

**Haitian Culture and Society, lecture notes for the final exam, Benjamin Hebblethwaite 2005**

**Pawòl granmoun, Jeanty and Brown 1996**

1. Madichon pa pè nan nwit 'Atoufè pa pè anyen'  
Curses are not fearful of the night
2. Nèg sòt se chwal malentespri  
The stupid guy is the horse of the evil spirit
3. Konplo pi fò pase wanga  
A plot is stronger than an amulet
4. Kote zonbi konnen ou, li pa fè ou pè 'Menm nan lanfè gen moun pa'  
Where the zonbi knows you, he won't make you scared
5. Tout maladi pa maladi doktè 'There are other ways to get healed'  
All illnesses are not medical illnesses
6. Jijman Bondye vini sou bourik  
God's judgment comes on a donkey
7. Nèg di san fè, Bondye fè san di  
Humans say without doing, God does with saying
8. Lavi se kòd sapat; ou pa ka konte sou li  
Life is a sandal string; you can't count on it
9. Nan benyen nanpwen kache lonbrit  
In bathing there is no hiding the naval
10. Lamepriz vo mye ke larepons  
Scorn is worth more than responding

One dedicated to Jean-Claude Duvalier and Jean-Bertrand Aristide:

1. Egzile miyò pase fizye  
Exile is better than the firing squad

**Haitian Culture and Society**

Wed. = 2 pages + Bibliography. Please see format at back of class packet.

Read: - "Work and gender in Rara," McAlister 2002

- "Urban life in the Caribbean: A Study of a Haitian Urban Community," Laguerre 1982 [*pop quiz?*]

## Arab-Haitians, review of Miami Herald article

Lebanese-Haitian: “All of my core values, what I believe in, my basic education, I got them in Haiti”

201 out of 214,893 Haitians in S. Florida identify themselves as Arab Haitian. Notable Haitians of Arabic decent: André Apaid, T-Vice (?)

- Sold textiles to the masses
- **Struggle for inclusion over generations in Haiti...**
- Expelled through anti-Arab laws
- Arabs saw progress under Duvalier, he named Carlo Boulos as health minister

The downside: “**Frankly, they don’t have a good track record of affirming their Haitian-ness, of actually contributing to the social, political and cultural growth of the island they claim to be their homeland**” – Gepsie Metellus

Anecdote: P-au-P Lebanese shop with stickers on cash register reading:  
“**Haiti: no electricity, no water, we love it!**”

## Gabriel’s drumming in Baudin, south-eastern Haiti

Drumming concepts: *rit tanbou*

*kase*

<i>Side 1</i>	Nago	<b>Rhythm:</b>	[African]	<i>Side 2</i>	Bal	
		Sanmba / Samba	[African]			Afwo
		Kongo	[African]			
		Yanvalou	[African]			
		Djoumba	[African]			
		Vals	[European]			
		Igbo	[African]			
		Kontredans	[European]			
		Nago (again...)	[African]			
		Rara	[African]			
		Mayoyo, ‘simpleton’				
		Tcha tcha tcha				
		Dawomen				

## **Work and Gender in Rara (McAlister 2002) / The Haitian family (Rey 1970)**

“work values” = “learned as the most important feature of the extended family” (89)

### Women

Control the household  
Respectability

### Men

Dominate the street corner  
Reputation and maintenance

## Urban Life in the Caribbean ~ A Study of a Haitian Urban Community

Michel Laguerre 1982

What are the features of Upper Belair (and La Saline)?

- crowded
- cohesive population in terms of interactions
- social integration
- *lakou vodou* > “trees inhabited by Vodou spirits”  
[*repozwa lwa*]
- gossip at the well...

Laguerre’s focus: **community structural dependency**

- humans and habitat
- we shape and are shaped by environment
- humans live in **niches**, they are socialized in niches

Laguerre looks at the **detail** of life in Belair. He examines both mundane and exceptional features of the community. He opens up Haiti for outsiders:

- Devotes a paragraph to lamp varieties used in Belair
- Water containers ~ *kanari*
- *Latanye* ~ tropical palm; *atèmiyò* = ‘on the ground is better’;  
*djakout/ralfò*; *tetyè*
- *Malèt* ~ important documents; Sunday clothes
- *Twa wòch dife* ~ ‘three fire stones’ = metaphor the basics
- The folkloric imagination. *baka*; *zonbi*;  
UFOs don’t mean much to Haitians!
- The *bayakou* [*‘Dem a payaka’*]
- Vodou: “One temple was found as a place where an expression of homosexuality and Voodoo piety are observed equally”  
[*Of Gods and men*]
- *fritay* stalls: see the interplay of social relations between men and women
- *bolèt*
- Interdependence of *lakou* people
- The seismic threat

Trades and the “informal economy”

Marketers and *pratik* 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the corridor  
Charcoal vendors  
Shoe-shiners  
*fritay* women  
prostitutes  
US-owned factory workers

**Citation on page 32, final paragraph:**

Press clippings on Belair

**Diglossia and language conflict in Haiti, Albert Valdman 1988**

5% of Haitians are balanced bilinguals in French and Haitian Creole

Relationship between French and Creole is **complex**

French symbolizes the social and political privileges of dominant bilingual elite.

Conversely, Creole symbolizes the social and political **exclusion** of the monolingual masses

The role of Creole in schools. The beginning of the debate: late 70s

**Opponents:** don't want to be denied the linguistic avenue of social advancement and access to outside communities and nations

**Proponents:** insure effective teaching

**Bilingualism and diglossia:**

Bilingualism is inappropriate in describing the Haitian situation.

Haitian Creole and French don't really have a *diglossic* relationship:

1. Both are **distinct languages** (they are more genetically removed from each other than even French and Latin)

Example, the French versus Haitian Creole relative clause:

**la personne** qui est venue a laissé ça

**moun** ki te vini **an** te kite sa

**the person** who came left that

2. Bilingual Haitians acquire Haitian Creole and French at home, unlike the typical diglossic scenario with the LOW language acquired at home and the HIGH language acquired at school.

High German and Swiss German

3. French *does* serve some vernacular functions among bilinguals  
No communicative function is exempt from Creole (whereas in the classic model of diglossia [Ferguson 1959] some functions are excluded the LOW language...

New model of linguistic functions for the languages of Haiti needed:

Vernacular ~ Everyday communication and expression with intimates

Vehicular ~ Communication to external groups

Referential ~ Transmission of cultural heritage

Magico-religious ~ seek mediation from divine

Membership in social groups ~ Elite versus Mass

Symbolization of power relationships ~

French as a means of escaping poverty and low status

French as a means of excluding the mass; French is used as a “filtering device to keep people in their place” (70).

### Valdman 1988 continued...

Universal Grammar interlude...

Language conflict in Haiti, page 70

Dominance/Subordination relationship inherently engender *linguistic conflict*

Social differentiation and unequal power cause the majority to have “minority behavior and attitudes” (examples Occitan/French; Catalan/Spanish; Creole/French)

- Ambivalence toward vernacular
- Self-hate toward own group
- But attest strong loyalty and emotional attachment to language
- Feel alienated from dominant group, but will invest in acquiring French due to its symbolic function, role in economic and social advancement
- French as *achte*
- French as *lang blan* and *baryè*
- Creole seen as symbolic of *san enstriksyon*
- Haiti is still a LINGUISTIC COLONY

JEAN CASIMIR interlude

Valdman’s evaluation of Creole’s **evolving** functions:

1. Creole as lingua franca between **white colonial establishment** and acculturated **Creole slaves** and the **Bossal slaves**. Function: vehicular.
2. Creole as subject to ‘repidginization,’ i.e. waves of new slaves continually reduced and restructured the Creole they found

Classic example: the Possessive + Definite Noun Phrase



## Haitian Creole Language and Bilingual Education in the US: Problem, Right, or Resource? ~ Flore Zephir

- Flood of immigrant students in US schools
- 1968 Bilingual Education Act
- Bilingual Education as “transitional” toward English
- Seen as remedial
  
- Originally more “politics than pedagogy” = channel funds to SW
  
- Bilingual Education Act of 1974, 1978, 1984 and 1988
- **Gradual legitimization** of bilingual education

Haitians Creole speaker are the third most numerous linguistic community in NY City School system...  
Second in Miami?

### “Home language instruction as a problem”

- Claims that such students face “cognitive problems”
- Cultural fragmentation or disruption, poor self-image and self-esteem...
- “ill advised and threatens the social and political stability of the US” (cited in Cummins 1991)
- Roosevelt: “We have room for but one language here, and that language is English”
- Thorough acquisition of English advocated as the solution

But the validity of these claims can be challenged!

In fact: **“developing bilingualism and biliteracy within a ‘strong’ bilingual education situation is educationally feasible and can lead to the obtaining of higher achievement across the curriculum for minority language children, the fostering of self-esteem and self-identity, and the formation of a more positive attitude toward schooling” (Baker 1993)**

### “Home language instruction as a right

Language as a fundamental human right

1,800 Chinese students versus San Francisco Board of Education:

“if these students could not understand the language used for instruction, they were, indeed, being deprived of an education equal to than of other students” (226)

Citation

Under US federal law, immigrant children who do not speak English are entitled to a *meaningful* educational experience

### **Flore Zephir continued...**

Second language instruction and maintenance as a RESOURCE:

- They can be exploited for cultural, spiritual, educational, economic and political gain.
- USA: heedless monolingualism  
(Strategic) language acquisition as a major US foreign policy objective (if we don't understand the world, how can we make peace with it?)
- Common Underlying Proficiency model of bilingualism: basic skills are transferable in another
- A student who is confident and recognized in her or his **primary-group** relates more positively to school and society
- Use of home language facilitates the development of critical thinking
- Promotes **metalinguistic** awareness. Metalinguistic awareness refers to knowledge on the structure and organization of language.
- Facilitates earlier reading acquisition, leading to higher achievement.

Lessow Hurley's 1996 findings (p. 228):

- Transfer of skills from L<sub>1</sub> to L<sub>2</sub>
- Primary acquisition facilitates second language acquisition
- Students need time to develop!
- Bilingualism/biliteracy has positive effects on achievement
- Enhances self concept

Zephir's evaluation of bilingual programs:

- Poor quality, lack of commitment and understanding  
Language is a central part of a person's being, IT SHOULD NOT BE DISCARDED

Dangerous labeling in schools.

- '...it is an absolute fallacy to regard all Blacks as a homogeneous population'
- Haitians consider themselves ethnically distinct
- Haitians consider themselves to be multiracial
- Linguistic assimilationist model has failed
- Zephir argues that Haitians do not see assimilation as a viable alternative.

Status assigned to Creoles... deviant... dialects... underdeveloped... NO!

**Chomsky's Universal Grammar (1981, 1995):**

*I'm watching the film:*

[<sub>IP</sub> I [<sub>I'</sub> am [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> watching [<sub>DP</sub> [<sub>D'</sub> the [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>N'</sub> film]]]]]]]]]]

*M ap gade fim nan:*

[<sub>IP</sub> M [<sub>I'</sub> ap [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> gade [<sub>DP</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> fim]<sub>i</sub>] [<sub>D'</sub> nan [<sub>NP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> [<sub>N'</sub> ]]]]]]]]]

Educators must realize: "this Black population has its own ethnic identity and that its full-fledged language, Creole, is a strong component of its ethnicity

Using Creole takes the foreignness out of school

Lowers the affective filter, i.e. the emotional filter that can block learning

Do we spend more now preparing people for academic success or more later rehabilitating people?  
We have the highest percentage of incarcerated people per capita in the world: I GUESS WE'VE  
ALREADY MADE OUR CHOICE.

**Wyclef Jean:**

Symbol of **hope and pride** for many Haitian and Haitian-American youths and adults.

Wyclef's exuberant display of the Haitian flag at his Grammy-win was symbolic of the Haitian potential in U.S. cultural and economic life

Dramatically symbolic of (a certain type of) American dream, i.e. the BIG bucks

Song-writer, poet, multi-instrumentalist, entertainer...

Mastery and practice of various musical genres, i.e. rap, konpa, twoubadou, ragga, reggae, gospel, rock... and fluently bilingual...

Wyclef's collaborative and unifying spirit:

*T-Vice Live 2002: on the road, "MVP Compas,"*  
*Dega Ba li gazzz, "I don't want to know"*

Wyclef promotes the unity and equality of the "races" living in Haiti and the world.

Wyclef provides popular entertainment and education through music.

- Pan-African philosophy (Marcus Garvey)
- Haitian awareness and promotion of Haiti
- Conscious of social and historical injustices (sequencing Jean Dominique)
- Lessons through narrative (stories).
- Master of pithy and catchy narratives that leave some room for reconstruction and interpretation in the imagination. But remember: we might read a good essay or poem several times, but we listen to Wyclef oh so many times!
- Some gangster and sexist metaphors: "guns," "bitches"... (but this does not predominate...)
- Where is our female Haitian mega-star

**Take home quiz on the portrayal of Haiti and Vodou in Hollywood and Harvard... (Anmweeey!)**

1. List some things about the film that makes Haiti appear appealing.
2. List some things about the film that makes Haiti appear unappealing.
3. What different sectors of Haitian society are represented? Lower/Middle/Upper Class.
4. According to the film, does traditional Haitian religion and medicine have something to offer the world?
5. What **exploitative/unnecessarily negative/false** images on Haiti/Vodou are used in the film?
6. What are some of the places featured in the film?
7. What **mythological/folkloric** figures appear in the film? What are American parallels?
8. Explain the concept of *zombi* developed in the film, i.e. is the *zombi* a monster or a victim? Explain why.
9. What political issues does the film raise?
10. What kind of link does the film make between Vodou and politics?
11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this film?
12. Why do you think my first Haitian friend (a voodooist) **loved** this film so much?

Notes on *Serpent and the Rainbow*:

What features of vodou culture were exhibited?

- Vodou wedding involving *zotolan* (doves)
- Govi
- Pilgrimages to natural and historical landmarks
- Syncretism with catholicism
- Candles
- “Petwo”
- Poison and potion arts ~  
Makandal’s 6,000 victims (Davis 1985: 162)  
Poison in African secret societies and royalty  
Maroons: between 1764-1793 48,000 cases of maroonage officially reported  
In 1786 of 10,000 slaves imported, 2,000 escaped (Davis 1985: 158)

Playful entertainment, pointless vilification of Haiti... both?

Métraux: *Voodoo in Haiti, The Supernatural World*

Great *lwa* of African Guinea: Legba, Zaka, Ezili, Danbala...

Local spirits varying in name and attributes from community to community: “Ti bout koulèv”

The *loa* might have been expelled from heaven, but not before they acquired many powers.

<i>lwa</i>	<i>dyab</i>
‘spirits’ (let’s do it right first)	‘devils’ (by any means necessary)
<i>men dwat</i>	<i>men gòch</i>
<i>oungan/manbo</i>	<i>bòkò/chòche &amp; oungan/manbo</i> (?)

English word ‘god’ fails to capture the ‘snooping and comic’ spirits who cheer up ceremonies.

*Papa Bondye* as IMPERSONAL DIVINE

*Lwa* as PERSONAL DIVINE

Where do the *loa* come from?

*lwa ginen*

*lwa kreyòl*

Promotion of an individual to the status of *lwa*: *Makandal* > *Makanda*

Promotion of an individual to the status *nanchon*: Dom Pedro > Petwo

Promotion of *lwa* through dream-revelation

Promotion of wife's "maiden *lwa*" into husband's family

Types of major ceremonies:

Petwo	and	Rada (=Arada)
<i>fwèt kach</i> (whip cracks)		<i>ayibobo</i>
<i>kimanga</i>		Originate in Dahomey/Nigeria -
<i>bilolo</i>		gentle
Originate in Haiti		Prestige
or <i>outside</i> of Dahomey		
Great force, roughness, ferocity...		
Helpful and 'human-eating' spirits		

*Rada* is well-viewed; *Petwo* is viewed with some apprehension

### **Possession**

The devotee expresses the character of a spirit in her/his **movement** and **attitude**

Learning about the *lwa* requires watching the possessed.

Possession replaces statuary and holy images...

Vodou's heterogeneous origins create a diverse make up in the field.

### **The power of the *loa* ~ Métraux continued...**

What powers do the *loa* have?

Suggest **remedies**

**Hope and consolation** in times of hunger

**Warn** of machinations of those who wish wrong

**Protection** from elements and bad situation

**Vengeance** in killing an enemy

"Possession states"

*Loa* asks for a job for the possessed.

Banker *loa* who lend money to devotees (???)

Money given by possessed brings luck

Money a priest receives due to the services of a *loa* must be used for the *loa* (except profits that accrue)

Money obtained from administering Zaka's services can be spent on peas....Gede loans of interest...

How do you win favor with the *loa*

Sacrifice, offerings... vow, participation in rites, compliance with orders of the *loa* (See sacrifice in Hebrew religion)

Neglecting *loa* has consequences;

(See punishment and reward in Hebrew religion)

*Loa* are proprietors. The spared goat is still belongs to a *loa*.

Did you know?

Ezili can possess 2 people and her 2 incarnations can speak to each other...

One can be the butt of an angry *loa*; punishment varies

One is obliged to serve root-*loa*, but one can wait until financially prepared

Punishment:

Illness, madness, persistent bad luck

**Laënnec Hurbon (2001), “The Catholic Church and the State in Haiti, 1804 – 1915 with added notes from:**

- *Pwomès kominis ak esperans legliz pou Ayiti*, Dr. Jules Casséus (1987)
- Bon Nouvèl, April 1986, December 1986, etc.

Haiti’s international isolation includes the Catholic Church from 1804-1860

Hurbon’s goal in historiography is to “present a new understanding” (155).

- Few French priests survive the war and Dessalines
- Many French priests were slave owners
- Churches sacked, objects destroyed

Haiti’s 1805 constitution (Dessalinian constitution):

p. 156...

Destroy church’s privileges; marriage and divorce a civil affair

Note: Toussaint and the Church

- Roman Catholic
- He installs priests loyal to (the pro French revolutionary priest) Abbé Grégoire. (Famous in French Linguistics for promoting universal French-only education and for doing a survey of the patois languages spoken in France in the 1790s).

Pétion ~ adopts Toussaint’s pro-catholic constitution

Christophe ~ seeks in vain for priests

**Boyer (1818-43)**

- Seeks an agreement with the church

- He wants his own clergy, seminary, to appoint his own bishop of Port-au-Prince, unconditional support from the priesthood...
- Rome refuses to “betray” (???) [ read: *do the right thing and reject*] French/international diplomacy (158)

### **Soulouque (1847-59):**

His fall from power opens the way to the **Concordat**  
 France wanted to send French priests to Haiti

### **PAGE 159**

Role of Church for the Haitian state: “civilization” and “pacification”

Ideological control and acknowledgement of Haiti’s independence

Anti-oodoo

Church as “defense mechanism against racist attacks”

Civil strife was sometimes linked to Voodoo activists:

- Boyer’s decision to pay the debt to France angered peasants and several rebellions broke out:
- Voodooist Jean Jacques Aca in 1843
- The Church could quell this (162)

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 Background:

Support for the “schismatic” Church in Haiti is based on the failings of the official Catholic Church in Saint Domingue.

The Church seen as ally to the colonists, and it was

The Church itself was content with itself in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is partly to blame for the long separation  
 Voodoo flourishes: *lakou, ounfò*

### **The Casséus (1987) review of Catholic history in Haiti**

Native Americans, Zemès

Kristòf Kolon 1492 at Mòl Sen-Nikola, he plants a cross

Las Casas

Catholic religion is promoted in constitutions of

1806, 1907, 1816, 1846, 1849, 1950

Konkòda 28 Mas 1860: “fè lidè politik kowonpi yo kontan” (32)

Major contribution of Catholic Church:

Education.

“li vize sèlman yon ti minorite”

The Church over-emphasizes the ruling class.

However, **liberation theology** has been instrumental in various ways  
Literacy, TKL, Bon Nouvèl...

### **Hurbon continued (p 164)**

**Church needs State to establish itself as prestigious power**  
**State needs Church to consolidate itself internally and externally**

#### **Major issues**

- **The “schismatic” Church’s legacy in Haiti**
- **The Christian-Voodoo “confusion” in Haiti (Msgr Robert)**
- But in reality the **Christian-Voodoo syncretism in Haiti began at the beginning of the slave period (circa 1690 or 1640...)**

Soulouque OUT, Geffrard IN

The Church in Haiti, 1860-1915

- Archbishop of P-au-P, Msgr Testard du Cosquer and 24 priests in 1860.
- Suspended or priest not in agreement with Rome forced out.
- Church wanted to be a peacemaker in political conflicts.
- Given right to control its finances, sacraments and educational system.
- Elite education...
- Mark of period: **persecution of the church**
- **Church wanted to keep Soulouque out of power**
- **Soulouque and black followers saw the concordat as tool of the mulattoes**

Suspended priests cause conflict

Church did not give preferential treatment to mulatto or black political leaders.

The Church resisted revolutionary movements and supported the establishment

- Seen as foreign power
- Easily manipulated
- Church expected autonomy but expected the Haitian state to pay priest salaries
- Government help organize parishes and bishoprics (170)
- Black intellectuals started emerging from Catholic schools; they expressed support for Freemasonry, divorce...

1900 ~ Situation “normalizes” (172)

Several dioceses formed

Seminary in France

150 priests in 78 parishes

**States signs education agreements with the Catholic Church**

Period of prosperity, but:

Church marriages don’t increase

Illegitimate children don’t decrease

1864 *Le Moniteur* publishes a letter by Geffrard advocating the

elimination of Voodoo (especially in the city)  
Church confronts syncretism: banishing of Saint statues

p. 177, paragraph 1

Jan Rabèl 23 jiyè 1987

Gwoupman Tèt Ansanm

**Ekip Misyonè** ~ Church groups composed of lay people

~ Church upkeep and administration

~ Literacy

~ Small scale credit; cooperative

~ Farm supplies

~ Training:

~ Organized a pilgrimage of 3,000 peasants over 30 kilometers to visit *Estatè Lasent Vyèj*.

The conflict in Jan Rabèl:

Their faction gained control of the hospital

Farm supplies impacted merchants' profits

Land disputes dating generations

Led law suits against *grandon* over their *fèmaj* on State-owned land

Reactionary sector of the Church, US embassy collude with *grandon*

### **Gage Averille, *A day for the hunter, a day for the prey***

Yon jou pou chasè, yon jou pou jibye

Tropes in Haitian (political) music

(Thematic currents)

Haitian social and musical life is steeped in DIVISIVENESS. "A deeply rooted habitus..."

Bands display factionalism internally and externally

#### **Rivalry**

Heightens fan loyalties

Drama during *kanaval*

Topics for adversarial song lyrics

Spurs creativity and reaching new levels

"The synchrony experienced by audience members at a Haitian concert, dance, carival or other events is largely based in the expectation of (and desire for) collective participation and for alignment with an event that 'heats things up.'"

Metè men nan lè

