Then, Simbi returned it to me with half-closed eyes and a secretive half-smile, sounding out his next sentence as if I didn't know Creole: "A rock, Little Alissa, That is a rock."

Later while cooking with Nel, I shared Simbi and Anperè's commentary, peeking to see if she would react defensively. Upon hearing both, she nodded casually, even disinterestedly, and continued preparing the herbs for dinner. When I pressed her, saying I didn't understand, she put down the mortar and pestel and wiped sweat from her brow, saying: "It's all true, everything they said is true. It's a good rock. A good one."

The constant push and pull between assembling, disassembling, and reassembling nanm and selves leave a wealth of traces on courtyards and bitasyòn across Sou Lapwen and the additional communities in the study. Dwelling places, with their layered experiences and parallel Masters, pull courtyards together into relations. Baptisms mark courtyards who become further entwined, who exchange gifts and shift each others fortunes for better or for worse. Dwellings are seen in the vision realm, neighbors appear in dreams, speaking at night to each other in visions, planting shared earth for the Met Bitasyon. Outsiders come, perhaps to be healed or consulted by Oungan, and they too leave traces upon the community (much like I have marked others and them, me). Roads also carry the traces of ritual practice and triumph, where
thanks and gifts are distributed to the Met Bitasyon or other Iwa who have healed someone, or answered another's requests. They are found under the chairs or at the foot of crosses where two roads intersect, along with other magical items (of a more dangerous nature) that are left half-buried at crossroads.

**Traces in Flesh**

This study begins and ends with flesh. The study begins from the assumption that we, as flesh, are both selves and tools (Merleau-Ponty 1968). Thus, it is imperative to analyze how our flesh is formed, how and through what (and whom) do we come to sense the world? How do we surface in social situations, and who do we surface as? In the case of Sou Lapwen, human, non-human, and quasi-human selves and landscapes are all players in everyday tasks, and their collaborations, antagonisms, and ambivalences are part of the trans-temporal, trans-species flow of dwelling spaces. By approaching “ecological” relations in Sou Lapwen in terms of a dwelling, following Ingold’s notion of dwelling and meshwork, we can better see the multi-scaler, trans-dimensional connections amongst a field of interacting agents who tend to shapeshift into and out of one another (and thus create the experience of dwelling).

I chose to approach the question of flesh by employing the notion of the assemblage, which is an analytical tool uniquely suited to the subject matter of being/becoming in Sou Lapwen. I rely on the analytical tool of assemblages, as developed in Haraway (1981; as cyborgs), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and Delanda (2006) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Treating persons, beings, and dwellings as assemblages, I argue that beings in Sou Lapwen (human and otherwise), arise and transform as feeling-sensing body-selves across composite webs of intrasubjective beings (Ingold 2011). The assemblage framework is deliberately used as a parallel to
similar frameworks used by Petwo Vodou healers in order to fix bodily selves and make sense of dwelling experiences as a whole. As in assemblage theory, Vodouissants pay close attention to the relations within beings and relations between beings, treating each as an ephemerally cohesive yet permeable web of flows. The analytical concept of the assemblage provides a vital bridge, a translational tool, for exploring these complex and deeply ingrained topics in Haitian Vodou while using the English language and the parameters of a study.

Even though this manuscript provides only a partial image of the site, several important points can be taken away. In Petwo practice, animate relational existence appears rooted in the substance known as nanm (Chapter 2). The entire world, permeated with the marrow-like nanm of a nearly infinite number of beings is a circus of interaction, specificity, and perspective. In the case of Vodou, nanm connects the ecology of the family courtyard (lakou a), the bitasyon (dwelling) and the many personalized constituents within it. This contributes to the experience of shared selves and in future work I would like to explore this within the contextual spectrum of Afro-Creole religions and practices.

In Chapter 2 and 3, I discuss how practices manage flows of nanm and make lives and selves sensational, concrete, and meaningful. One primary way that lay people manage their own nanm and that of their loved ones on a daily basis is through raising food, gathering food, preparing food, cooking food, and sharing food. Techniques of feeding and eating generate and maintain key experiences of nanm-as-being and contribute to the manufacturing of shared, mutually sensible bodies.
Families also employ a number of other practices to directly fortify, protect, and heal nanm. Many of these practices are particularly intense in infancy, perhaps because infant survival is so dependent upon proper care, but also because people celebrate these opportunities to extend themselves as proper selves. Gestation, birth, and early infancy are key sites where sensations are socialized and shared experiences of personhood are built, both for infants, for caretakers, and for the networks that sustain them.

Through these social practices, courtyards come to share in the experience of many emotions, including hunger (as an emotion), satiation, pleasure, and the company of touch. Furthermore, the landscape and lwa also share in the pleasure of substance exchanges. This is not to say that there is a single image of a giving person that people seek to imitate—rather, collections of selves are unique as are styles of consumption, cooking, and sharing. They bear the signatures of the unique assemblages which came together to make them. Lwa, persons, courtyards negotiate their own personal styles of consumption, fulfilling social obligations to share but to varying degrees and with varying skill. Life is connected by substance, experience, and emotion. These are things that leave traces, things that remain long after their given makers are gone.

My task, as I saw it, was primarily to listen. In turn, I wanted to create a richly layered and ethnographically nuanced treatment that centered personhood, senses, and the assembling of daily life. At the regional level, I see the significance as describing practices of hope and care in ways that humanize Haitian peasants, but I also think there is great value in paying heed to the lived wisdom of daily life as it channeled along Vodou paths. In the global anthropological level I see the significance
as taking seriously the sensory experiences of others whether they match up with the researcher’s sensory experiences, and attempting to represent this field experience through writing.

Formerly, humanitarian discourse and international media have propagated a bleak, brutal narrative of reproduction and death in Haiti (Hoffman 2011). Haitian families have often been treated by the media as cruel, inept caregivers in charge of helpless infants who must be “saved” by Western families or adoption, and I hope that this work has contributed to a more nuanced and humanized picture of infant and child care in post-quake Haiti.

**Future Directions**

In future work, I would like to probe in much greater detail the connections between my work and discussions of witchcraft and evangelicalism, and the political dimensions of sensory experience. I am also interested in pursuing the connection between assemblage theory, and the *flesh* that Merleau-Ponty speaks of, as I am convinced there will be important implications for what ethnographic fieldwork can become in the next century. I am curious about how these theories intersect with broad humanistic questions of ethics and morality, about what sorts of threats face human society and the steps that people can and should take to be free from them. In the future, I hope to engage these fields of inquiry by engaging jointly with felt worlds of insecurity and the ethical and moral values which shape them. I will also take the experiences laid out here, as well as the many documents, videos, and sound recordings, and explore life with more attention to sound and day to day touch. I will explore how these experiences and findings fit in with Afro-descendant populations and cultures across the globe.
In future work, I am also eager to explore traces at the site, looking at them as ways of producing and reworking encounters with past events and substances as well as those which will come in the future. The process of coming to an understanding of a particular trace can indeed be knotted and recursive. Encountering zonbi, for example, will leave traces within one's own body. For those who are afflicted, individuals, courtyards, and communities can experience their bodies, past and present, as reservoirs for sent zonbi. With Madamn Aline, Madamn Nanschmide, and other still-living-patients, the zonbi manifests as a tying-up of the flesh of the patient, leaving deep marks. These are some of the traces which persist despite community desires otherwise. The simplest of these undesired traces would be cras, bodily grime, which must be removed daily through bathing, or trash, which must be removed through sweeping and burning on a daily basis. There are other traces, too, of the complexities of life. In trees throughout the community, colorful bottles hang with flashing mirrors, harboring zonbi that promise to punish anyone who passes with ill intention. Jealousy and generosity live side by side in a town that shares, fights, resolves, and remembers.

Underneath the surface of life in rural regions, there are unspoken accusations, suspicions, sympathies, fears, and judgements of others. Zonbi bottles hang on paths, fall, and threaten passerbys until they are finally buried with earth. Coins at the entrance to graveyards mark someone’s efforts to acquire zonbi. Many men and women are suspected of ill will, and they are suspected in silence, more powerful than words. They are suspected not only because of rumor but because of the solid, palpable effects of loss, terror, and illness.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alissa Jordan is an anthropologist interested in personhood, senses and bodies, ritual practice, and metaphysics, from a four-field holistic perspective. She received her PhD in Anthropology from the University of Florida Department of Anthropology in 2016, under an Alumni Fellowship, while also collaborating with the Harn Museum of Art, Museum Director Dr. Rebecca Nagy, African Arts Curator Susan Cooksey, and Dr. Robin Poynor in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Florida. In 2012, Alissa was awarded a Federal Language Area Studies fellowship through the Latin American Studies Center at UF for the study of Advanced Haitian Creole. In 2009, she graduated from the University of Chicago with a Master in Social Sciences, where she trained in exhibits and curation at the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago. In 2008, Alissa Jordan was awarded a National Science Foundation REU Fellowship to research the bioarchaeology of an Ancient Near Eastern skeletal collection at Notre Dame. In 2007, Alissa graduated from Indiana University with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology, carrying Departmental Honors and Highest University Honors. At IU, she spent two years training in ethnographic collections at the Mather’s Museum of World Cultures. In fall of 2005, Alissa was the Assistant Research Director of the Indiana University Semliki Chimpanzee Project in Semliki National Park, Uganda.