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National Myths, Resistant Persons: Ethnographic Fictions of Haiti

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I

The god of the white man calls him to commit crimes; our god asks only good works of us. But this god who is so good orders revenge! He will direct our hands; he will aid us. Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears and listen to the voice of liberty that speaks in the hearts of all of us.¹

With these powerful words, delivered on a stormy August evening in 1791, a young religious leader and coachman named Boukman, originally from Jamaica, inspired a group of slaves in the Caïman woods of northern Saint-Domingue to raise arms against their French masters, igniting a revolutionary spark that would lead to the birth of Haiti, the world's first independent black republic, in 1804.

Boukman, so named because he was a literate *man* of the *book* (not the Bible but the Qur'an), is described in various accounts as officiating alongside a priestess "with strange eyes and bristling hair," or as Laurent Dubois writes, "a green-eyed woman of African and Corsican descent" named Cécile Fatiman.² There were blood oaths, ritual dances, rousing speeches, and the slaughter of a sacrificial pig. There were men and women of African and Creole descent, from coffee and sugar plantations across the region—fieldworkers and overseers as culturally, economically, and religiously diverse as the rituals they performed and the priest and priestess who led them.

The continued lure of this foundational myth (for it is unclear how much of it is truth or embellishment: Was the religious ceremony a grand pretext for surreptitious strategizing and arms distribution? Or was it, in fact, a genuine marriage of religious and military fervor—the proclamation of a divine right to murder in the name of one's true god(s)?) appears to lie not in its remarkable display of cultural

heterogeneity, but rather in its purported aim of national unification. As scholars like Susan Buck-Morss have argued, the various interpretations of the Bois Caïman myth all tend to organize around or against the European story: Bois Caïman is either conjured as proof that Haiti had “entered into modernity proper because it joined the European story, the only story that counts,” or used to indicate that Haiti had surpassed the European story. In either case, the myth has come to signal Haiti’s entry into nationhood, “complete with its own . . . pedigree of “founding fathers” and “bloody birth.”³

Ethnographic accounts of Haiti often employ a similar unifying gesture, but point in a different direction: If Haiti was thought by some to have joined the European story after the revolution, others sought to recuperate the African story embedded in Haiti. Travel writer William Seabrook wrote famously and problematically in *The Magic Island* (1929) of the essential Africanism he found running through the “soul” of Haiti. He writes that it is “something more than atavistic savagery, but which may trace none the less to their ancestral Africa, dark mother of mysteries—some quality surges to the surface of group or individual; and when this happens, we others are in the presence of a thing shorn of all that can provoke superior smiles or scorn, a thing which strikes terror and sometimes awe.”⁴

American ethnographer Melville Herskovits also saw these essential Africanisms in the heart of Haitian culture. After extensive fieldwork throughout Africa and the Caribbean in the 1920s and 1930s, and despite his understanding that Haitian civilization was “the result of close and continued” contact between Europeans and Africans, he nevertheless held to the belief that these peoples and traditions were utterly dissimilar. Instead of a New World interculture, Herskovits primarily saw the remnants of Africa: “The presence of members of native ruling houses and priests and diviners among the slaves,” he writes, “made it possible for the cultural lifeblood to coagulate through reinterpretation instead of ebbing away into the pool of European culture.” While he does account for a “process of acculturation” that “resulted in varied degrees of reinterpretation of African custom,” Herskovits sees in Haiti the emergence of “full-blown African civilizations.” It is Africa, not the Afro-Caribbean, he sees in these “independent or quasi-independent Negro communities.”⁵

But for members of the African diaspora on American shores, the Haitian Revolution told a more expansive and diffuse story. Indeed, for US African Americans like Frederick Douglass, Haiti was an exemplary model of liberty, “the original pioneer emancipator of the nineteenth century” that inspired other countries to defeat slavery. Speaking at the Haitian Pavilion at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, Douglass tells his audience that “the freedom you and I enjoy today; that the freedom that eight hundred thousand colored people enjoy in the British West Indies; the freedom that has come to the colored race the world over, is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons of Haiti nearly ninety years ago.”⁶ But Douglass’s vision of Haiti, like that of others before and since, as “the greatest of all our modern

teachers,” extended beyond the European story of nationalism, beyond the terrestrial roots of the Americas and Europe. Douglass understood that the “roots” of this tree of liberty, as Haiti’s own founding father, Toussaint Louverture, had famously stated at the time of his surrender, “are deep and numerous,” and extended beyond the borders of the nascent nation and the sea that surrounded it.⁷ Douglass reminds his audience of this, stating that when Haitians “struck for freedom, they builded better than they knew. . . . They were linked and interlinked with their race, and striking for their freedom, they struck for the freedom of every black man in the world.”⁸

Haiti, then, stood for something far more profound than just a political mirror for European models of nationalism, more than just a warning signal to slaveholding interests in the United States, and more than just a cultural mirror of Africa. Haiti’s roots were a complex web of Arawak, Creole, African, and European cultural and political traditions. The birth of Haiti, as the name itself performed, was the birth of a cultural and political space that stood simultaneously for the indigenous and the foreign—for rootedness and diffusion. Unlike a United States culture that flattened racial and class distinctions in the service of “successful” nationalism, Haiti stood as a bold counterexample for the New World, supplanting traditional models of nationalism and imperialism in its very emergence.

In fact, a complex interplay between the indigenous, the African, and the European, were part of Haiti’s successful military strategy during the revolution. As historian Brenda Plummer discusses, “black resistance retained a specifically indigenous character in spite of the innovations that the *philosophes* and the French Revolution made possible.”⁹ This points to the “eclectic sources of Haitian politics and thought,” as Haitian state formation “originated in circumstances both cosmopolitan and local.” She explains that struggles between African and Creole fighters during the revolution actually led to a unique collaboration of indigenous and European strategies in fighting colonial forces: “African guerillas’ strength lay in their tactical flexibility,” she explains; “their capacity to use Vodun as a psychological weapon; and the solidarity created by close ethnic ties in isolated communities.” Later, when the Westernized Creoles joined the fight, they “brought to the anticolonial movement a battle-tested knowledge of modern military science and the rudiments of political organization” (13).

Even after the revolution, as Haitians sought to define and unify their national identity, they did not rely on static concepts of citizenship borrowed from the US or France. Instead, as Brenda Plummer explains, they “proclaimed themselves *noirs*—‘blacks,’ and admitted to this category any Indians or mulattoes who considered themselves Haitians. Even renegade Polish mercenaries, stranded in Haiti after the expulsion of the French army, shared this attribute” (2).

Thus while Haiti’s founding myth cannot entirely escape the clutches of European tradition and interpretation, and while some ethnographic interventions are intent on situating Haiti’s origins in Africa, Haiti’s origin story, in fact, deliberately

resists genealogy, for it is, in a Deleuzian sense, a story of becomings and undoings—of movement and change.¹⁰ Its dramatic shifts, from indigenous Arawak community to European colony, from transatlantic slavery to global sovereignty, are better viewed through a panoramic lens that envisions Haiti as part of the larger Caribbean archipelago and beyond. A more fully realized understanding of Haiti, its history, and its troubled present, then, requires an extraction—or perhaps the proper word, to borrow from Caribbean intellectual Édouard Glissant, would be *diffraction*—from the limiting, disciplining myths of nation and land, to a more expansive view of its position as an “island bridge,” as Antonio Benítez-Rojo has called it, between North and South America.¹¹

For the Haitian experience, as Susan Buck-Morss has argued, “was not a modern phenomenon, too, but *first*,”¹² and it is well worth considering whether its unique strides toward becoming a postcolonial, postslavery society were flatly incommensurate with the fictional promise of a European-inspired model of nationhood—but not because Haitian society and its leadership were socially unprepared or politically immature. Rather, Haiti betrayed the fissures in the existing rhetoric of nationalism by virtue of its *advanced* position in the economics of modernity; its leaders’ open-eyed understanding of the role of labor and servitude in that economic process; and its constitutional interculturalism, from linguistic creolization to religious syncretism. In other words, Haiti is not an example of failed nationalism; rather, Haiti *exposes* the failures within the disciplinary model of nationalism itself.

In this essay, I build on the re-readings of the Caribbean offered by scholars like those already mentioned by turning to the early twentieth-century artist-ethnographers Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, and Langston Hughes. As other(ed) US citizens, in their overlapping capacities as artists, ethnographers, visitors from a colonial power, and diasporic kin, these writers help to reveal the centrality of *performance* in what Antonio Benítez-Rojo calls the culture of the “meta-archipelago”—“a chaos that returns, a detour without a purpose, a continual flow of paradoxes.”¹³ Performance effectively and constitutionally resists both isolationism and the neocolonial presence, for it is an act that, through both its ephemerality and acute awareness of scrutiny, reveals a culture in flux; one of the places in the world, as Glissant has described it, “where Relation presents itself most visibly, . . . a place of encounter and connivance . . . and, at the same time, a passageway toward the American continent,” that allows each person “to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry.”¹⁴

Thus, for Hurston, Dunham, and Hughes, Haiti and the other Antillean islands are no longer depicted as the lagging stepchildren of modernity but are offered instead as stunning exemplars of a burgeoning postmodernity—the earliest representatives of an open-ended, global network that is best understood as a “meta-archipelago,” with neither boundaries nor a center, but an outward diffusion that “takes away the space that separates the onlooker from the participant.”¹⁵ Haiti

is reinvigorated through such readings and their emphasis on the distinctively “aquatic” aspect of Caribbean cultures, “the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double-folds, of fluidity and sinuosity” (11).

The visual image of this archipelago as an unlikely but powerful bridge, emerging in a vast sea to connect the routes and histories of multiple peoples of the world, is a compelling, poetic redemption and acknowledgment of its vital power for the modern West. But my desire to reintroduce Haiti as a space that challenges the political and geographic borders of “nation” is not intended as a utopian rescue that erases or diminishes its continuing political, social, and economic struggles. Rather, it is offered as a productively problematic counter-reading of “nation” itself as performance, with borders measured not by finite shorelines that divide land and sea, but through cultural crossings between persons and across oceans.¹⁶

Ethnography, once understood to be a discipline closely linked to the imperial enterprise, today may be considered the discipline that engages most directly with this idea of nation as cultural performance. In fact, the subgenre of performance ethnography, studied and employed by scholars and practitioners like Diana Taylor, Richard Schechner, and others, examines cultures within this framework of mobility and contact.¹⁷ Yet to refer to performance ethnography as a kind of subgenre is, in effect, an act of redundancy, since all ethnography is exemplary of what performance theorist Richard Schechner has called “twice-behaved behavior.”¹⁸ It is the continuous reiteration of cultures in motion that renders impossible the search for cultural origin or cultural purity. Zora Neale Hurston, for example, stages, through her ethnographic narrative, a performance of Haitian culture, in which is also embedded her own shifting cultural status as a US African American woman in Haiti.¹⁹

While Haiti has long been burdened with an exceptional status in American politics and anthropological study as a “grotesquely unique” space,²⁰ the intervention of artist-ethnographers like Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, and Langston Hughes works to bring Haiti into focus as foundational to the prosperity of this diasporic solidarity—no longer a solitary, exceptional example, but a vital link in a continuous chain of uprisings and uplift.²¹ In Haiti’s struggles are mirrored the struggles of a global, diasporic community whose very foundations rest and crack on questions of racial identity and performance.

As US African Americans, these scholar-artists navigated the everyday “ironies and complicities” inherent in diasporic identity, as Tavia Nyong’o has discussed. For performance, as he explains, played a crucial role in accounting for “the antinomies of race and slavery in American heritage.”²² As a result, they were able to widen the diasporic lens of inquiry by bringing their own experience of the “twice-behaved behavior” that is constitutive of American racial experience to bear on the Haitian story.

I examine the crossings of these three artist-ethnographers to Haiti from the waning years of the US occupation in the early 1930s to the eve of World War II, a time of robust intellectual and cultural exchange between members of the African

diaspora in the United States and Haiti. The gestures of solidarity and kinship fostered by these journeys allowed them to reach beyond national boundaries, and also allowed them to use this lens to censure their home governments' hypocrisies.²³

I will begin with a brief historical trajectory of Haiti, introduced through the lens of global performance. This will set the stage, as it were, for the ethnographic performances that follow, since Hurston, Dunham, and Hughes especially, incorporate Haiti's vexed history into their own narratives. What I hope to emphasize in such an analysis is the potential for a new kind of "decolonizing" political ethnography, as scholars like Kevin Meehan have called it, one that works to connect rather than isolate seemingly disparate religious, cultural, and national traditions, and nourishes an inter-American, diasporic solidarity.²⁴

II

Theorist Arjun Appadurai coined the term *ethnoscape* to describe what he calls "a slippery, nonlocalized quality" of the new ethnographic terrain of the twentieth century. The global "landscapes of group identity," or ethnoscares, as he defines them, "are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous."²⁵ But the complex cultural and political history of the island known today as Haiti has been a shifting, migratory terrain for centuries before the era of mass media in which Appadurai's ethnoscares are situated. The term may be new, but the concept of a performative, migratory, deterritorialized identity was foundational to the Haitian ethnoscape long before twentieth-century ethnographers took their newly self-conscious, mirrored lenses there.

In *Cities of the Dead* (1996), Joseph Roach also discusses the impact of migration through the lens of circum-Atlantic performance, from staged plays and sacred rites to the "invisible rituals of everyday life." Performance in the "geohistorical matrix of the circum-Atlantic world"—bound as it is by the economic and cultural traditions of Europe, Africa, and the Americas—is an act of transmission as well as a bringing forth, part collaboration, part invention.²⁶ This is how Haiti comes into being, inventing and reinventing itself through a "genealogy of performance," a careful and "intricate unraveling of the putative seamlessness of origins." For Haiti is "at once a map of diasporic diffusions in space and a speculation of the synthesis and mutation of traditions through time."²⁷

Understanding revolutionary Haiti as an ethnoscape, then, permits us to re-read the 1791 revolt that led to its birth as an act of diasporic performance, successful in part because it relied on syncretic practices and strategies, emboldened by the diverse histories and journeys of its people. Only *after* the hard-won revolution did its leaders' conformity to existing neocolonial and imperial models begin to diminish the power of the peoples' global act of resistance. Both Louverture and Dessalines supported a plantation-based economic system and emphasized the importance of

the export market. A new class of Afro-Haitian planters, on the other hand, simply wanted “larger garden plots”—to grow food on their own, newly acquired land.²⁸ Haiti’s dream of recognition as a modern state was slowly eroded by this widening gulf between politicians and citizens at home, and through diplomatic containment policies abroad.

While the United States had helped hasten Haitian independence for its own interests by supplying arms to the rebels, and while it remained cautiously but officially neutral toward Saint-Domingue during Louverture’s brief tenure as leader from 1800 to 1802, Jefferson and his successors soon argued against the formal recognition of Haiti. Other European nations and settlers in the region joined this “cordon sanitaire,” halting or slowing “the flow of information and people” to and from the island.²⁹

Local rebellion in Haiti grew stronger at the turn of the twentieth century, especially among the nomadic and forceful *cacos* (rebels from the north). Multiplying economic and social divisions also left its larger political leadership hamstrung and vulnerable to foreign interests, who would, in turn, find appropriate pretense to intervene in a country whose divisions and complexity they neither understood nor respected. On July 28, 1915, the opportunity came, with the violent assassination of Haitian president Vilbrun Sam. In protest of his expanded ties with the United States and, most pressingly, his authorized execution of 167 political prisoners just one day before, a mob of mourners—primarily from the elite classes—stormed the French embassy, where Sam was hiding, beat him to death, and tore his body into pieces on the street. Over three hundred US Marines arrived in Port-au-Prince that afternoon. They remained there for nineteen years.³⁰

Performing a constitutional resistance that was far more powerful as foundational narrative for Haiti than either the common history of enslavement or the utopian promise of liberty, Haitian citizens fought bitterly against the occupation. On December 6, 1929, during a confrontation on the southern coast, at Aux Cayes, US Marines opened fire on a crowd of fifteen hundred people, killing twelve and wounding twenty-three. The Cayes massacre resulted in widespread international condemnation of the US occupation, and the eventual withdrawal of US troops four years later. But the damage had been done: local rebellion had been crushed, and centralized despotic governments continued to ensure that any future acts of resistance would be handled with violence in kind. The occupation, as Mary Renda succinctly illustrates, had “eliminated the very safeguards against entrenched despotism that Haiti, for all its problems, had always successfully maintained. In doing so, U.S. Americans helped to lay the groundwork for two Duvalier dictatorships and a series of post-Duvalier military regimes.”³¹

III

From the cold outsider's perspective, Haiti was an irremediable state: it was not recognizable as *American*, it resisted neocolonial intervention, and yet it could not organize itself around its shifting cultural, racial, and class designations. As Haiti approached midcentury, even its claim to a common national past seemed untenable. What was this common past around which its diverse people could *all* rally anew: Was it still the shadow of slavery? Racial unity? The revolution? The Cacos revolt(s)? The US occupation? The Haiti envisioned by its founding fathers—the independent nation they had fought to bear—now seemed almost vampiric, preying on the very people it once sought to free. Haitians were looking to return to a sense of unity they had last felt in their protonational past. But it was just that: a sense. Haiti's sense of unity came from its performances of an origin that had no stable location. It staged these performances along an axis of diaspora (enslavement and uprootedness) on one hand, and of indigeneity (motherland) on the other.³²

Jean Price-Mars, one of Haiti's most important ethnographers and intellectuals, urged Haiti, in his 1928 *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, to find its own voice through a break with its colonial past and with French culture.³³ He advocated a return to Haitian history and folklore, yet once again this call to action traded one unifying narrative for another: asking Haitians to abandon France, once and for all, in order to redeem the original Africa, through the “nationalization of culture.”³⁴ Price-Mars had been to the United States, had visited Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, had stayed in segregated hotels, and had witnessed the surge of creative productivity and recognition of US African American artists at the start of the Harlem Renaissance. He encouraged Haitians to follow the lead of these artists and searched, in vain, to replace one narrative of patriotism with another.³⁵

For US African Americans like Hurston, Dunham, and Hughes, however, the ethnographic and narrative impulse, while perhaps initially motivated by the search for home in exile, and the yearning to find national and cultural unity through acts of defamiliarization or cultural mirroring, soon transformed, upon arrival in Haiti, into the disruption of a unifying myth of origin that belonged to either Africa or the Americas. Price-Mars, as a traveler to the US—perhaps because of the rigidity of racial and class segregation on US soil—could hold on to his foreign exceptionalism and a stable sense of his racial identity in a manner that Hurston, Dunham, and Hughes could not or did not always do in Haiti. In a space where blackness and Africanness held multiplicities of color, caste, and national possibilities, these US travelers were able to experience firsthand the performative and fluid aspects of black and white, foreign and native, and of course, African and American.

I begin with Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 trip to Haiti, which led to the publication of her controversial work of ethnographic folklore *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938). Hurston's journey and subsequent writings are perhaps the most well-known of the three, but while contemporary scholars have

largely dismissed her acts of ethnographic performance as colonial minstrelsy, I would like to offer a more complicated reading of her twice-told retelling of the Haiti story, and her position in the narrative she stages. From Hurston, I move to Katherine Dunham's 1936 journey to Haiti, which contributed to her success as a pioneering dance choreographer and led to the eventual publication of her 1969 *Island Possessed*, an ethnographic memoir in which she depicts with honesty and vulnerability the blurring of lines between scientist and artist, between "invader" and "local." I close my analysis with Langston Hughes's excursion to Haiti, which was a vacationer's sojourn turned political awakening. As Hughes famously writes in his 1956 memoir *I Wonder as I Wander*, he had originally set sail for the "land of blue sea and green hills," in 1931, "to get away from my troubles."³⁶ His political radicalization and eventual rewriting of Haiti's origin myth is a compelling testament to the transatlantic solidarity I wish to trace through this essay.

IV

Until recently, many critics have largely dismissed Hurston's narrative of Haiti and the occupation in *Tell My Horse* as a shallow curtsy to US imperialism.³⁷ However, closer attention to Hurston's complicated articulation of life in the Caribbean—in the form of folktales interspersed with historical details, and a deliberately elusive narrative voice—reveals the political impact of cultural performance, which is always and necessarily shifting. Through a multilayered narrative that moves back and forth between a distant narrator and the local voices of Haitians, Hurston shows her readers how narratives of nationalism can be deployed and resisted at the same time.

The end of the US occupation of Haiti was marked by the repeal of a legal prohibition against *les sortilèges* (spells), affirming the rights of its citizens to organize "popular dances." However, President Vincent laid down strict rules about which forms of ritual were sanctioned and outlawed by the government. This national "folkloricization" of popular ritual was both limiting and freeing, as it was sanctioned only as a "revival" of "a transcended cultural past."³⁸ But performers often found a way to use the national stage to their advantage, surreptitiously using the performance itself to critique repressive mandates of the law. This is the post-occupation Haiti that greeted anthropologists like Hurston in the fall of 1937. As one of her contemporaries, George Eaton Simpson noted, while on a postdoctoral research trip in northern Haiti that same year, his informants told him that a "dance without sacrifices" had been specifically "invented" in order to "circumvent the law" during the late occupation period.³⁹ This is, in effect, what Hurston does with her narrative. Allied with her informants, she has also converted her narrative into a sanctioned piece—a "dance without sacrifices" that is, on the surface, obedient to the dictates of US exceptionalism, gendered narration, and imperial discourse but is, in fact, a subtle critique of the hypocrisies and conventions in all three.

On the cutting edge of what is now considered anthropology's "postmodernist turn," Hurston's work has garnered a second look, especially within the context of feminism and performance ethnography.⁴⁰ These reconsiderations are not so concerned with recuperating Hurston's ethical reputation but rather with illuminating the negotiations of nationhood and complicity with imperialism that her ethnography enacts. By recasting ethnography from its role at the time as a "neocolonial cultural form" and making it speak, instead, "in a language of indigenous protest against the legacy of U.S. imperialism and local caste, class, and gender oppression," Hurston reveals the power of intercultural dialogue and Afro-Caribbean exchange, as Kevin Meehan explains, "to reorient existing disciplines and practices toward decolonizing cultural goals."⁴¹

Hurston brought this resistant performance to the participant-observer method. She understood that the hierarchies it sought to dismantle through its findings were the same ones it relied on to implement its studies and to retain its scientific status of objectivity and authority. She did not have to travel to the Caribbean to learn this. She first performed it as a student of Franz Boas, conducting anthropometric studies on the streets of Harlem in 1926, approaching black heads to appraise, record, and report back to him.⁴² Of course, the aim of Boas's study was to disprove biological racism, but the hierarchical structure that made this task a peculiar one for an African American woman was not lost on either the student or her mentor. In fact, such early autoethnographic projects set Hurston apart from other students trained in the Boas school, and he and colleague Melville Herskovits eagerly encouraged Hurston (and, initially, Katherine Dunham as well) to "capitalize upon [the] duality" of her role as "both a subject and an object of her discipline."⁴³ Hurston's position allowed her to collapse the once-impassable distance between observer and observed, while still retaining the necessary scientific objectivity of the discipline.

How could she possibly resist? Hurston takes these problems of Boasian anthropology, imbues it with her own brand of play, and creates a new way of looking at cultures, one that respects yet playfully distorts the scientific logic of the participant-observer method. She employs techniques "that would embody African American expressive culture on its own terms, while also avoiding, as she told Langston Hughes, 'loop-holes for the scientific crowd to rend and tear us.'"⁴⁴ Through a unique merging of anthropological observation and participation in circum-Atlantic cultural practices, Hurston was able to navigate the unique position of ethnographer in cultural camouflage, combining objectivity and performance, merging reality with art.⁴⁵

This is the lens Hurston brings to Haiti in *Tell My Horse*, as she reconstructs the events leading up to the US occupation and its consequences in a clever framing narrative titled "Rebirth of a Nation." To accept this title in earnest is to welcome the occupation as an act of national rescue and reconstruction. But as critics like Kevin Meehan and Leigh Anne Duck have discussed at length, one might instead catch

Hurston's sly reference here to D. W. Griffith's 1915 blockbuster Klan propaganda film *The Birth of a Nation*, which paints a lurid, threatening picture of African Americans in the wake of US Reconstruction. To invoke this title is to call out the occupation for what it actually was: an act of white supremacist aggression.⁴⁶

Through this tongue-in-cheek reference, Hurston also reveals that the rhetoric of nationalism functions, only and always, as a perpetual promise for the people—both in Haiti and in the United States. In fact, as Hurston demonstrates, the perpetuity of that promise is an essential component of how such rhetoric survives, and must survive, for governments to function. Part of the reason that governments continue to fail in Haiti is due to the constitutional ability of its people—in part because of their public tendency to “throw a gloss over facts,” as Hurston remarks—to see through the lies and fictions of nationalist rhetoric.⁴⁷ Thus while Hurston dons the outer garments of US nationalism through the voice of an “impartial” frame narrator, it is actually *through* the voices of the Haitians themselves that she drops the rhetorical guise and enters the consciousness of the people themselves, almost in a spirit akin to vodou possession. She deploys this, as Kevin Meehan has discussed, “as a strategy for staging scenes of social protest.”⁴⁸

Hurston begins and ends her introduction of the occupation in the voice of the frame narrator, who writes (again, in a certainly satiric tone) of the dramatic call-and-response exchange between Haitians and the US Marines. As a “crescendo cry” is heard from “the heart of Haiti,” it is answered with a promise of peace from “another land and another people utterly unlike the Haitian people in any respect.”⁴⁹ This line itself reveals Hurston's playful mask, for as an African American, she embodies the common link between these lands and people, and their countries' intertwined histories of slavery, colonialism, and revolution. As the *USS Washington* arrives in Port-au-Prince, the narrator describes the smoke from the ship's funnels as “a black plume with a white hope” (72), once again inviting readers to look more carefully at the hypocrisy behind the image of a smoke-infested hope, to listen more carefully, beyond the surface readings and official histories, to what the people are *really* saying. So she begins the *real* story of the occupation, not from the point of view of the US Marines, nor from that of President Vilbrun Sam, but from the point of view of the people, beginning with the children.⁵⁰

It is the children who hear the ominous first shot coming from the direction of the palace. A young boy, Étienne, symbolic namesake of the general who led the massacre of the president's prisoners, “give[s] tongue to the speechless something that was reeking in the air,” whispering to the young girl, Fannie, who has also crept into the night, “The people in the prison are dead.”⁵¹ The failures of a nation are thus narrated, ringing in the ears and voices of its children. It is then that Hurston unleashes a string of denunciations against Sam. The people have their say in a poetic flood of comments, about his lack of politesse, his greed, his stupidity, his criminality, his unauthorized and monstrous political ascent. “A man like that deserved no loyalty and allegiance from cultured folk,” writes Hurston. “He must

expect revolution. The men in the prison were heroes for having resisted him. This was the opinion of the majority” (68).

Edmond Polynice, the father of three executed prisoners, is incredulous, in Hurston’s account, that such an honorable official could have authorized the massacre of so many “unarmed and helpless people” (69). Convinced it could have happened only over Étienne’s dead body, Polynice searches the heaps of human remains for a “small piece of the protector of the helpless that he might do it honor” (70). In answer to Polynice’s persistent lament of “Where is the body of Étienne?” someone reminds him that Étienne, after all, “is the friend of Guillaume Sam” and is likely to have led the massacre. “But,” retorts Polynice, in a phrase profoundly important to the broader notion of political allegiance, “honor lays a greater obligation than friendship; and if friendship made such a monster of a man, then it is a thing vile indeed” (70). Polynice later finds a “cringing,” but very much alive, Étienne at the Dominican legation and promptly puts three bullets in his chest, one for each son. Like many of Hurston’s folk parables, this—while based on a lamentable historical fact—is a powerful preamble to the Haitian occupation. The figure of Étienne represents all the so-called “friends” of Haiti—nations of Europe, and now the US—whose outstretched hand of strategic allegiance comes at grave cost to the Haitian people. Leaders like Étienne and Sam had sold Haitian honor and murdered the promise of its own three prominent sons—Louverture, Christophe, and Dessalines—for the sake of a false allegiance.

Hurston’s unraveling of the promise of the US occupation in Haiti is deliberately circuitous, as she moves back and forth from the mainstream US perspective to the Haitian perspective, from US lore to Haitian folklore. Sometimes she uses Haitian politics as a bridge to critique the “tongue-and-lung era” of US racial politics, and sometimes as a way to credit US African American journalists and NAACP leaders, who lobbied and spoke out against the occupation, as the real heroes of the Marines’ 1934 departure from Haiti; she later credits them directly with this in her critique of President Vincent.⁵² Hurston also gives voice to the sentiments of protest mounting in Haiti and applauds the efforts of the vibrant intellectuals who see that “the peasants of Haiti are so hungry” and are “refusing to see the glorified Haiti of the demagogue’s tongue.”⁵³ From such earnest and then scathing political commentaries, Hurston moves back into folklore, introducing the important art of *lying* in the performance of historical retellings in Haiti. It is a “twice-behaved behavior” in this narrative indeed, in that it turns the lens from Haitians to narrator to the audience itself.

There is a cultural tendency in Haiti, explains Hurston’s narrator, for lying. It is, in some respects, a survival mechanism, a way of “deceiving first themselves and then others to keep from looking at the dismal picture before them,” she explains. This habit is not limited to the poor and uneducated, the narrator explains, but “goes from the thatched hut to the mansion, the only differences being in the things that are lied about” (82).

The broader lesson, however, is about the lies we (as readers and outsiders) must tell ourselves about the occupation. There is a constitutional inability to face the truth about Haiti in any *official* narrative. But it is there, if we listen carefully to the voices of the people themselves. Sometimes the truth comes in the very guise of lying itself—like the litany of complaints the narrator collects from Haitians about the occupation. It is through these purported “lies,” as the narrator frames them, that Hurston is able to offer her strongest critique of the occupation, as Haitians voice their *true* discontent about the occupation, stating that “the Marines . . . had no right to come here in the beginning,” and “what can a weak country like Haiti do when a powerful nation like your own forces its military upon us, kills our citizens and steals our money?” (85). It is through the performance of these “lies,” the official ones protected by frame narrators and governments, and the unofficial ones (AKA “truths”) signified by laborers and rural villagers, that Hurston works to undo the official framing of Haitian history, weaving together the failures of nationalism alongside the resistant survival of people.⁵⁴

V

Katherine Dunham approached ethnographic inquiry in a slightly less suspicious, if similarly playful way. As an anthropology graduate student studying under Melville Herskovits in the 1930s, Dunham had already established herself in arts circles as a successful dancer and choreographer. She thought of Herskovits as a “fantastic guide for getting people to the bottom of things,” but as she ventured into fieldwork herself, she found herself moving away from his “single-minded” methodology. “Herskovits’ one *thing* was Africa in terms of the New World,” Dunham writes of her mentor. But as she began to study and catalogue the many fascinating details of Haitian life on her own, “hand movements, voice tones, food seasonings, storefront churches, political trends, and palaverings,” she saw “both areas,” Africa and the New World, working together in the performance of everyday life.⁵⁵

Dunham’s initial foray into fieldwork, funded by a 1936 Rosenwald Fellowship to study the links between dance and cultural traditions in the Caribbean world, was also fueled by an earnest desire for adventure, which she readily admits in the opening lines of her ethnographic memoir, *Island Possessed*: “It was with letters from Melville Herskovits, head of the Department of Anthropology at Northwestern University,” writes Dunham, “that I invaded the Caribbean—Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Trinidad, passing lightly over the other islands, then Haiti again for the final stand for the real study” (3).

By introducing herself as an *invader*, Dunham places herself in the continuous line of outsiders who have come into the Caribbean uninvited, from colonists to soldiers to scientists. She also brings to relief, from the start, the way these identities and interventions come together *in her*, as a US African American female ethnographer, who enters Haiti on the heels of the US Marines’ departure. In doing

this, she acknowledges the uncomfortably close relationship between scientific intervention and territorial conquest, hinting at the role that the rationale of “science” has historically played in defining, subjugating, and “othering” colonial nations.⁵⁶

Her reference to Haiti as the “final stand” and the “real study” also points to these links between military and ethnographic intervention, and also provides a clue that the genuine or “real” work she does there challenges and enlightens her, as she is not able to “pass lightly” over this region, and must return, like others before her, for a final lesson. Dunham thus introduces her dual positionality from the outset of her narrative—as a student and cultural stranger, who must come armed with legitimizing “papers,” but also as a US traveler aware of the colonial power conferred by nationality.

The precarity of her position as insider-outsider is also further complicated by the politics of gender and skin color. As a young woman traveling on her own, her authenticity and expertise must be validated by men and institutions, despite the fact that she is already a learned scholar and professional in her own right. However, as a light-skinned African American woman, she is also granted a special privilege that ethnographers like Herskovits or Boas could never enjoy. For Dunham is welcomed, first by the Accompong Maroons in Jamaica and later by the Haitians, who are drawn to her strong resemblance to the “lost people of ‘Nan Guinée.’”⁵⁷ Her light skin also affords her the highest privileges in the caste hierarchy, from the hotel lobby to the floor of the *houngfor* (voodoo temple). As a result, Dunham can navigate both public and private spaces with a level of trust and authority not typically granted to outsiders. She can navigate between elite public circles and intimate ritual spaces with similar ease.⁵⁸ She can also cross racial lines much more easily “in the complexity of Caribbean color classifications,” as compared to the “clean-cut” dichotomy of US color politics. In Haiti, she could be “a mulatto” or “griffon,” as occasion warranted, or even a “noir,” perhaps “not exactly” in color, but in the “quality of belonging with or being at ease.” Most of the time, however, she is, and prefers to be, “an unplaceable” (4).

It is a tenuous performance on either side of this looking glass for Dunham, a duality she discusses candidly and elegantly in the backward glance that is *Island Possessed*, which was published nearly thirty years after her initial journey in 1965. In this hybrid narrative that moves, Dunham moves, like Hurston, between travelogue, ethnography, and political commentary. She also performs a bit of autoethnography, reflecting on her own experience as a student of Haiti and how she eventually came to find “a home” there. For she would eventually achieve the rank of high priestess and would also purchase Habitation Leclerc—once the home of Pauline Bonaparte Leclerc, sister of Napoleon and wife of General Charles Leclerc—in the late 1940s.⁵⁹ Dunham expresses this slow transformation and bond she develops with the Haitians, that is at once intimate and specific, as well as sweeping and historic. “I was beginning to feel at home with them,” she writes, “to sense the tie of kinship that

must hold together secret societies the world over. We were associated in things not common to all men.” But she connects the specificity of the secret ceremonial rites they share to a larger, more distant collective memory: “There we lay, scarcely breathing, waiting, listening, senses alert, packed like sardines much as the slaves who crossed the Atlantic, motionless as though chained, some of us afraid.”⁶⁰ From trauma to rebirth, the story of exile is transformed into a story of home—transgeographic yet intensely local.

But while Dunham did enjoy a privileged status and easy welcome in the communities she studied, she was not simply possessed by the deep transhistorical connections with her Haitian kin. She grappled, as both Hurston and Hughes did, with her professional position as an outsider. In another compelling reflection of her participation in the *lavé-tête* ritual (a Haitian rite of initiation into vodoun, in which she is wedded to one of the spirit gods, Damballa), Dunham writes of her inability to situate herself fully in either performative role—participant or scientist. As she recalls, “there must have been, I have since reflected with my jaded observer’s mind, drugs of some mild kind administered, incense and herbs burnt that added to the trance feeling that made me see with startling clarity the meaning of this marriage to Damballa, to someone outside the sphere of human acquaintance, the total acceptance without loss of self.” But then, she admits, “the sensation would leave me, and instead of feeling the god in possession of me, the calculating scientist would take over, and I would be making mental notes on clothing, social organization, speech habits, associated traits, and so forth” (105–6). While part of her wishes to legitimize and rationalize her “loss of self” during the ceremony by suggesting that there must have been a mild, herbally induced hallucination at play, she nevertheless admits that this is the editorial voice of the “jaded” scientist within her.

Dunham struggles with this “split in attitude,” even thirty years later, after she has achieved the ranking of high priestess in the community and has lived in Haiti for much of her life. She confesses that “when people ask me, as they do now, what of those mystic or occult experiences I believe in, or why I spend so much time in their search and research, I find myself answering as I did even as far back as those hounfords days, that I honestly do not know. I am there to believe or not believe, but willing to understand and to believe in the sincerity of other people in their beliefs, willing to be shown, to participate, and where the participant begins and the scientist ends, I surely could not say” (106).

This professional “double consciousness,” of course, is a familiar conflict for US African Americans after Du Bois had given voice to this sense of “twoness” that lives in the soul of US African Americans—part American, part black.⁶¹ This idea of double consciousness has a particular resonance for artist-ethnographers like Dunham, whose careers are devoted to the work of cultural translation, and who have to walk the line between professional observer and intimate participant, a liminality that is not unlike the conflict between national affiliation and cultural

belonging. Like the Haitians they met along their travels, US African Americans understood the delicacy of negotiating between national identity and racial identity, especially—as was the case in both Haiti and the United States—when race was a founding principle of national (re)formation.

Dunham, in fact, writes in *Island Possessed* of her discomfort with the evolving definition of “Négritude,” a word she fears has moved away from its original meaning of “unité pluraliste,” as Léopold Sédar Senghor had defined it, and now incites a different kind of fervor in French colonies, led by Aimé Césaire—a word that pleads humanism while “bordering on nationalism.”⁶² Dunham advocates, instead and once again, a consciousness of men that can (and must) cut across finite boundaries and alliances, performing through writing, dance, and ritual, a fluidity and relationality between peoples. “For myself,” she writes, “I insist upon the meaning of Négritude as the effort to create a community of men, who happen to be black but must belong to the world around, no matter what kind or color. It is a word I find to be redundant in most of its uses. Especially for English-speaking people it is hard not to feel undertones of nationalism and narcissism, and I do not admit to a spiritual or cultural poverty in black people which would make it necessary to coin a word or system of thinking of oneself outside the human division.”⁶³

As she matured as a traveler, scholar, and choreographer, and as she began what would become her lifelong commitment to the people of Haiti, Dunham proved herself to be one of the leading figures of anthropological study in Haiti during the 1930s and beyond, and a crucial player in the construction of a new transatlantic black consciousness.⁶⁴ But she did this perhaps most successfully through her dancing. As the first choreographer to establish her own predominantly black dance company, Dunham “developed a unique dance style that blended European patterns with African American and Caribbean vernacular forms” (124). Through her work on multiple stages, Dunham expresses the ways in which the ephemerality of embodied experience is crucial to understanding the modern transhistorical experience.⁶⁵ Dunham’s ethnographic performance became a living, moving document of Haitian history and culture, as well as a part of the larger collective memory of transnational black consciousness.

Dunham does this by placing herself in the role of cultural conduit and translator, and connecting her personal trajectory to a larger history, like the great mothers, for example, of both Africa and the New World. She writes of this as an epiphany that comes through the spiritual guidance she receives from the other experienced mambos (priestesses), like Téoline and Degrasse. In watching Téoline in one such initiation rite, Dunham explains that “at that moment more than any other before or afterward I appreciated the large, earth-mother benevolence of the authentic African woman, undefiled by colonialism, untouched by the inroads of Western civilization in her own country, and enriched by the experience of slavery in the New World.” But she then reclaims the place of the African mother in the New World, giving her a position of power that comes through endurance, protest, and

reconstitution. “In the New World,” writes Dunham, “this earth mother, instead of remaining in the background, has been given her just due, perhaps because she fought for it, perhaps because there was so often opportunity for her to prove a selflessness and courage that is not typical of the Africa that I know. Téoline restored my confidence in what I was doing and why. The cause became worthy of the deed.”⁶⁶ As a US African American woman, Dunham replaces Herskovits’s African cultural-survivalist rhetoric with the dynamic, shifting modernity of the Black Atlantic.

These rituals, she insists, carry a special weight in and for the transatlantic world, connecting diasporic communities who have lost their connection to nature and must intensify their belief in magic as an act of symbolic surrogacy. There is a pantheism that guides all the descendants of ‘Nan Guinée, suggests Dunham, through which they are able to make peace—through nature alone—with “the unknown and would-be unfathomable.” This, she explains, in necessarily graphic terms, “is the key to the symbology that we lack, because blood sacrifice is not just the slitting of a cock’s throat or winding warm entrails of a beef around one’s loins before going into the sea. We do these things,” she elaborates, “in Haiti and Africa and Brazil and among close-knit ethnic groups in New York because we don’t know what else to do, and when the law of averages brings us a return, we hasten to repeat our propitiatory act and double if necessary to be doubly safe with the gods; or, if an act of vengeance or violence, double it also to be double safe from our own fear” (72).

In hailing diasporic communities here, as elsewhere in the text, Dunham offers a reading that moves beyond the pathological configuration of double consciousness, and moves instead into a global understanding of cultural organization that surpasses national identity and a repressed African past. While artist-ethnographers like Dunham, Hurston, and Hughes indeed understood that “the problem of the twentieth century” was “the problem of the color line,”⁶⁷ they also used their wide-angle cultural lenses to reveal that the solution was embedded in the problem: the color line was central to the construction of the global, and as such, it was time to acknowledge the primacy of race in constructing and undoing these binaries of nation and people, slavery and freedom, homeland and diaspora.

VI

While Hurston and Dunham went to Haiti on ethnographic missions to examine and eventually destabilize essential truths about Haiti’s relationship to Africa and the US, Langston Hughes claims to have set sail for the “land of blue sea and green hills” in 1931 for an entirely different reason: “I went to Haiti,” he writes in his 1956 memoir *I Wonder as I Wander*, “to get away from my troubles.”⁶⁸

Seeking shelter from the US race problem in what he imagined would be the welcoming arms of the proud black republic, Hughes received instead a shocking firsthand glimpse at Haiti’s constitutional contradiction: that the Haitian nation,

“congealed around notions of liberty from slavery,” was launched in an opposite direction from the Haitian state, which had “inherited the social and economic institutions from colonial times, which required a regimented labor force.”⁶⁹ The Haiti that welcomed Hughes in April 1931, fifteen years into the US occupation, was indeed “a new world, a darker world,” but one in which “the white shadows” had encroached, transforming Haiti “into a sort of military dictatorship, backed by American guns.”⁷⁰ It had become “a fruit tree for Wall Street, a mango for the Occupation, coffee for foreign cups, and poverty for its own black workers and peasants.” All of the labor that kept Haiti alive and the foreign traders rich, lamented Hughes, was done by the “people without shoes.”⁷¹

Thus radicalized by his trip, Hughes wrote several brief but damning essays about the occupation on his return, in communist publications such as the *New Masses* and the NAACP’s *Crisis*. In “People without Shoes,” Hughes points to the hypocrisy of the Haitian and foreign elite, who exploit the local population and provide nothing in return—no schools, factories, or passable roads—while the “people without shoes” who “cannot read or write . . . live in thatched huts or rickety houses; rise with the sun; sleep with the dark.” Even after fifteen years of US occupation, he writes, “the need for economic reform is greater than ever.” Hughes also paints a vivid picture of how it is these “barefooted ones” who have been propping up Haiti’s economy for centuries: “because black hands have touched the earth, gathered in the fruits, and loaded the ships, somebody—across the class and color lines—many somebodies become richer and wiser, educate their children to read and write, travel to be ambitious, to be superior, to create armies, and to build banks. Somebody wears coats and shoes” (12).

Hughes’s narration is an exemplary instance of diffraction—of Haiti’s contribution to the global economy and construction of the modern world. Hughes comes back from Haiti emboldened, in part, by his own communist ideology, which linked these struggles, as Jonathan Scott has pointed out, to others around the world, from the European fight against fascism, to the larger independence movements in Latin America and the Caribbean, to the struggle for socialism in Russia, and the ongoing battle at home in the United States “for the overthrow of white racial oppression.” All of these together created for Hughes an “international common ground from which new concepts of writing and politics could be advanced and popularized.”⁷² The imprint of the black hands of Haiti, in Hughes’s vision, could be seen in all of these struggles, could be said to span every corner of the modern West. It is with this broad vision of the “people without shoes” in mind that Hughes set out, with Arna Bontemps, to write a children’s book about Haiti, *Popo and Fifina*, in 1932.

In this tender novella, there is a critical shift in Hughes’s writing: gone is the radical attack on the US occupation, the anger at Haitian leadership, the outrage over poverty and class hierarchies. Instead, explains Arnold Rampersad, “Hughes and Bontemps concentrate on showing the simple, ordered, industrious, resourceful lives

of the typical Haitian poor,” in a “a gentle, episodic narrative . . . of the customs and traditions of the Haitian masses.”⁷³ The relocation of a peasant family from a rural village to Port-au-Prince is told from the perspective of a young boy who, despite his poverty, is “proud to be going to town to live by the ocean and see new wonders.”⁷⁴ He walks to work “like a man” (78); he visits the Citadel with his Uncle Jacques, who tells him the story of the slaves’ revolt against the French, and is amazed by the view of “the great Atlantic”—an ocean that no longer terrifies but incites wonder and hope in his young eyes (92).

Even in his 1956 memoir, *I Wonder as I Wander*, Hughes excises his political opinions and makes no mention of the essays he wrote about his travels. Like Hurston, he emphasizes his encounters with people and lets the critique—however gentle—come from their stories. However, as Rampersad attests, “to some observers, this approach amounted to an evasion of what they saw as the intellectual’s primary responsibility to analyze, historicize, categorize, and—where necessary—to condemn.” As one reviewer noted, it seemed, from the sanitized account of his travels, that Hughes had done “more wandering than wondering.”⁷⁵

What motivated these silences in Hughes, as other writers of the Harlem Renaissance, like James Weldon Johnson (in his capacity as NAACP secretary in the 1920s), continued to speak out and write strong political tracts about Haiti?⁷⁶ Some have speculated that perhaps it was a particular Hughes strategy, in his work, as in his life, to be “always movin’ on,” as James Haskin has put it. “His creative method,” explains Jonathan Scott, “was always ranging across racially segregated worlds of art and literature,” always seeking to create “new, popular-democratic forms of American art and literature.”⁷⁷ Indeed, his earlier writings do reveal that Hughes initially participated in this shift in US African American discourse on Haiti, from a 1920s emphasis on the portraits of figures like Louverture and Christophe, to a Depression-era focus on “demands for rights and respect from whites.”⁷⁸ Haiti, as a vehicle through which US African Americans could voice their own concerns about racial inequalities and failed promises of progress and uplift, was a cause that called for movement and clamor, not static resignation and silence.

In part, what Hughes saw amid this clamor was obfuscation—the voices of the Haitian people were lost in the overpoliticization that increasingly became more about US African American issues, or a broader critique of US imperialism, or discussions about Haiti’s national future that were mired in the same discursive paternalism from which they sought to rescue it. As a poet who understood the power of brevity and simplicity of language, Hughes sought instead—in both his fiction and his memoirs—to engage in something more intimate, namely “his almost compulsive desire to enter into the lives of the common people.” Hughes chose to write directly from the position of the “low-down folks,” and not the “talented tenth,” and as a result, achieved his goal of producing “racial art” that fused the traditions of Haitian *indigenisme*, Francophone *Négritude*, and the emerging black arts movement in Harlem.⁷⁹ Also, like Hurston’s provocative narrative skills, Hughes’s

acumen lay in his ability to negotiate tragedy and humor, and to play with the “tensions between truth and design.”⁸⁰

But the shift in Hughes’s writing about Haiti that most interests me, and that brings this discussion full circle in its larger concerns with ethnographic performance, is Hughes’s theatrical staging of Haiti’s birth into nationhood, compressed into the tale of a single revolt, but encompassing many historical and contemporary issues of the peasant class into the oft-rendered foundational myth of Haiti. In his 1936 *Emperor of Haiti* (first conceived as a “singing play” in the 1920s but not performed as an opera until 1949, with the title *Troubled Island*), Hughes surprisingly manages to convey the “processual” nature of Haitian history.⁸¹

Although Dessalines is credited with leading the revolutionary charge in Hughes’s rendition—while Boukman, Louverture, and Christophe remain in the shadows as important leaders—his character is clearly a composite of all three, as he leads the ceremony at Bois Caïman in Act I (as Boukman had), discusses a lofty vision for Haiti in Act II (as Louverture had), and leaves the palace after a display of great pageantry just before the start of Act III (a trademark of Christophe). Unlike Eugene O’Neill’s composite sketch in *The Emperor Jones*, in which a fictional character takes liberties with a specific moment in Haitian history, Hughes’s Dessalines represents the processual nature of a large swath of Haitian history. In this sense, Hughes’s Dessalines is not quite a composite “figure” but a simultaneously prescient and reminiscent *being*—history in motion, more *personhood* than *person*.

For example, as Dessalines addresses the slave council in Act I, informing them of the coming revolution, he proclaims, “In the hills, we’ll meet our fellow slaves from the coast, the slaves from the west and all the leaders, Boukman will be there, Christophe, and Toussaint. . . . There on the mountain top we’ll sacrifice a goat to Legba. We’ll dance obeah. We’ll make powder and bullets, and gather strength until the time is ripe for us to come down to the coast to seize the ports, and claim all Haiti as our own. Then we’ll be free!”⁸² In this grand address, Dessalines not only names those who *actually* led the charge, not only links African and Judeo-Christian religious rituals, but also interpellates “Haiti” before it has even been so named. In this sense, the pronouncement, like the figure of Dessalines himself, is both a forward march to revolution and a backward glance at nationhood realized.

And yet Hughes’s constant references throughout the play to Dessalines’s years in Africa, and to the scars of French terror written on his back, remind his audience that the will to nationhood is not an amnesiac will, and that the history of Haiti branches outward, connecting to many other nations and histories, within and through individual bodies and connections. This is evident in the final scene of the play, as the fishermen and peasants who come upon Dessalines’s corpse note that “he musta been a slave once—from the looks of his back,” to which his first (slave) wife, Azelia, now a fruit vendor known as Défilée, closes the play in reply, “He was a slave once. . . . Then a King!” (332).

Azelia's position in the play is vital and also reflects the historical record, as Dessalines's corpse was, according to official accounts, tended to by "an old peasant woman" named Défilée.⁸³ Hughes gives her a significant prior role as the former wife of Dessalines. Historically, she was Dédée Bazile, a young woman who traveled as a *vivandière*, or sutler, with Dessalines and his troops, peddling provisions to the soldiers.⁸⁴

After Dessalines's death, Défilée became, as Joan (Colin) Dayan and others have explained, "the embodiment of the Haitian nation: crazed and lost, but then redeemed through the body of their savior." Her lamentation at Dessalines's body "converts a sudden gruesome act into a long history of penitential devotion."⁸⁵

Hughes also gives this woman a prominent place in the life of Dessalines the slave, but a more honorable and visible one: as the wife who stands by him as he prepares to lead the revolution. She unknowingly prophesies, on the night of the Bois Caïman ceremony, that "freedom'll take you from me."⁸⁶ By Act II, she has, of course, been exiled from his palace for her illiteracy (for "How could I have an empress that can't read or write?" exclaims now-Emperor Dessalines [303]). Proudly refusing his offer of a pension, Azelia becomes a destitute fruit vendor in a coastal village. She is now one of the "people without shoes," invisible to those who are meant to represent her.

By closing the scene with Azelia/Défilée, tending to the mutilated body of this figure—this amalgamation of Haiti's history of past glory and present deterioration—Hughes relays the powerful message that the future of Haiti lies not in the wielding of swords or titles but in the opening of these hands who "have touched the earth, gathered in the fruits, and loaded ships."⁸⁷ It is through this act of performance that Hughes is able to return to a *moving* critique of Haitian politics, avoiding the paternalism of official or scientific discourse, but filling silence with meaning, in the final, pregnant gesture of a peasant woman, leaning over the body of her former kin and king, removing her shawl and gently spreading it over his shoulders.

In other dramatic portrayals, Défilée takes the remains of the dismembered Dessalines to the city cemetery, to be buried by soldiers. Although Hughes leaves this scene out of his own play, Défilée's act of covering Dessalines with her shawl can still be read as a ritual gesture of "reciprocal salvation" in which both the dismembered leader and unhinged woman are made whole through her act of salvaging his bones and giving him, in this case, a symbolic burial.⁸⁸

Défilée's act has particular import within the context of burial rituals in Haitian culture. US ethnographer and filmmaker Maya Deren, among others, have described the West African roots of the ancestor cult in Haiti and the care taken to ensure that the dead are buried quickly and properly so that their remains may not be put to "magic and malevolent use" by sorcerers. Défilée's position thus becomes far more powerful than that of witness or devotee. "More like the ougan or manbo who prevents the dead from returning to life to harm the living," writes Dayan, Défilée "transposes apparently contradictory traditions with fluent and convincing ease: the

penitent devotee turns into the wise diviner, and the fear of stunted burial is joined to the promise of glorious resurrection” (45).

One might argue that Hughes stops short of this promise by leaving his audience with a sense of uncertainty about the final resting place of Dessalines. But one might also counter that Hughes is moving away from both the West African as well as the Christian implications of this tradition of proper burial, and providing a more syncretic vision, of a mambo with healing powers who is empowered and entrusted to tend to her hero, her nation, and her history in accordance with (and in full possession of) her own divine authority. She does not authorize any further surveillance, and so the curtain closes with her final, powerful gesture. The Haitian story is left in the hands of a woman, as it began, that fateful evening in August 1791, with the priest Boukman and the mambo, Cécile Fatiman, who is said to have led the charge.⁸⁹

VII

In the interventions I have discussed, Haiti becomes—either through or in spite of the varied political, scientific, and literary drives that guide them—a shifting repository for *other* kinds of histories, and repressed desires that move beyond its borders. Whether in Hurston’s veiled critique of the US presence, in Dunham’s conflicting thoughts on the hounsfloor, or in Hughes’s retelling of Haiti’s foundational myth, these narrations, too, become shifting presences in Haiti, “moving, transient roots” of the people they attempt to represent in their scientific, political, and artistic renderings.⁹⁰

But unlike the conquering presences who came before, the circulation of these ethnographic performances offers not a subtraction but an accretion, not captivity but mobility. For they show that, in a variation and extension of Glissant’s idea of national consciousness, “theatre is the act which allows a collective consciousness to see itself, and consequently to move forward.” “Il n’y a pas de théâtre,” writes Glissant, “sans nation.” There is no theatre without nation.⁹¹ The lived experience of a nation’s people, its collective unconscious, or its folklore, explains Glissant, is passed on through the conscious reflection that is theatre. The collective unconscious, as J. Michael Dash translates, is transformed into collective consciousness. What I have tried to propose, by providing a window into Haitian culture and folklore through the theatrical lenses and performative stagings of Haiti’s US siblings, is a broader diasporic nationalism—portable and proliferating—deliberately splintered from a Western trajectory, and tied more accurately to action and flux than to space or situatedness. Such depictions move the ethnographic lens from its complicit role in a “predatory transnationalism,” as Kevin Meehan has described neocolonial acts of domination like the US occupation of Haiti, toward a more accurate depiction of Haiti’s contribution to a “dissident transnationalism.”⁹²

Artist-ethnographers like Hurston, Dunham, and Hughes were certainly not the first to experience or write about the perpetual flux of dissident transnationalism, but they may have been among the first to mobilize it as they did in the field of American ethnography. Their stagings mapped the seemingly impossible: the ever-shifting terrain of cultural migration and transmission in the Atlantic, one that was routed from Africa, reconstructed in the New World, but rooted only in movement and change. As New World kin, they also embodied and performed their resistance to the neocolonial history of the profession by wielding their tools of inquiry as political weapons. They used their narratives, in part, to combat a false rhetoric of failed nationalism that had reduced the global complexity of Haitian history to a simple story of African rebellion and European rescue.

Their ethnographic work, instead, concentrated on the ways in which Haiti's reach extends beyond its *terre mere* and into the proliferating sea, and whose influence is felt *everywhere* the Caribbean meta-archipelago has reached. For, as Benítez-Rojo has poetically expressed, "the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own sea with a vengeance."⁹³ What these ethnographers attempted to show, in their various depictions, performances, and personal experiences, is that Haiti is, as the utterance of its very name performs, a space of continuous relation between the indigenous and the foreign. Unlike other western nations, in which "movement becomes fixed and nations declare themselves in preparation for their repercussions in the world," Haiti both struggles and thrives because of its constitutional and cultural resistance to such fixity.⁹⁴

It is through such constitutional acts of resistance and intercultural performance as are foundational to Haiti that one can find, as Joseph Roach has discussed, "an alternative historical narrative of American literature and culture, one more resistant to the polarizing reductions of manifest destiny and less susceptible to the temptations of amnesia."⁹⁵ Writers like Hurston, Dunham, and Hughes tap into this "performance genealogy" of Haiti—of a collective consciousness that is pieced together through "movements made and remembered by bodies" and "imaginary movements dreamed in minds" (26)—in part because their own histories reflect a similar "map of diasporic diffusions" (30), and because they, too, are eager to offer an alternative vision of the Haitian nation, one whose dynamic, multilateral nature is in deliberate opposition to the other nations of the West whose prosperity it constructed.

It is through these ethnographic stagings, I believe, that these writers were part of an avant-garde circum-Atlantic group who were poised to take back "archival power" from the West, making its once-*unthinkable* past part of an irrepressible future—one that reaches and connects all persons in "a discontinuous conjunction . . . [of] unstable condensations, turbulences, . . . sunken galleons, . . . seagull squawks, . . . [and] uncertain voyages of signification."⁹⁶

Notes

¹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 100.

² *Ibid.*, 99–100. See also Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 141.

³ Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti*, 137.

⁴ William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929), 277.

⁵ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941; repr., Boston: Beacon, 1990), 297.

⁶ Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Haiti” (1893), in *Haiti: A Slave Revolution: 200 Years after 1804*, ed. Pat Chin et al. (New York: International Action Center, 2004), 78.

⁷ Quoted in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 278.

⁸ Douglass, “Lecture on Haiti,” 83.

⁹ Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 13.

¹⁰ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21–25, especially their discussion of the rhizome as a kind of “interbeing” without beginning or end.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of Glissant and Benítez-Rojo, see J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998). Dash eloquently explains here that, through an examination that resists both the “homogenizing universalism” of the European story and the “polarizing alterity” of the African story, Glissant is able to offer “a new definition of the Caribbean that not only locates it squarely in its hemispheric context but also projects the truth of a culture marked by a creolizing incompleteness” (14). With regard to Haiti’s interpellation as a terrestrial culture, Dash also discusses here the tropes of the “mother land” and the ideal of national belonging as an organic, authentic sentiment rooted in nature, as tropes and ideals also drawn from European and American traditions of romanticism and transcendentalism. As Dash writes, “nature is used poetically because in it are perceived the harmonies, the coherence, the organicism that provided a model for the state itself” (48). See also Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. James Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 2; and Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999).

¹² Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti*, 138.

¹³ Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 11.

¹⁴ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 33–34.

¹⁵ Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 16.

¹⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot explains that

the problem with concepts of the nation that emphasize a specific cultural feature, such as language or a belief in a common ancestry, is not their emphasis on culture-history as such but the search for a cultural feature that would repeat itself *mutatis mutandis* in each and every situation. In other words, “nation” has no fixed cultural content—and that is what makes its cross-cultural conceptualization a difficult one. But in a fundamental way, “nation” has everything to do with culture, for culture and history are its sole constant referents. Claims of nationhood always imply a reference to some past and to the cultural present eventuating from that past. This reference is always a fiction, but only to the extent that all cultural constructs are somewhat fictitious. Cultural constructs always privilege some human-made relationships and features. In that sense, nation is a fiction, as are race, color categories, and descent. And indeed, the features invoked to claim nationhood are as varied as those we manipulate to justify racial distinctions, ethnic boundaries, and color or descent lines.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 24.

¹⁷ See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1988); Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (2002): 145–56; Norman K. Denzin, *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003); and Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

¹⁸ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 22.

¹⁹ For all forms of embodied practice, from gender and ethnicity to nationality and sexual identity, are, as Diana Taylor has noted, “rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere” (Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 3–4).

²⁰ Gérarde Magloire and Kevin A. Yelvington, “Haiti and the Anthropological Imagination,” *Gradhiva*, no. 1 (2005), <http://gradhiva.revues.org/335>.

²¹ For a discussion of the discourse of Haitian exceptionalism, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean, and the World,” *Cimarrón* 2, no. 3 (1990): 3–12.

²² Tavia Nyong’o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 13.

²³ As historian Brenda Plummer explains, scholars like J. Michael Dash have written extensively about the special relationship between Haitian and US African American intellectuals from the start of the US occupation in 1915 through the World War II era. “These intellectual communities shared an interest in African cultures of the diaspora and in race relations,” she explains. “In some respects, acts of recognition or friendship toward black Americans constituted an oblique rebuke to Washington.” The writings of US African Americans also “increased Haiti’s visibility in the United States and introduced it to a wider audience” (Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 130). See also J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988).

²⁴ See Kevin Meehan, *People Get Ready: African American and Caribbean Cultural Exchange* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 12.

²⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 48.

²⁶ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xi, 4. See also Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982); and Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 3–4.

²⁷ Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 30.

²⁸ Trouillot, *Haiti*, 44–45.

²⁹ Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

³⁰ Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 140.

³¹ Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 36.

³² Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 42. Also, as Brenda Plummer elaborates, “Herein lay the source of the conflict between urbanites on the one hand, and those with roots in an indigenous, particularistic Haiti, on the other. The dynamic tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism contributed to political unrest and helped precipitate the twenty-year U.S. occupation that began in 1915” (Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 69).

³³ Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l’oncle: Essais d’ethnographie* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de Compiègne, 1928).

³⁴ See Orvar Löfgren, “The Nationalization of Culture,” *Ethnologia Europaea* 19, no. 1 (1989): 5–24. Quoted in Magloire and Yelvington, “Haiti and the Anthropological Imagination.”

³⁵ See Magloire and Yelvington’s discussion of Price-Mars’s visit to the United States:

And finally, in 1904 he was appointed by the president of Haiti as one of the Haitian representatives to the Louisiana Purchase Centennial Exposition in St Louis, Missouri, in the United States. There he stayed in a segregated hotel, and at the exhibition was ridiculed by a group of Filipino tribesmen who were being displayed in an enclosure. From St Louis, he wrote to Booker T. Washington, whom he had met in Paris the previous year, and asked to visit the Tuskegee Institute. This is the first time he signed his name Price-Mars, to signal the unity of mulatto and black in the Haitian nation. He traveled to Tuskegee in Alabama through the Deep South, alone, in order to experience and observe the ignominies of US-style racism (Shannon 1996: 19–20). His American experience, coupled with his discovery of the intellectual and artistic production of American blacks, led Price-Mars to inform Haitians and to urge them to follow the lead of the African American artists of the Harlem Renaissance. (Magloire and Yelvington, “Haiti and the Anthropological Imagination”)

See also Magdaline W. Shannon, *Jean Price-Mars, the Haitian Elite and the American Occupation, 1915–1935* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Jean Price-Mars, “À propos de la ‘Renaissance Nègre’ aux États-Unis,” Partie 1, *La Relève* 1, no. 1 (1932): 14–20; Jean Price-Mars, “À propos de la ‘Renaissance Nègre’ aux États-Unis,” Partie 2, *La Relève* 1, no. 2 (1932): 9–15; and Jean Price-Mars, “À propos de la ‘Renaissance Nègre’ aux États-Unis,” Partie 3, *La Relève* 1, no. 3 (1932): 8–14.

³⁶ Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* (1956; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 15, 3.

³⁷ See Hazel V. Carby, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston," in *Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 117–36; John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 280; and Annette Trefzer, "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*," *African American Review* 34, no. 2 (2000): 299–312. See also Dash, *Haiti and the United States*, 58–60.

³⁸ Kate Ramsey, "Without One Ritual Note: Folklore Performance and the Haitian State, 1935–1946," *Radical History Review*, no. 84 (2002): 32, 8.

³⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 13. See also George Eaton Simpson, "The Belief System of Haitian Vodun," *American Anthropologist* 47, no. 1 (1945): 58.

⁴⁰ See Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective," *Signs* 15, no. 1 (1989): 7–33; and Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, eds., *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Meehan, *People Get Ready*, 19.

⁴² Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 88.

⁴³ Michael A. Elliott, *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 171.

⁴⁴ Katherine Henninger, "Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and the Postcolonial Gaze," *Mississippi Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2003): 591.

⁴⁵ See Sandra Dolby-Stahl, "Literary Objectives: Hurston's Use of Personal Narrative in *Mules and Men*," *Western Folklore* 51, no. 1 (1992): 56; Rosemary V. Hathaway, "The Unbearable Weight of Authenticity: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and a Theory of 'Touristic Reading,'" *Journal of American Folklore* 117, no. 464 (2004): 168–90; and Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Meehan, *People Get Ready*, 81. See also Leigh Anne Duck, "'Rebirth of a Nation': Hurston in Haiti," *Journal of American Folklore* 117, no. 464 (2004): 127–46; and D. W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915; St. Laurent, Quebec: Madacy Entertainment, 2002), DVD.

⁴⁷ Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938; repr., New York: Perennial Library, 1990), 82.

⁴⁸ Meehan, *People Get Ready*, 85.

⁴⁹ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 65.

⁵⁰ Vilbrun Sam had, perhaps reluctantly, been in the pockets of the US government from the start of his brief reign. He seized power in February 1915 and helped to strengthen US commercial and strategic dominance of the region, much to the chagrin of the Haitian people and Cacos-led politician Dr. Rosalvo Bobo. For a basic but sustained discussion of Haitian history, see Michael R. Hall, *Historical Dictionary of Haiti*, Historical Dictionaries of the Americas (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012). See also Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 210.

⁵¹ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 67.

⁵² See *ibid.*, 86. See also Brenda Gayle Plummer, “The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934,” *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (1982): 125–43; Herbert J. Seligman, “The Conquest of Haiti,” *Nation* 111, July 10, 1920, 35–36; and James Weldon Johnson, “The Truth about Haiti: An N.A.A.C.P. Investigation,” *Crisis*, September 1920, 217–24.

⁵³ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 81.

⁵⁴ In examining Hurston’s complicated architecture of historical fact and ethnographic fable, we might also wonder, as others have, whether Hurston, writing in the 1930s, is reclaiming the category of the *primitive* from its modernist interpretation, or whether she is complicit in perpetuating it. It is, I believe, through her unique style of truth-telling—once again, a twist on the cultural performance of *lying*—that Hurston’s portrayals are redeemed. Patricia Chu argues that the “contrast between ‘lies’ and ‘historical documents’ serves to outline the process by which ‘all the citizens’ come to assert a national narrative; this process creates them as subjects of history.” But by choosing to let the so-called primitives—whether in her ethnographies or in her fiction—tell their story “the way the people tell it,” instead of as a recorded historical fact, Hurston represents “the ethnographical ‘primitive,’” says Chu, as “functionally antistate.” She thus “locates authenticity, or nativeness, as emerging from a hyperawareness of modernity,” which allows her to challenge it from *inside* the felt life of the “primitive” subject. Patricia E. Chu, “Modernist (Pre)Occupations: Haiti, Primitivism, and Anticolonial Nationalism,” in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 183, see also 170–83.

⁵⁵ Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (1969; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 65.

⁵⁶ Hannah Durkin, “Dance Anthropology and the Impact of 1930s Haiti on Katherine Dunham’s Scientific and Artistic Consciousness,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14, nos. 1–2 (2011): 132.

⁵⁷ See Joyce Aschenbrenner, *Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 62.

⁵⁸ It is worth noting, however, that Dunham was sympathetic to the human labor that worked to make her travel and research easier, as she writes after departing early from a funereal ritual: “My guide squatted and managed to turn his back to the wind and light a pipe. He sat over the lantern, looking into space, until I had the strength to continue. He was about twenty years old, black, friendly looking and by that time, I decided, extremely patient. He had been taken away from an occasion which might not happen again in many years, if at all. Bocors of really high category were dying out and there were few candidates for replacement. The old man who lay dead might have been a relative of his. There was feasting and dancing besides praying and magic séances, and here he sat in the downpour of rain waiting for a foreign young woman to collect herself and find strength to continue the road. Then he would have to return immediately the long way and it would be full morning. To me it didn’t make sense. I resolved to find ways of field research that didn’t demand such services of others as I had exacted that night” (Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 39).

⁵⁹ As scholar Hannah Durkin elaborates, Dunham “unlike her colonial predecessor . . . used her home as a medical facility.” She remained “a lifelong campaigner for Haitian rights,” and “in 1992, at the age of 82, she embarked on a 47-day hunger strike to protest against the injustices of the forced repatriation by the United States of Haitian refugees who were fleeing the military coup that overthrew Aristide” (Durkin, “Dance Anthropology,” 132).

⁶⁰ Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 79.

⁶¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 11.

⁶² Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 4, 46. See also Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté 1: Négritude et humanisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964); and Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (1947; repr., Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

⁶³ Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 4–5.

⁶⁴ Durkin, “Dance Anthropology,” 124.

⁶⁵ Diana Taylor uses the ephemeral to describe the rift between “the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 19, emphasis original).

⁶⁶ Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 128.

⁶⁷ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 17.

⁶⁸ Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 15, 3.

⁶⁹ Trouillot, *Haiti*, 40. Quoted in Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 269.

- ⁷⁰ Langston Hughes, "White Shadows in a Black Land," *Crisis* 39, May 1932, 157.
- ⁷¹ Langston Hughes, "People without Shoes," *New Masses* 12, October 1931, 12.
- ⁷² Jonathan Scott, *Socialist Joy in the Writing of Langston Hughes* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 3.
- ⁷³ Arnold Rampersad, "Afterword," in *Popo and Fifina*, by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes (1932; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 107–9.
- ⁷⁴ Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 3.
- ⁷⁵ Arnold Rampersad, introduction to Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, xix.
- ⁷⁶ James Weldon Johnson criticizes the impact of the US occupation and discusses the social and economic issues of the Haitian people in his 1920 series "Self-Determining Haiti," in the *Crisis*. For further discussion of Johnson's series and political work, see Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 19. See also Kevin Meehan, "Decolonizing Ethnography: Zora Neale Hurston in the Caribbean," in *Women at Sea: Travel Writing and the Margins of Caribbean Discourse*, ed. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Ivette Romero-Cesareo (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 250.
- ⁷⁷ Scott, *Socialist Joy*, 7.
- ⁷⁸ Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 288.
- ⁷⁹ Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *Nation*, June 23, 1926, 692–94. See also Russell White, "'Drums are not for Gentlemen': Class and Race in Langston Hughes' Haitian Encounter," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14, nos. 1–2 (2011): 112. Kate Ramsey also writes of the rise of *indigenisme* following the end of the US occupation in August 1934. The seemingly contradictory confluence of "imperial myths of peasant ritualism" and the power of Haitian popular culture as "the matrix for Haitian national identity" was building among young urban intellectuals during the occupation years, and eventually gave birth to Haitian *indigenisme*. Leaders of this movement emphasized the importance of literary and ethnological representation in shaping the nation, and used popular culture to break from the past and construct a new national literature (Ramsey, "Without One Ritual Note," 8).
- ⁸⁰ Rampersad, introduction, xv–xvii.
- ⁸¹ I borrow this term from Michel-Rolph Trouillot, with reference to Columbus's landing(s) in the Americas. Since the varied events leading to European settlement in the Americas have been collapsed into a *singular* event, explains Trouillot, "the Discovery has lost its processual character. It has become a single and simple moment." Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 113.

⁸² Langston Hughes, “Emperor of Haiti (Troubled Island)” (1936), in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 5, *The Plays to 1942: Mulatto to The Sun Do Move*, ed. Leslie Catherine Sanders, with Nancy Johnston (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 296.

⁸³ Leslie Catherine Sanders, with Nancy Johnston, introduction to Hughes, *Collected Works*, 278.

⁸⁴ Joan (Colin) Dayan provides a more contemporary history of Défilée, as archived by Ertha Pascal-Trouillot, one of Haiti’s many acting presidents after the departure of Baby Doc Duvalier in 1986, and the first woman to hold this office. Pascal-Trouillot, in her “Bibliographie Féminine, Epoque Coloniale de XIXe Siècle,” writes that Défilée’s real name is given as Dédée Bazile, and “she had a wild passion for Dessalines that exacerbated the mental troubles caused by the slaughter of her parents by French soldiers.” According to this version, then, as Dayan explains, Dédée “was not simply a marketwoman or meat vendor, who followed the Haitian Revolutionary Army as it marched (hence her name Défilée, meaning parade or procession), but, unstrung by the loss of her parents and her love for Dessalines, she supplied the soldiers with sex.” Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 44.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 40–42. Dramatists continued to give Défilée a prominent role in their various stagings of the Haitian story. Historian and dramatist Hénock Trouillot, for example, in his 1967 *Dessalines ou le sang du Pont-Rouge* creates a Défilée who addresses her people with shame and rage: “What the French could not accomplish, have they really done it, these monsters? . . . What will they say about us, tomorrow? . . . The blood of the black Christ! The blood of the Emperor!” (quoted in *ibid.*, 41). Other versions include Massillon Coicou’s *L’Empereur Dessalines* (1906), as well as earlier discussions of Défilée in the historical writings Thomas Madiou’s *Histoire d’Haiti* (1847) and Beaubrun Ardouin’s *Études sur l’histoire d’Haiti* (1865).

⁸⁶ Hughes, “Emperor of Haiti,” 286.

⁸⁷ Hughes, “People without Shoes,” 12.

⁸⁸ Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, 42.

⁸⁹ Dayan asks readers to consider more carefully the folkloricization of the female figures of Haitian history, asking, “What does the conjunction of hero and madwoman tell us about Haitian history?” (46). What kinds of symbols are required to construct a “‘national’ literature,” and why have the “actual black women” been “metaphorized out of life into legend?” (48). While Boukman is the legendary figure remembered for leading the ceremony of Bois Caïman, it is important to remember that it was, in fact, “the black manbo” who began the attack.

⁹⁰ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 14.

⁹¹ Édouard Glissant, “Théâtre, conscience du peuple,” *Acoma* 2 (July 1971): 42. Quoted in J. Michael Dash, *Édouard Glissant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 100.

⁹² Meehan, *People Get Ready*, 88.

⁹³ Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 4.

⁹⁴ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 14.

⁹⁵ Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 189.

⁹⁶ Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 2. Trouillot discusses the silencing impact of archival power, which can “define what and what is not a serious object of research, and therefore, of mention” (Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 99). Benítez-Rojo lists these items as part of “a field of observation quite in tune with the objectives of Chaos,” in which Chaos is defined to mean that, “within the (dis)order that swarms around what we already know of as Nature, it is possible to observe dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 2).

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