Miami Money and the Home Gal

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SUMMARY  Since the massive labor migrations of young adults from Haiti to North America and beyond that began more than two decades ago, protracted separation of husbands from wives and parents from children has caused severe hardship to the women left behind, especially to the mothers of young children. They suffer under the severity of the cultural commitment to patriarchy, yet they require for their survival their own economic autonomy. This article shows these contradictions as they are worked through in a dramatic event involving infidelity in a Haitian family compound.

Eloquence and wit are practical strategies of poor Haitian women. Verbal adroitness can be an especially effective tactic in the volatile arena of conjugal politics, which are charged with contradictory cultural commitments to patriarchy, women's economic autonomy, and matricentric kinship. Since the massive labor migrations of young adults to North America and beyond, which began more than two decades ago, protracted separation of husbands from wives and parents from children has been added to this complex conjugal brew. The setting for these sexual contests is now a vast transnational space, and the medium for transmitting oratory is often a cassette tape.

A long-distance confrontation between an articulate and beautiful Haitian "home gal" named Simone and her handsome, migrant "Miami" husband, Jean, is the subject of this discussion. Simone was caught in a purgatory felt by too many young wives of male migrants, dependent on a man who did not send enough money to support her and their children but who nevertheless demanded his wife's "respect" (sexual fidelity) for the length of his migration. Simone failed to give him his respect and became pregnant with a child fathered by another home man. Jean sent a cassette letter threatening to take their other children and place them with his maternal kin. When Simone, contrite, went to Jean's home relatives to receive their final damnation, Jean's aunt—a woman well respected for her thunderous eloquence—intervened. Jean's aunt used her loud theatrics to subtly undermine the family's project. She salvaged Simone's honor and, more subtly, Jean's reputation as well.

The Ti Rivyè Transnational Community

Long-term separation besets most Haitian families. It is one of the untoward costs that the mobile society pays for its harsh incorporation in the world economic system. About one out of every five Haitians is a transnational migrant, and close kin are commonly scattered across two or three national boundaries. Despite their settlement abroad, most Haitian migrants do not fully assimilate to the societies in which they sell their labor. For, like other workers whose movements have followed and reinforced the transnational redistribution of capital during the late 20th century, Haitian transmigrants and their families back home actively intervene in one another's lives across a dispersed but unitary social field (Basch et al. 1994).
The transnational community discussed here is anchored in Ti Rivyè (Petite Rivière), a coastal hamlet in the Plain of Léogane, Haiti. Though this impoverished, quasi-peasant economy involves fishing, farming (mainly sugar cane), and food commerce, its main activity seems to be producing low-cost labor for export, consuming migrants’ wage remittances, and reabsorbing the migrant workers when they are spent (or deported). Migration is so thoroughly normalized that children expect one day to grow up to leave, as it is said, “in search of a livelihood for their (extended) family” (chache lavi pou fanmi yo). Mundane references to members located “outside” (deyd) and “over there” (lot bo a) further naturalize the reality of dispersal, particularly to South Florida. Though people from Ti Rivyè are spread across Haiti, the Caribbean, North America, and France, the vast majority of expatriate members live in Palm Beach, Broward, and St. Lucie Counties, Florida. Mayami (Miami) is the term they use for this location, and they often refer to the nation-state as “the country of Miami” (peyi Mayami). The imagined northern boundary of Mayami is New York, the other key destination point for Haitian migrants to the United States.

The majority of the emigrants from Ti Rivyè sailed to Miami between 1979 and 1982 in their own tiny, motorless fishing boats. They primarily found work as migratory farm laborers in Florida and along the southern and middle East Coast. Most moved out of the poorly paid and dangerous labor as soon as they could. Some were pushed out by the agriculture industry itself, in retaliation for successful lawsuits filed against growers during the 1980s. They now work in the lower levels of the burgeoning industries of tourism, service, and health care (hotels, restaurants, theme parks, landscaping, construction, transportation, cleaning, and nursing homes). Meanwhile, the former “boat” migrants continue to sponsor the migrations of their family members, who arrive from Haiti by airplane with legal or quasi-legal visas in hand.

The residential concentration of the Ti Rivyè migrants is an important aspect of their continued involvement with one another and with their home. A personalized, efficient, and entirely unregulated “parcel service” links them intimately with their home community. Independent entrepreneurs from the village specialize in the business of “coming and going.” Many also serve their community as “travel agents.” Members of the transnational Ti Rivyè community have long entrusted their money, correspondence, information, and gifts to a man who travels biweekly between the village and the Palm Beach and Broward Counties.

Communication Aesthetics and Cassette Correspondence

For poor Haitian families struggling to keep one another afloat in the changing currents of transnational capital, one device has provided a particularly vital linkage: the portable radio and cassette recorder. For most Haitians, whose domination has long been reproduced by illiteracy in French, the colonial language, cassettes offer a way to “write” in their own beloved vernacular, Creole (Kreyòl). But even if they were literate, the tapes are far more congenial for extending their emphatically oral Creole aesthetic, one that prizes proverbs, figurative language, indirection, antiphony, and the fluid shifting between speech and song. Corresponding by cassette has become so normalized that the term “to write (a letter)” (ekri) signifies recording a cassette rather than the epistolary form.

Moreover, there is now a distinctive genre of cassette correspondence including formulaic greetings, salutations, routines for posing questions to a range of listeners, and patterns for talking about accompanying or forthcoming remittances, even patterned ways of interacting with the “writer’s” voice while listening.
to his or her tape. Both recording and listening to a cassette-letter are "performance events" (Bauman 1984). The tape is often communally produced. Likewise, family members gather round to hear a faraway relative personally greet her or him. They frequently interact antiphonally with the voice as if the speaker were present, interjecting "yes," "no," "oh my," and the like. Meanwhile, audio and, increasingly, videocassettes are transforming healing and religious rituals, so that they, too, take place across a vast transnational performance space. At rituals unfolding on family land back home, worshipers and spirits who appear "in person" at ceremonies personally address far-off migrants. Migrants can participate vicariously in the rituals regardless of where they hear or see the tape.

The portable cassette-radio thus stands as an epitomizing symbol, that is, "a model of and a model for" this transnational society (Geertz 1973:93). The apparatus is likely to be prominently displayed in the migrants' Florida apartments. A "boom box" is likewise an appropriate gift to send home, especially with the price tag still conspicuously attached. The device radiates the vitality of the dispersed family's intimacy. As a symbol of conspicuous consumption—like any art object—the apparatus at the same time connotes the migrant's success abroad.

In the Yard

The symbolic and territorial anchor of Jean's family was a yard, or lakou, where Jean grew up and where I lived for a year and a half during the mideighties. There were seven houses, including two new dwellings, symbols of their migrants' recent progress, one a neat blue and pink house, the other, an ostentatious house as yet unpainted, with a forged iron porch and marble floors—which I leased. Another one, belonging to Jean, was under construction.

The compound seemed to be a woman's space, organized, owned, and inherited by women. It was known as Philomène's lakou. She inherited it from her mother who purchased the parcel around 1910, and she, in turn, bequeathed it to her children. Although all of her children were entitled to build houses and reside on the family land, as often happens, only some did so: Jean's mother and her two older sisters, Alina and Filoza. Following the death of Jean's mother, his aunts were the only acknowledged heads of the yard.

The households in the yard were typical of Haitian and Caribbean forms in both their "matrifocality" and ever-fluid residence (Brown 1991; Kerns 1983). There were on average about twenty children living in the compound, including Jean's three children with Simone and many of his nieces and nephews. The children's residence, though, was fluid, as they moved between households. Children of better-off families circulated between the capital city where they attended school and the yard where they spent weekends and vacations.

Few men lived in the yard continuously. As for men of the senior generation, one of Jean's uncles often ate and passed time in the yard, though he slept elsewhere. His aunts' husbands also had other abodes, but they frequently ate and slept in their wives' residences, as husbands of any means ought to do. (Sleeping with his wife at least part of the time, in the house he ideally built for her on her own inherited land, fulfills their marital contract, just as sleeping elsewhere—in his own family's yard—part of the time signifies his social and economic male independence.) By contrast, Jean's unfortunate brother-in-law, a very poor farmer in his fifties, resided full-time in the lakou in a tiny mud-thatch hut with his wife and three children.

The experience of migration was most tangible in the total absence of young adult men and the absence of about half of the young adult women. With only
one exception, every man of Jean's generation—his brothers and maternal cousins—was living "outside" (deyò), mainly in "Miami" (Florida). The exception was Jean's cousin whose partial blindness made him an unlikely candidate for migration.

When he was eight years old, Jean's mother died while giving birth to her 11th child, who also died. His aunts were surrogate parents to him and his eight surviving siblings, compensating not only for the loss of their mother but also for their father's premature decline after the tragedy. In a pattern typical of the strategies of Haitian peasant kin to reproduce their class position or transform it, Jean's well-off aunt, Filoza, took in her poorer teenage nieces as servants (as opposed to "employees"). Their unpaid labor helped her accomplish her gendered burden of cooking, washing, clothing, buying food, and cleaning, so that she could carry out a successful commerce of conches between Petite Rivière and Port-au-Prince. She set up two households, one in Port-au-Prince, where several of her children also lived during the week and went to school, and the other "at home." During the sixties and seventies, Filoza's nieces helped take care of her younger children. During the eighties, they helped mind her grandchildren whose parents had emigrated.

In contrast to the woman's services Jean's sisters performed, Jean and his brother did men's activities—they farmed and fished. They helped their father in his many, but tiny, plots. They were very poor. Jean, who was a handsome guy, married Simone, a strikingly beautiful woman from a nearby yard. They made a handsome, if unfortunate, couple. Choun, Jean's older sister, described how they "struggled with poverty together" [bat mize ansanm]. "He couldn't touch money. He was responsible for supporting three children and his wife. Problems! Sometimes when he went to sea he didn't return with as much as $1."

Jean's younger brother was on the first sailboat to leave Petite Rivière for Florida. That first successful voyage in 1978 is legendary in this community. The departures increased until 1981 and ceased after President Reagan and President-for-Life Jean-Claude Duvalier agreed to the stationing of U.S. Coast Guard cutters in the waters between Cuba and Haiti in order to seize all "unauthorized" vessels, burn them, and return the passengers to Port-au-Prince. On the island, the Haitian police selectively enforced the new law against escaping the country without an exit visa. In a string of extraordinary bad luck, Jean tried and failed three times to steal away by boat. Once he was arrested and beaten, and his family had to pay bribes to get him released. In 1981, his brother and his Aunt Filoza sponsored his legal emigration and he entered Miami.

Simone continued to live in the yard with their three children. During his second year abroad, Jean fell off a roof at a construction site and could not work for an extended period. When he did go back to work, he found only sporadic employment. Through Antoinne, the courier, he managed to send back about $60 a month, hardly enough to support his family. It was not enough to allow Simone to employ others to substitute for his labor in his father's gardens, a loss that adversely affected his already poor father as well. Nor could Simone accumulate enough resources to start her own food trade and simultaneously compensate others to care for her young children.

Jean did seem to have particularly bad luck, but the predicament in which his migration left Simone was all too typical of the experience of young mothers who are the wives of migrants (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Martinez 1989): Unable either to make up for the lost labor of their husbands or to resume their trading or other occupations, these wives are often further impoverished by their partners' labor migrations. Simone poignantly summed up their plight when she demurred: "For the sake of Miami money, a mother in Haiti dies."
It is obvious that Simone was faced with few alternatives to putting the "little square of land between her legs" to work. This symbolic, female "land" (lè) is also called a woman's "money" (lajan), or "mother money"—capital (manman lajan). A gendered "capital," it can be used as both a power and a perdition. Selling it entitles its owner to male material support. The status of the mate, whether friend or husband, does not alter the commodified terms of the exchange. As Ira Lowenthal (1987) has argued, women astutely control their sexual exchanges with men to ensure they get their "pay." Yet the very commodification of their sexuality can be, and frequently is, used against women, through the humiliating indictment of prostitution, as Simone painfully found out.

Two years after Jean's departure, Simone became pregnant. For Jean's older sister Choun, at least, Simone's disloyalty placed her beneath contempt. Here Choun was acting as Jean's advocate "back home," rather than as an ally of females. Simone's betrayal was in continuing to accept Jean's remittances while failing to give him his due "respect." Moreover, it happened under the nose of the family while she was living in their yard and reflected badly on their surveillance. Choun sent word to Jean on a cassette tape. Simone soon moved out of the yard and back to her mother's place, taking the two boys and leaving the little girl in the care of Choun. The children nonetheless constantly circulated between the two yards.

Jean continued to send money to Simone for the care and education of the boys, but once again, it was less than they needed to survive, much less pay school fees. He sent even less money to Choun to look after the girl, forcing her in effect to rely on the generosity of other family members. During the year and a half of my residence "at home," the girl was sickly, having numerous cases of worms and the reddish hair of malnourishment. Meanwhile Jean started to send funds to build a house, one that was originally intended to be on his wife's family's land. After the revelation of Simone's betrayal, he relocated the site to his maternal yard.

Crisis in the Yard

In May 1984, Choun arranged to have a photograph taken of Jean and Simone's three children. She sent it to her brother by way of the courier, Antoinne. Immediately Jean recorded and dispatched an anguished cassette-letter. The family gathered around the cassette-radio, responding antiphonally to his voice as he individually addressed his aunt, father, and sisters. As he spoke, his voice quivered; he seemed at times to be weeping. From the photograph, the children appeared to be starving. Their ribs were sticking out. He did not understand how it could be so. He had been sending money regularly to their mother for their upkeep, and they had been in good shape when he left them three years before. Only the girl appeared healthy (to me, an incongruous observation given her chronic sickness). Jean said he did not care how they had to do it. Even if they had to take a rope and drag the kids out, and even if the children were naked, he wanted them out of Simone's house and back in the yard. Jean's father, who confronted Simone later that day, reported that she rebuffed and insulted him.

The next day Simone came walking into the yard. A profoundly anguished discussion unfolded, most of which I managed to write down. Simone crystallized her plight as the home wife and mother of the children of a migrant man, a woman who "dies for the sake of Miami money." Filoza tried to resolve the crisis in the loud, authoritative, and quick-witted style for which she was locally known.

Although Simone was addressing Filoza, she fixed her gaze on Jean's cousin's wife, Fernande. Simone was thereby directing her comments to a person whom
she did not expect to reply but to just passively listen. While Simone did not have a distinct ally in the yard, Fernande could be expected to hold a relatively neutral position because she was herself an outsider, an in-law. Fernande was not meant to be Simone's target hearer but her foil or "bridge" (pon). Simone expected her target, Filoza, to "overhear" her amplified message.

Realizing Simone's rhetorical move, Filoza immediately designated her own "bridge," Choun, simply because she happened to be standing there. Choun was hardly an ideal sham listener, for she was the main party in the dispute with Simone and could not be expected to be silent. Indeed, she muttered a running, hostile commentary addressed to no one in particular. Yet her chatter did not become obtrusive enough for Filoza to reject her as a sham listener.

By fixing her gaze on Fernande, Simone thus initiated the artful, indirect performative frame for quarreling in Kreyol. Social norms censure direct confrontation, but an acceptable speech frame is "triangular communication" by means of a decoy. This routine is analogous to African Americans' use of "loudtalking" (Mitchel-Kernan 1973). One Creole speaker characterized the strategy as "passing through Peter to get to Paul." Inside this oblique speech frame, it ideally takes four people for two persons to have an argument! Each antagonist takes a personal sham listener whose sole role is to listen passively, not joining in the argument. Barring two bystanders, the two antagonists will resort to sharing the same foil. By impassively absorbing the venom, the sham helps to contain the hostility, which is nonetheless amplified so that the target can hear.

Simone started out by saying, "I don't want people spreading lies about me."

Filoza responded by telling Simone how upset Jean was, how offensive his angry language was, and finally that he was dead serious in his demand for her to give up the children. Filoza repeated Jean's threat about using a rope to get them, until Simone finally responded, "I said the children aren't going anywhere."

Filoza said, "If you don't give up the children, he'll come to Haiti to take them."

Simone said, "Choun is the one who hates me."

"Look," said Filoza. "Everyone talked on the tape. If they'd said something wrong on the tape I'd have heard it. If it wasn't right, I'd have erased it.... I'm sitting here. Jean owes me almost $400. He never sends me a gourd [20 cents]. And when he was 'writing,' Simone never said to me, 'here's what Jean sent for you.' " She was accusing Simone of pocketing Filoza's remittance money.

Simone said, "I need some peace. Jean wasn't a guy who wrote often. His brother writes regularly."

Filoza said, "The tape was played right here. You should have heard the way he talked! I'm not his mother—he can't just say any old thing to me. I can't stand to listen to that kind of foul language." She paused. "He would've helped you."

"Your wealth," said Simone. "I don't need it."

"He said tie a rope and put them here," said Filoza.

Simone repeated, "I need some peace. I need to be done with this. For a whole year I've been in prison."

"How can this be resolved, then?" asked Filoza.

"How can it be resolved? When they die. . . ." Filoza said, "The children can't come here yet, Jean's house isn't ready. You're the one who has to bring them here. Write a letter to him. Do it here."

"They don't want to come," said Simone.

Filoza said, "My son, Eli, who's over there—he doesn't send anything" [for his children, whom Filoza minds].

Simone said, "They're my own. How could I not care about them?"

"Yes, of course you care about them," said Filoza.
"Just take the children," said Simone. "And give me back my life. To say that Dadi [her middle son] runs around in the field instead of going to school—you should know why they don't go to school. I haven't forgotten Jean," she went on. "They say this and that about me. It really hurts, when I think about how I've struggled to survive with them. To hear those words—"

"You have to respond to him," Filoza said.

"I'm a home girl. How could he forget me? But I don't regret it; I'm the one who left him."

"He'll shoot you all," said Filoza, amid laughter. "You and your mother."

"There's no medicine for grief," said Simone.

"Listen to me," said Filoza. "You and Jean should've stayed together for eternity. But your 'coco' is hot! Jean would've built a house for you. You should've had an abortion with the latest pregnancy. By the way, he does look like the others. Didn't you have an arrested pregnancy, a perdition, for Jean? [i.e., "Weren't you pregnant for Jean all along?""] It has to be Jean's child! If you saw him, you'd say he looks just like all his other children. Didn't you have perdition? ..."

Simone now said, "Isn't there a girl named Rosa—I heard she's pregnant for Jean over there."

"You must mean my son Blan [rhymes with Jean]. Blan's the one giving us trouble over there.... Choun's been crying all day." Filoza and Choun started to cry.

Simone was crying too. "Take the children and give me back my life."

"Where will I put them?" asked Filoza.

Simone said: "For the sake of Miami money, a mother in Haiti dies. I'll kill myself, damn it! Then they'll see. Jean didn't do anything for me. I'm not going to talk about this anymore." She started to leave.

Filoza yelled after her, "It's a lie. Don't do it. It's up to you to bring them here. Close your lips. Choun lied. Hush." She said to Choun and the others, "It does seem as though we were the ones who told him, it seems so."

She told Simone louder, "Just ignore them...."

The Implications of the Crisis

During the confrontation, Filoza struggled to find the right words, the right thing to say, to maneuver between the unequal spaces of Miami and Petite Rivière and around the double standard applied to male and female sexual conduct. She continued to adjust to the flow of her own and Simone's pointed words to save both mother and baby's honor, and do so without shaming a male member of her own family. Filoza undermined Jean's demand to take the children from Simone by telling her that it was her move to deliver the children: "you are the one who has to bring them here," and when Simone, exasperated, finally blurted out, "take the children and give me my life," Filoza disavowed her abdication. The children were not entirely welcome in the yard. "Where am I going to put them?" she asked rhetorically. Conveniently for Filoza, Jean's house was still a few partial cinder block walls.

In a subtle way, Filoza also condoned Simone's use of her "female land." She implied that she understood how Jean's meager remittances left his home wife with little choice. She indirectly criticized Jean's failure to be responsible for his wife and children by complaining about the unreliability of her own migrant son, Eli, who hardly sent anything for his two children and left his mother to "do for" the two of them. She acquiesced for the sake of his reputation and, as his mother, her own honor. Reputation is a precious resource (or social capital) in and across
this transnational community. Scandal and scorn can effectively destroy one’s future both at home and abroad.

Furthermore, Filoza did not tell Simone the truth about Jean’s new relationship with a woman in Miami. Filoza herself could not have approved of the liaison, since the newcomer would surely compete with Simone and her three needy children for Jean’s manifestly insufficient resources. Filoza deflected Simone’s inquiry about Jean’s new affair by telling her that she must have meant Blan (Filoza’s other son in Miami whose name rhymes with Jean). Blan, she admitted, had indeed had an affair with a girl of only 14, who was now pregnant. As he had done before, Jean left his parents to clean up the mess back home. The two other children he helped create when he was still a teenager in Petite Rivière lived in a nearby yard. Filoza and her husband contributed to their upkeep.

A Woman in Perdition

More stunning was Filoza’s rhetorical move to rescue and redefine Simone’s flagrant tort of pregnancy two years after her husband’s departure. First Filoza asked Simone why she had not had an abortion, in effect condoning the deception of one’s husband. Filoza did not wait for Simone to answer before offering justification: “By the way, the baby does look like the others. Didn’t you have a repressed pregnancy (perdition) ‘for’ Jean? It has to be Jean’s child! When you look at him, he resembles all of Jean’s other children.” Filoza was suggesting Simone had been suffering from the female ailment known as repressed pregnancy (pedisyon, literally “perdition” or “damnation”), well-known in the region.

Gerald Murray described the condition in detail:

The woman knows that she is having regular coitus with her husband; she sees that her period stops for one or more months; her stomach may in a few cases even begin to swell—then suddenly she bleeds for several days. She looks to see if it is a miscarriage. If she sees that it is not and if her bleeding comes the following month, she knows that she is in “perdition,” that the child in her womb is the victim of one of the many forces which can rob it of the maternal blood it needs to grow normally.

Thus the growing internal supply of blood suddenly bursts and escapes via the woman’s vagina and the child’s developmental progress is immediately and completely reversed. The fetus shrinks to the tiny speck of blood it was a few days after conception, but it is not expelled with the blood (this bleeding is not to be confused with menstruation because she is pregnant). It remains attached to the mother’s womb. [1976:61–62]

There is no limit to the time that a fetus may remain trapped in her womb. And until the child-in-perdition is freed, no other child can be conceived. If the child-in-perdition is freed (and born) after the woman forms a union with a new spouse, the biological father of the child is expected to be notified of the birth so that he can recognize his child at the baptism and so that the child will have inheritance rights to his estate (Murray 1976:63).

Most cases of repressed pregnancy are self-diagnosed. It was a daring, and clever, move on Filoza’s part to diagnose the condition for someone else, long after she had been cured. Moreover, she declared it with authority: Filoza said it—therefore, it was. For there was no evidence not to accept a post facto diagnosis by this seasoned (biological) mother and grandmother. Simone had simply been unaware of her long-standing pregnancy, which had resolved itself on its own by an inadvertently administered, and as yet unidentified, cure. Furthermore, the identity of the baby’s genitor could be ratified by a new, revised birth certificate. The “revision” of birth certificates is quite standard now, thanks to the thriving businesses that handle the personal, legal, and national identities...
of these mobile people, and assist in getting visas, sponsoring relatives, and obtaining residency and citizenship abroad.

Repressed pregnancy is related to other feminine “dis-eases.” Female embodiments of “sick” social relations are perceived as disorders of blood (Farmer 1988; Weidman 1978). The blood of women, which is said to be greater in both volume and temperature than that of men’s, represents their most vulnerable corporeal constituent. The common debility known as “bad blood” is thought to result from emotional stress produced by women’s relations with men. The etiology of “perdition” most often involves unhealthy “social” relations with the unseen forces: ancestors (mò), anthropomorphic spirits (lwa) who are also inherited, or agents sent by sorcerers (doing the bidding of envious others). Only a ritual specialist (gangan or manbo) can confirm a diagnosis of perdition and administer its cure—the liberation of the pregnancy—through ritual performance. Biomedical doctors do not recognize the condition. Yet women may nevertheless seek them out because doctors are sometimes inadvertently able to treat an illness they did not or could not diagnose.

**Woman, Mother, or Wife**

Cultural models of gender roles, relations, and morality mediate (and are mediated by) the perceived negotiability of paternity and female reproductive dis-ease. In *Mama Lola* and elsewhere, Karen McCarthy Brown (1987, 1991, 2001) has written perceptively about feminine roles and relations through the imagery of the anthropomorphic spirits or lwa. The spirits, who epitomize Haitians’ contextual morality, are mirrors, ways of seeing the self (or selves), one’s constraints, and one’s options. Brown argues that the experiences of Haitian women are given objective reality in representations of the female lwa, Ezili Dantò and Ezili Freda. The Ezili spirits are conflated with particular manifestations of the Virgin Mary, “but unlike the Mary of mainstream Catholicism, who offers an impossible ideal of perfectly submissive (and virginal) motherhood for emulation, the Ezili are much closer to the human drama” (Brown 1991:221).

Ezili Dantò, identified with Mater Salvatoris, is an independent, childbearing woman with an unconventional sexuality that, on several counts, flouts the authority of the patriarchal family. Dantò is also the patron of women in their respected, prestigious roles as independent, mobile traders. Filoza, who served Dantò, credited her patron with her success as a fish trader, and she kept an altar for Dantò in her home. Filoza circulates on the outside and manages her own funds, however infinitesimal. She is quick-witted, loud, and competent. Virtually all women learn the skills to pursue successful commercial activities, and they can become marketers when the opportunity arises. Their potential economic independence offers an alternative (and a threat) to their roles as the wives of men.

Although the identity of the competent and independent machann (merchant) is in tension with the identity of wife, it does not contradict the identities of mother and daughter. Indeed the lithograph of Mater Salvatoris shows Dantò with a baby in her arms. The woman is a single mother, raising her child without a man (but with the help of her matrilineal kin). Significantly, Haitians say that the baby in her arms is a girl. The lithographs capture the close bond between mother and daughter, a single, tough mother raising her daughter on her own, and the essential role of woman as a moral anchor, ritual protector, and redistributor among kin (Kerns 1983).

Ezili Freda, the imagined sexual competitor of Ezili Dantò, is identified with Maria Dolorosa. Unlike the poor but independent Dantò, Freda locates her identity and worth in relationships with men. She signifies the category of
feminine that defines the masculine man. Men like to conquer and discipline her so that she does not betray them with other men. The common image of the saint shows her with a sword plunging into her heart, an emblem of her broken heart. The child hidden by her side is interpreted to mean that she is willing to forsake her child for a man, a striking contrast to the image of Dantò, who cradles her baby "daughter," with whom she shares a fiercely strong bond.

Throughout *Mama Lola*, Brown retells stories of the dissolution of marriage, after which the woman returns to her mother and matrilateral kin. In each one, the woman labors to become someone's wife, to realize the dream of Ezili Freda. Soon enough, though, her jealous mate's discipline becomes too much to bear. She leaves him to be an independent, if desperately poor, single mother. She returns to her "self" as Danto.

Brown's interpretation of religious representations of Haitian women's roles and moral options articulates with Ira Lowenthal's (1984, 1987) cultural analysis of Haitian kinship and marriage. According to Lowenthal, conjugal contract entitles a woman to her share of her (typically polygynous) husband's labor, for which she must compete with his other wives. The same agreement entitles a man to his wife's sexual fidelity. A husband must "take care of" (okipe) his wife, and a wife's duty is to "respect" (respete) her husband. A wife is entitled to material support from her mate in virtue of her sexuality, rather than in consequence of, or in direct exchange for, her own domestic and productive contributions to the conjugal unit" (Lowenthal 1987:120).

Sexual encounters, whether in or out of conjugal union, are always explicitly linked to the exchange of the money of men and the sexual "services" of women (Lowenthal 1987:89). Women do not consider sexual gratification adequate recompense. A man who suggests to the woman he is pursuing that sex should be "dous pou dous"—sweetness for sweetness—is laughable. Women explicitly represent sex as strenuous work, for which they must get compensated. Among themselves women speak of sex in glowing and lewd terms. But to share this knowledge with men would be a foolish waste (Lowenthal 1987:75, 89).

Representations of Ezili Danto and Freda reiterate these options. Danto, maneuvering to protect her own interests and her children's, is in control of her sexual exchanges. Freda, however, is foolishly naive. She does not negotiate with her sexuality. She believes in "sweetness for sweetness," and she is always disappointed. Yet Freda is also imagined to be already rich, so her frivolous waste of her "resources" results in limited damage, unlike the case of a poor woman in a chronically precarious situation.

All sexual exchanges between men and women, whether between friends or spouses, imply commodity exchange. Thus women and men represent female sexuality as capital, a resource that can be put to work to produce wealth, or to reproduce itself, to grow. A common aphorism says, "Every woman is born with a carreau—a little square of land—between her legs" [Chak jann fet ak yon kawo te—nan mitan jann ni] (Lowenthal 1987:74). This symbolic, female "land" (tè) is also called a woman's "money" (lajan), or "mother money"—capital (manman lajan). As my friend Ti Krab told me, in the context of describing why he had to do wage labor and I did not, "You walk around with all your money on you" [ou mache ak tout lajan ou sou ou].

There is, however, a crucial difference between actual capital and its embodied, sexual representation. Land and exchange value can create wealth, independence, and the power to dominate others. In her ideal female role as a merchant, a woman can control and use capital to be an autonomous agent (perhaps in magical collusion with the spirit Ezili Dantò). But in her role as the embodiment of sexual exchange, her position is less secure. She cannot control
when others might transform a bargaining power into a perdition. Conceptualizing the problem through the dualistic imagery of the spirit, Ezili, the woman cannot control when others will attempt to discipline Ezili Dantò into her role as an Ezili Freda.

At any point, others can and do use a woman's identification with sexual capital against her in the humiliating indictment of fe bouzen or jènès—prostitution. Being called a "prostitute" is the quintessential female dishonor. During my fieldwork in Ti Rivyè, accusations and revelations of who was really a prostitute was the leading item in gossip. In conversation, mostly in the person of men but also occasionally women, the speakers would inevitably lower their voices in the middle of a sentence to add, "so and so is [or was] a bouzen." Surprised by what seemed to me to be a male obsession with female sexual immorality, I once asked my friend Kanès about it. He apparently gave my question serious thought, and in an absurd exercise of scientific precision, answered, "99.4% of the women in this village have been or are prostitutes."

In the inevitable contests over access to a migrant man's remittances, a woman's potential for sexual immorality is a potent and oft-wielded weapon. His kin use the indictment of "bouzen" to undercut a wife's claim to the money. Although the migrant man may pursue additional conjugal unions, both at home and "over there," he demands his wife's sexual abstinence (or loyalty) for the length of his migration, often for many years. Indeed the vast majority of the Ti Rivyè migrants who sailed to Florida in their own sailboats between 1979 and 1981 could not return to visit until 1988, when their liminal immigration statuses were finally regularized.

A man's family members—both men and women—police his wife's behavior to make sure that she is showing their son or brother "respect." So that they can better surveil her, the husband may request that his wife live in his family's yard, deviating from the common practice of uxorilocal (or matrilocal) residence. Although the husband, the kinsman of this family, may be failing to fulfill his part of the conjugal contract, the family acts as if the contract is not contingent on a minimal amount of male support; as long as he sends money, however inadequate, to support her and their children, she should show him "respect." The absence of the man and the assignment of his wife's competitors as his proxy agents worsen the wife's chances to be treated fairly. His family inevitably finds that she is a bouzen.

Fertility and Feminine Flourish

Mama Lola told Brown "Women got to do all kind'a thing" (1991:242). (She said these words while revealing how, as a young woman, she attempted in vain to convince a lover to claim paternity of a child she knew was not his.) A husband's neglect of his marriage obligation can force a desperate wife to vend her little square of land. Estranged couples can be reconciled if the husband recognizes how his failure to provide adequate support forced his wife to sell access to the little square of land between her legs. If his wife has become pregnant as a result of a relation with someone else, her spouse can agree to claim paternity once the child is born. In the case of Jean, Filoza made Jean's acquiescence even more palatable by firmly declaring the boy child to be his son and the pregnancy a case of perdition.

As Filoza's rhetorical maneuver demonstrated, the woman's advocates may use their oratorical skills to reconcile the couple. They may persuade the man to see how his neglect contributed to his wife's "disrespect" and exhort him to think again about the consequences to his honor of making his marital inadequacy
public. Such direct persuasion is likely to come from women's strategic use of the genre of indirect discourse known as "sending" or "throwing points" (voye pwen). The tactic uses the pithy, objective images of proverbs and songs to crystallize and bare truths about contentious situations while allowing the unnamed target to save some face (Brown 1976, 1987; Richman 1992b; Richman and Balan-Gaubert 2001). A handy "point" to send an indignant and self-righteous husband is the well-worn proverb, "a hungry woman doesn't know the difference among men" [fanm grangou pa konn hason]. In other words, hunger can justify a wife's resorting to "selling her land" to other men. Repressed pregnancy is an embodiment of unequal male and female sexual powers. Repressed pregnancy is, after all, an illness suffered in the wombs of women and by the embryonic lives inside them—domains over which men claim authority. This authority is reproduced in the very words one uses to talk about pregnancy in Creole: "she is pregnant for so-and-so" or "she is suffering perdition for so-and-so." Filoza, a locally powerful woman, demonstrated in the exclusive presence of women that even she was unwilling to challenge men's claim over the loins of women.

Yet Filoza read the gendered crisis unfolding between Ti Rivye and Miami and enacted a "situated" or "situational feminism" (Pessar 1995). Filoza took control to show Simone how to outmaneuver—at his male game—her own jealous, arrogant, irresponsible nephew and surrogate son. Filoza had no use for passive victimization, but neither did she practice ideologically consistent feminism. In that critical and tense moment, Filoza thought to use the epitomizing symbol of women's "damnation," known by the same name, to turn it into a means of returning to them control over their bodies and fertility. A clear diagnosis of infidelity would have condemned Simone forever to the prison of disgrace she so movingly portrayed. While saving Simone's reputation within this intimately connected, if far-flung, transnational community, Filoza also delivered her (perhaps undeserving) nephew from the humiliation of the "duped" husband, the cuckold. She was resourceful enough to seize the opportunity paradoxically present in one type of damnation to help a "home girl" free herself from a living hell of another kind. To use the home woman's words, she "gave her back her life."

Notes

1. Perhaps the most obvious sign of how standard the genre of cassette discourse has become is that it now infiltrates written letters when members of this transnational community resort to the epistolary form of correspondence. Although the letters are initiated in French, in spite of the scribe's diligence the scriptural discipline begins to unravel and the distinct Creole syntax and formulaic greetings of cassette speech overtake the letter.

2. Guadeloupian playwright Simone Schwarz-Bart (1987) keenly appreciated the extent to which the portable cassette recorder has, since the late seventies, symbolized and mediated the Haitians' interpersonal relationships across national boundaries. Ton Beau Capitaine is set in the crude interior of a small cabin on a Guadeloupian plantation; the dramatis personae: Wilnor, a Haitian immigrant agricultural worker and his battery-operated radio-cassette recorder; the action: Wilnor listens to a cassette-letter from his wife and he "writes" a response. This vital appliance structures the audience's experience, as it does the protracted separation of the couple, obliging all, as Wilnor comments, to "see with your ears and hear with your eyes."

3. Jean did not try to help her migrate, and I neglected to find out his reasoning. According to Jean's maternal uncle, Jean was afraid that he would not be able to control her in "Miami," that some more powerful person would steal her from him because she was so beautiful.
4. Virginia Kerns (1983:100) describes Black Carib (Garifuna) ideas and mediations of a similar illness. The Creole description of the phenomenon pèdi san (to lose blood) was probably confounded with the French-based word for "perdition," pèdisyon.

5. Concerning the duty to respect, I have argued elsewhere (Richman 1992a) that ritual initiation may provide a bodily setting for fixing a too-fluid female identity. Discipline and fidelity dominate the construction of the marriage of the novice (ounsì) to the spirit Danbala Wedo. For although the novice receives ritual instruction during her confinement, when compared to the restraint she learns, the educational aspect of her training attracts relatively little attention. For 41 days following her exit from the altar room, the novice continues to sleep in the shrine and to wear the formless white garments of initiation. Out of sexual loyalty to Danbala she avoids physical contact with men and any female gender-coded domestic tasks that would directly or indirectly benefit a man (other than husband/father Danbala). The ounsi may consume only "cool" foods and drinks favored by Danbala, studiously avoiding anything that would make her "hot" with desire for another man. Should the novice provoke Danbala's jealousy, he might "give her a spanking" [I ap kale yo], in the person of the priest (gangan ason) or a senior ounsi. Women and children receive "spankings." Like any self-respecting husband/father, Danbala enacts his paternity by disciplining his ounsi wives to insure their unswerving sexual fidelity.

6. Lowenthal (1987) argues that by emphasizing women's sexual functions as the sole source of her entitlement to male material support, the value of her domestic and productive labor is systematically ignored and devalued. The devaluation of domestic labor is familiar to Americans. Women who can afford it resort to exploiting the labor of "lesser" women in order to advance their own chances for economic autonomy and success. In Haiti, the daughters of poorer kin or ritual kin (godparent–godchild relations) live with the family and perform unpaid labor.

7. The carreau or square of land is the basic unit of measure, equivalent to 3.19 acres or 1.29 hectares. The carreau also signifies the minimal parcel needed for reproduction.

8. His dishonor will be attributed to his economic failings that in turn cause him to be a sexual loser, rather than to any imagined sexual inadequacy. A man is expected to convert his economic prowess into sexual success. His sexual inadequacy will not immediately be suspected as the reason she "disrespected" him (Lowenthal 1987:132).

9. Pwen is pronounced like, and based on, the French word point. There is no analogous term in English for the complex concept. But analogues to this style of indirect, hostile communication are found throughout the African diaspora and include the African American practice of "signifying," the Jamaican style of "throwing words," and the Barbadian routine of "dropping remarks" (Fisher 1976; Mitchell-Kernan 1973).

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