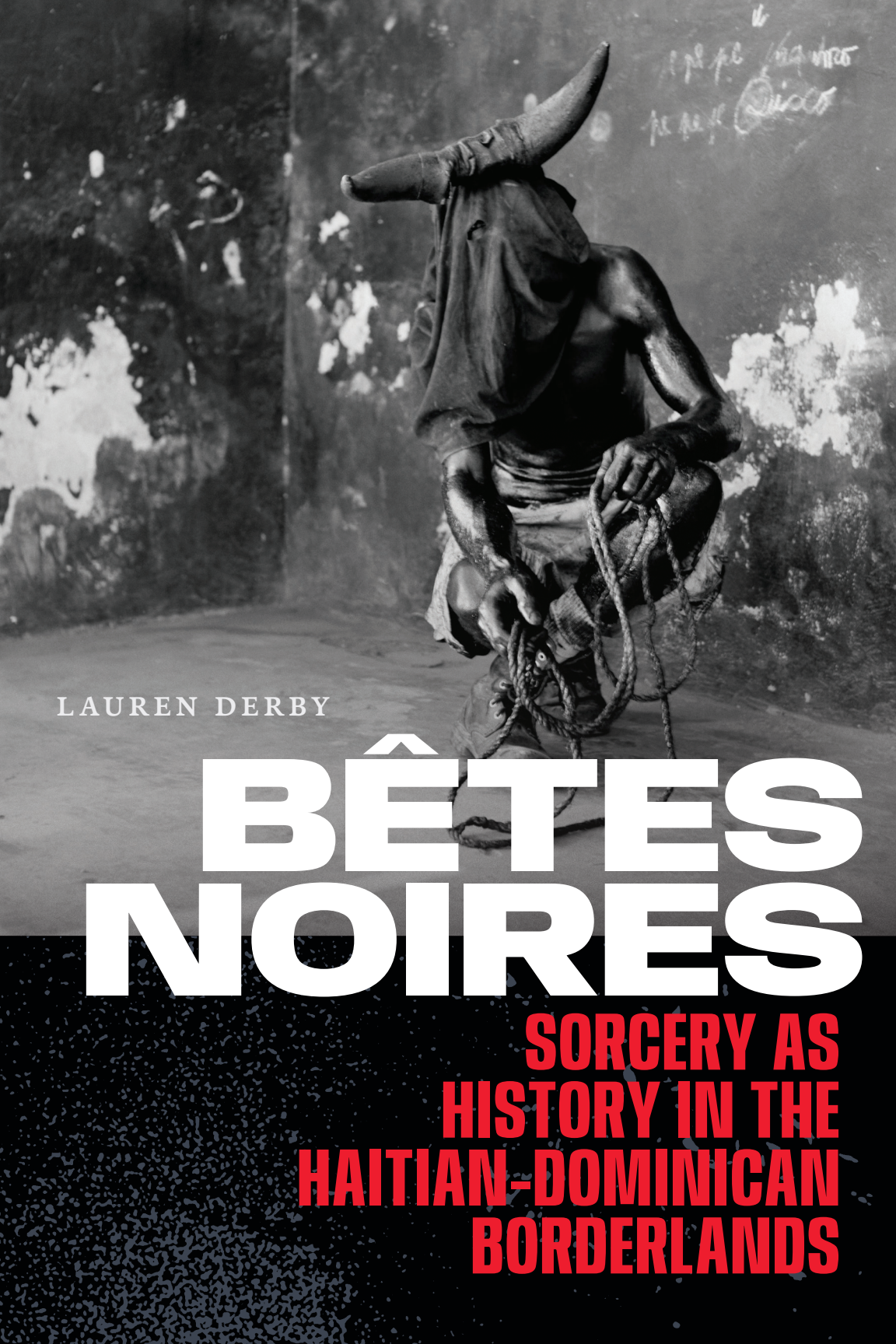




LAUREN DERBY

BÊTES NOIRES

**SORCERY AS
HISTORY IN THE
HAITIAN-DOMINICAN
BORDERLANDS**

BÊTES NOIRES



BUY

BÊTES NOIRES

SORCERY AS HISTORY

LAUREN DERBY

IN THE HAITIAN-DOMINICAN BORDERLANDS

DUKE

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FOR ALEC, JAMES, JULIAN, AND ANDREW

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Fridays. Doña Pico Mora, leader of the St. Francisco cofradia, with whom I stayed during many visits to Bánica, also said that she foresaw my arrival through a vision of one of my twin boys. As in Haiti, in Bánica twins are considered particularly numinous as well as potentially dangerous, and they are said to have powers of magic and divination since they are the “original dead”; I was admonished never to feed them vegetables so that they would not lose their special powers, a taboo they appreciated even if I did not. And during one of my visits I was sent home with a yucca seedling to plant in my garden, which was intended to make me a true Baniquera (alas, it did not thrive, since I lack gardening skills). Special thanks to Doña Pico Mora for her hospitality over the years as well as Martín Alcántara Fragoso (Bubú) and his wife, Reyes; Héctredes Gómez, from whom I have learned so much about religious matters; Irio Ramírez; Edwin Pérez in San Juan de la Maguana; Jennifer Severe in Elías Piña; Fernando Alcántara, Héctor Alcántara Fragoso, Mello, Riderson, Judy Mora, and Sabia who fed me macaroni and cheese on many occasions; and countless others who have spoken with me at length during my many visits. I am grateful to Father O’Hare, Mari Ramírez, Johnathan, Carlito, Flor, Elvis and Carmen, Arsenio and Bienvenido, and other friends who have made Bánica such a wonderful place to visit; Niccolo in Biassou, just across the Artibonite River, with whom I shared *kleren* (bathtub rum) on many occasions; and in Port-au-Prince, Watson Denis, Kendy Vérilus, Ronald Edmond, Zidor Sophonie, Fred Lagrandeur, and the students in our seminar on oral history at the Université d’état d’Haiti who taught me so much. Román Alcántara and his wife, Beba, in particular were exceedingly hospitable, offering me many cups of coffee and stewed guinea fowl when one could be had. Abercio (Abel) Alcántara has been an exceptional research assistant in Bánica, just as Georges René has been an extraordinary assistant in Port-au-Prince, Haiti; I never could have collected or deciphered this material without them.

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Unless otherwise noted the translations are my own. Most names have been changed to anonymize my interlocutors.

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PREFACE

FROM THE MOUTH OF THE GOAT

The *baka* (*bacá* in Spanish) has been furtively trailing me for a very long time.¹ The seeds of this study were sown when Richard Turits and I were collecting oral histories about the 1937 massacre of Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Haitian-Dominican frontier and I first heard mention of the *baka*. Someone made a joke about stories that a car in Ouanaminthe, Haiti, had been taken to be a *baka*. Later I was told that the poultry, mules, and pigs left behind by Dominicans of Haitian descent fleeing the killing fields around Dajabón and Loma de Cabrera in 1937 were accursed *baka* that no one should touch.² I then heard stories that the brutal dictator Rafael Trujillo had a *bacá* that identified his enemies so he could have them eliminated, and that this accounted for his longevity in office.³ And later I was told about a *bacá* that was responsible for several untimely deaths and blood in the toilets at a Dockers assembly plant in Santiago in the early 2000s.⁴ But it was in the central frontier town of Bánica that I first heard about *bacás* in the form of uncanny dogs, pigs, cattle, and horses (and occasionally goats), which raised the thorny question of why only these particular beasts have become spirit demons today. My grandmother, who was haunted by a family member's revenant, eventually requiring that her apartment be subjected to an exorcism by a priest, prepared me to listen to these tales. (I use the Spanish spelling *bacá* when referring to a Dominican *bacá* reference and the Haitian Creole spelling *baka* when referring to a Haitian one.)

Although its name bears some resemblance to the Spanish word *vaca*, “cow,” the term *bacá* is ultimately untranslatable; it accords with the names of other, very similar nonhuman spirit entities throughout the West Indies, *bakoo*, *buck*, and *bakru*. All of these provide their owner spiritual power to gain wealth and are often associated with ethnoracial others.⁵ Like the indigenous Taíno spirits of the dead, they are open secrets lurking in the shadows, widely recognized but generally not publicly

discussed.⁶ They are also shape-shifting creatures that can morph from a little black humanoid figure in urban contexts to an animal host in rural settings. As *campesino* (rural smallholder) Domingo Bautista put it, “The bacá is a natural being that is made with an animal, into which the spirit of a dead person is introduced.”⁷ This specific fusion of a moneymaking male spirit and a being that can shape-shift into an animal is unique to Hispaniola and is a manifestation of what Dominicans call the *fukú de Colón*, or curse of Columbus, since it is only the types of animals brought by Columbus that have become spirit demons.⁸ Perhaps the most diabolical of all these creatures is the goat, as evidenced by the fact that repressive dictator Rafael Trujillo was nicknamed “the Goat”; those who loathed him had a feast of goat meat upon his death, and Dominican popular speech includes dozens of vernacular sayings about goats.⁹ But as we shall see, bacá spirit demons most often appear as dogs, cattle, horses, and feral pigs—the animals that enabled the dispossession of the indigenous Taíno.¹⁰ I argue here that the bacá is first and foremost a “commodity familiar,” a sign of ill-gotten wealth associated with predatory capitalism.

Yet in animal form, the baka also conveys a *longue durée* history of environmental despoilage that accompanied extractivism and had devastating human, faunal, and environmental costs. I propose that baka narratives are signs of what philosopher Paul Ricoeur has called the “space of experience,” which includes the inchoate emotional traces left behind by past events—latent desires and fears, vestiges of which cannot often be found in written archives.¹¹ An avatar from the past with a distinctively disquieting frisson, the baka is a visceral conveyor of strong emotions such as sorrow, jealousy, and anger. Even if late-nineteenth-century travelers noted the abundance of forests (mahogany, pine, and other fine log woods) and birds, over time deforestation has taken its toll, even if it took longer and was not as extensive as in neighboring Cuba, since sugar’s arrival in the Dominican Republic as a large-scale monocrop economy was delayed until the twentieth century, and even then sugar did not define the economy as it did in Cuba, Jamaica, or Puerto Rico.¹² These stories of spirit animal predation are polyvalent but may in part represent a defiant refusal to let go of the free-range hunting ecosystem called *montería*, notwithstanding the fact that the teeming animal commons of yesteryear that took refuge in the extensive forests has given way to domesticated animals grazing on parched and eroded savannas today. Thus baka revenants might be seen as a form of “environmentalism of the poor,” since in refusing to go away, they seem to decry the violence and ecological damage wrought by

industrial agriculture on the island; these “spirited things” appear to want to wish back into existence the feral animal commons now long gone.¹³

I have been fascinated by the biculturality of the “center-island” borderlands since traveling there in 1989 (see map 1).¹⁴ Located on the banks of the Artibonite River, which serves as the dividing line between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Bánica, Elías Piña, is one of the oldest towns on the island and has been called the Macondo of the Dominican Republic, a reference to the fictional town made famous by Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, a master of the Latin American literary genre *lo real maravilloso* (magical realism), in which magic is cast as real and the forces of capitalism are presented as inscrutable and even supernatural.¹⁵ Founded in 1504 and named for its abundance of ebony, Banique, as it was called during the colonial period, originally formed part of the Taíno Maguana *cacicazgo* or chiefdom. The past is palpably present in this town, where one can still see crossing the river canoes fashioned out of single logs (a technique passed down from the Taíno indigenous population, which is now long gone) (fig. P.1), and one can see atop mules that transport produce to market saddles fashioned out of intricately woven straw (a craft that dates from the early sixteenth century). I argue that, like these historical vestiges, the bacá in animal form is a historical artifact of the imagination, a searing “point of memory” of the mass death that commenced with the indigenous Taíno and continued through successive waves of brutal Indigenous and African slavery (the Spanish colony known as Santo Domingo was where the first African slaves arrived in the Americas and became the central depot for Indigenous slavery routed from New Spain and Amazonia in the sixteenth century).¹⁶ The northern border later became the theater of the 1937 slaughter that took the lives of some fifteen thousand Dominicans of Haitian descent who were viciously killed by machete by the Trujillo regime (1930–61), a regime that was supported by the United States during the Cold War.¹⁷ The bacá thus could also be seen as the “rot remains” of the “tangible effects of ruination” left behind by *longue durée* imperial histories of extractivism on the island.¹⁸

Haiti and the Dominican Republic are often cast as dramatically opposed nations and cultures, and these states have clashed at times.¹⁹ Through sugar plantation agriculture, Haiti became the wealthiest of France’s colonies in the eighteenth century, while the Dominican Republic languished as a colonial backwater dependent on extensive cattle ranching. But the baka/bacá is a poignant reminder that within the realm



MAP 1 The Haitian-Dominican border and borderlands. Map by Emily Vogt, Committee on Geographical Studies, University of Chicago.



P.1 An example of the canoes used to cross the Artibonite River, which forms part of the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Haiti, 2012. Photo by the author.

of popular culture, there is much on the island that is shared, since the stories told about its powers of predation are eerily similar, and Dominicans and Haitians share the same visceral reaction to signs of its presence. Of course, the island as a whole was ruled as a Spanish colony during the formative buccaneering period until the French colony of Saint-Domingue was founded in 1669.

Even if I primarily narrate the bacá's predations from the Dominican side of the island in this account, these stories exuberantly cross the border and serve to pit Haitians and Dominicans against one another as well as knit them together, just as the bacá transgresses other antinomies such as life and death, nature and culture, and human and animal.²⁰ This study offers an entangled view of the island, one in which Haitians and Dominicans are intertwined in "complex relations of dependency and interdependence" with spirits and animals as well as each other.²¹ It is significant that in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, a pathway to the spirit world may be opened through Dominican red wine, while in the border province of Elías Piña, Dominican Republic, this may be done through Barbancourt, a Haitian rum.²² These ties of codependence are conveyed through what anthropologist Birgit Meyer has termed "sensational form," since spirits and their animal hosts cannot speak and their presence is registered in and through the body.²³ Animals figure prominently as hosts for the divine and the diabolical in this context, and have long formed an integral part of everyday life and labor. In this rural community with a long-standing dependence upon livestock, animal sounds fill the air. The soundscape is replete with the distant sounds of cocks, cattle, goats, dogs, and donkeys. On market days, there are more burros carrying produce to market than trucks. Farmers contend that they can smell when it is going to rain, and the spirits make themselves known through dreams as well as sensations such as a gust of wind.²⁴

The central frontier today is perceived by those living in the Dominican capital city, Santo Domingo, as a remote hinterland, but in the eighteenth century it became the centerpiece of the national economy as cattle and oxen poured across the border into the sugar plantation economy of Saint-Domingue when it became the world's largest sugar producer. The illicit cattle trade long knitted together Dominican ranchers and Saint-Domingue's sugar producers; not surprisingly, this was the region where the flag for a United Spanish Hayti—a unified island—was first raised in the nineteenth century.²⁵ As it expanded rapidly over the course of the eighteenth century, Bánica served as a bridge between the

major township of San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, with its ample grazing savannas, and Hinche, Haiti, en route to the Artibonite Valley, where the sugar plantations formed that fueled Saint-Domingue's eighteenth-century sugar boom. Yet the population diminished at the turn of the century, when the sugar economy receded and it became a theater of war during and after the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804).²⁶ Bánica today is still dominated by descendants of the four principal cattle clans that founded the town, including the powerful cattle baron and political broker Wenceslao Ramírez of San Juan, whose grazing lands straddled the border, even if ranching is no longer a central feature of this area today (fig. P.2).²⁷

This study is based on extensive oral histories with members of the founding ranching families, especially the extensive Alcántara clan and their field hands, descendants of General Victoriano Alcántara, who was said to have survived on the run from authorities through miraculous protection from bullets.²⁸ A member of the Alcántara family I spoke with had a sugar mill in Thomassique, Haiti, speaks Haitian Creole, and holds on to the pre-1937 border view of Haiti as grander and more cosmopolitan than the Dominican Republic due to its majestic architecture, ample imported goods, and formidable elite, harking back to a time when the Dominican border currency was the Haitian gourde. As he put it, “Haitians were very, very, very rich.”²⁹ Nor are the Alcántaras the only family whose lives and kin have traversed the border. Renowned Haitian leader Charlemagne Peralte, who led the Caco uprising against the US occupation of Haiti (1915–34), actually hailed from the Peralta family, which was originally from Restauración, Dominican Republic, and his brother-in-law was Dominican. When Dominican legislation was passed in 2013 aimed at expelling Haitian-Dominicans born on Dominican soil after 1929, I was told that it did not have an appreciable impact on everyday life in Bánica.³⁰ Today the dance hall in Bánica plays Haitian *konpa* dance music alongside Dominican bachata.

The region's reputation for fierce independence is also due to the fact that it was long a refuge for maroons, or runaways from slavery. It was there that the Taíno chieftain Enriquillo stood up to the brutal Spanish colonizers, establishing a “locus of defiance” of runaway Indian and African slaves for nearly a decade.³¹ Through the eighteenth century the southern Bahoruco Mountains were an outpost of insurgent runaway slaves who refused to submit to Spanish authorities and established what



P.2 Cow at rest outside Biassou, Haiti, 2014. Photo by the author.

historian Charlton Yingling has called a “realpolitik of evasiveness.”³² So in collective memory this area has long been a locus of fierce resistance to authorities. Even today the frontier identity as a “society against the state” remains palpable.³³ When border trade was officially shut down due to a cholera outbreak in Haiti in the 2010s, Dominicans in Bánica resisted by setting up a night market in the cemetery, where they surreptitiously traded with Haitians.³⁴

While this study examines narratives of spirit demons in animal form, this region has also long been seen as a holy land due to its reputation for miraculous healing—in the eighteenth century its mineral springs were said by the French to be curative.³⁵ Its hallowed reputation was later burnished by the fact that faith healer Díos Olivorio Mateo took refuge in the area while on the run from authorities and that it was where he was eventually killed by US Marines in 1922, during the military occupation (fig. P.3).³⁶ It is said that Bánica’s patron saint, San Francisco (St. Francis—appropriately, the patron saint of animals), has appeared in the sacred grotto there, which is a site of national pilgrimage, just as the national patron saint, the Virgin of Altagracia, appeared on a water tank.³⁷



P.3 Irio Ramírez’s altar with images of faith healer Dios Olivorio Mateo alive and slain. San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, 2015. Photo by the author.

The sacred cave of San Francisco is located on a mountain above Bánica and is the oldest pilgrimage site in the Caribbean, dating from precolonial times.³⁸ This may help explain why the largest town in the central frontier, San Juan de la Maguana, is seen as a center of potent sorcery on the island.³⁹

I have long used oral history as a primary source in my work, but one particular challenge of this project has been centering a disorderly corpus of narratives of ghostly encounter episodes as my primary archive; perhaps this is necessary if we are to come to terms effectively with what it means to live “in the wake” of slavery in the Black Atlantic.⁴⁰ I commence each chapter with an anecdote about a personal encounter with a bacá, but this material should not be taken as folklore—that is, as something located in the past. These were related to me as contemporary historical events, even if there is at times a presumption that as the border has modernized these monstrous apparitions have lessened over time. This was made patently clear to me during an oral history class I co-taught at the State University of Haiti: I was presenting on the history of scholarly approaches to folklore, and the students responded by

relating their own personal encounters with baka, which I interpreted as a repudiation of the framing of this material as traditional folklore and thus part of a distant past.⁴¹

My interviews were generally conducted as life narratives with follow-up questions about bacá sightings and encounters, but given the taboo nature of these phenomena, I had to approach the topic indirectly. In one case, I heard one particular version from one interlocutor and then very different versions from others (see chapter 5), but since my fieldwork was conducted in a series of short visits to the region over the span of over a decade commencing in 2008, it was rare that I was able to collect various perspectives on one particular incident. Some Catholics and most evangelicals object to even uttering the baka's name, which could conjure it, and instead describe it through a euphemism such as *pájaro malo* (evil creature).⁴² Since bacá stories are male drinking tales, women play a role in transmitting them but tend not to discuss them in public, which required me to conduct my research with a male research assistant, even if, as a foreigner, I was granted access to male spaces. While oftentimes oral history is portrayed as a straightforward process of storage and retrieval, in this case deciphering these "anecdotal authority stories" and perceiving their patterns required interpretation.⁴³

Walter Benjamin once claimed that storytelling was a declining art, but clearly it lives on robustly in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where one might even say there is an excess of memory.⁴⁴ Perhaps, as Paul Ricoeur has said, storytelling and "critical history can contribute to the healing of collective memory."⁴⁵ In this case, as we shall see, this would involve healing the cultural trauma wrought by colonial conquest, as the seed animals brought by Christopher Columbus became technologies of famine and terror and today have been converted into spirit demons stalking the central frontier.⁴⁶ This popular vision of Columbus's *fukú* or curse is, of course, completely at odds with a state that has long sought to define the Dominican population as descended from Columbus via rooting a mythic Hispanic identity in his remains.⁴⁷ The interface between trauma and the spirit world has been noted by Cathy Caruth, since to be traumatized is to be "possessed by an image or event," which is also a way to describe being seized by a spirit. She also recognized post-traumatic stress to be not just a symptom of mind but also a "symptom of history."⁴⁸ Christopher Columbus himself noted the absence of monsters on Hispaniola, which is more than a little ironic, since if I am right, he actually unleashed them there.⁴⁹

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INTRODUCTION

SPIRITS, HISTORY, & POWER

A day for the hunter,
a day for the prey.

BOUKMAN EKSPERYANS | “Ganga.”

If you eat the meat, you have to pay for the meat.

AVADRA GRAND CHEMIN THROUGH ERNST NELSON

In June 2015 in Port-au-Prince, I went to speak with Avadra Grand Chemin, through his “horse” (spirit host) Ernst Nelson, about the shape-shifting skills of Haitian secret society members, since Nelson is a member of the Sanpwèl (fig. I.1).¹ The conversation touched on many themes, including mobility, eating, theft, and vital matter:

EN: A secret society member can turn into an *asson* [a sacred rattle to call the spirits], a *kalbas* [gourd], a wheelbarrow, a lamp—they can turn into anything on earth.² They can turn into animals too: cattle, goat, pig. If they turn into a pig you cannot eat them. They can turn into a dog. You join the society [*inscrit*] when you enter the Sanpwèl. You lose a lot of things when you join. If you have a wife or a child, they might die—they might get eaten.³ The

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Sanpwèl eat meat. If you eat the meat, you have to pay for the meat. If you want to enter the society, someone has to present you. Both women and men can enter the Sanpwèl. In Sanpwèl, the girls fly higher than men. They can fly. When the Sanpwèl make a ceremony they have a special bottle. It is through the bottle that they become an animal. They can go anywhere—they may arrive in Aux Cayes or Jérémie as an animal. In one night, the Sanpwèl can visit all of Haiti.

LD: Could you ever by mistake eat a pig that was actually a Sanpwèl?

EN: No, because they only become animals at night. If someone becomes a pig, they are bad (*malfetè*); he is a *lougawou*. The *lougawou* can turn into an animal—a large pig or cow. If you try to sell that one in the market it will die. If someone eats that animal in the market, they are eating human meat.⁴

This study considers the spirit demons called *baka/bacá* on Hispaniola from the perspective of its Dominican victims who found themselves becoming its prey. Such was the case for Juan Alcántara, who was on sentry duty at a remote border post on the Dominican frontier when he was attacked by a phantom in the form of a rabid dog, which he eventually fought off, but only after a violent exchange of blows that left him very shaken up. Or the case of Hegel, who recounted to me that for years his house was haunted by a wild dog that would repeatedly scratch at his door, and which continually evaded him until someone suggested that he install a protective charm that eventually kept the beast at bay.

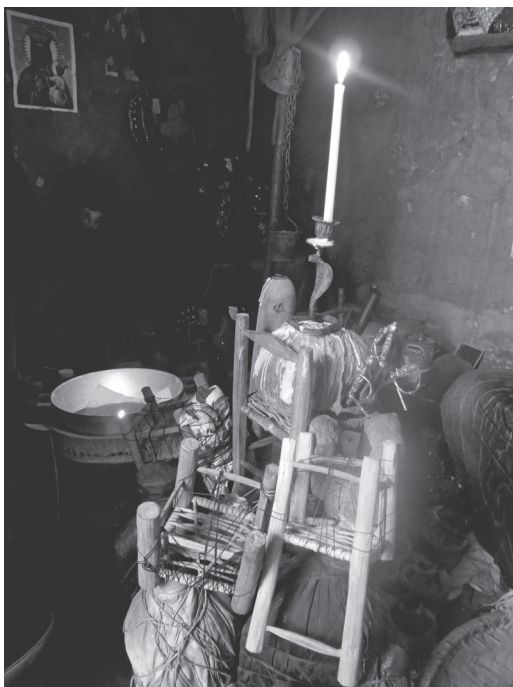
Here I want to consider this phenomenon for a moment from the perspective of its assailants, those skilled in the arts of sorcery who have been tasked with sending spirits as a form of supernatural assault. One of these is Ernst Nelson, who worked as a *bòcò* (sorcerer) in Martissant, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.⁵ I will then explore how the *baka* might be seen as a “commodity familiar.”⁶ As a member of the Sanpwèl secret society, Nelson commands a virtual battalion of *mò* or spirits of the “*vagabon* dead,” which he converts into *zonbi* and sends on expeditions to do specific things—for example, secure a straying wife, obtain a favorable legal outcome, or get vengeance on someone.⁷ Working with the skull of a former *ougan* (vodou priest) who was his mentor in the arts of sorcery, Ernst has several squadrons of spiritual mercenaries at his disposal.⁸ One group is represented by a cluster of small wooden chairs bound together



1.1 Vodou priest Ernst Nelson with his *zonbi*-making paraphernalia, including an image of St. Expeditus, the patron saint of urgent causes and desperate situations. Martissant, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2018. Photo by the author.

and hung upside down with twisted ropes from the ceiling of his *atelier* (fig. 1.2); at the center of his workspace there is a skull with a lit candle in an ornate candelabra. He also works with small red and black cloth dolls and the skulls of several other former ougan, which can be used to send spirits on *zonbi expedisyon* (zonbi expeditions). As a member of the Sanpwèl, Ernst can change form as well, becoming (among other things) an animal, which confirms the observation that shape-shifting is centrally about experimenting with forms of power.⁹

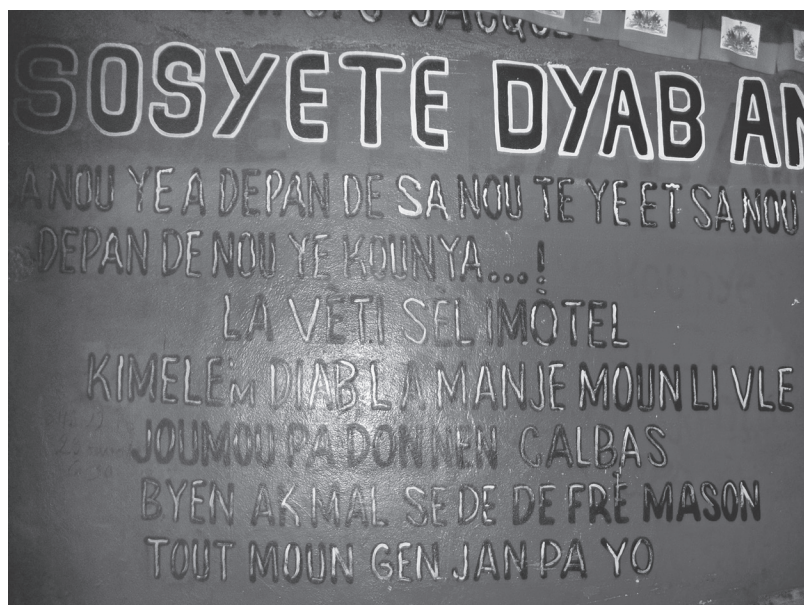
Said to be the “first modern monster,” the *zonbi* has received considerable attention as an allegory for the dispossession of labor under slavery—as literary critic Colin Dayan expressively put it, “the most powerful emblem of apathy, anonymity, and loss.” It expresses the human cost of slavery, which produced “soulless husks deprived of freedom.”¹⁰ The *zonbi* presents “the animated corpse as allegory of the slave’s disempowerment,” alienated from kinship and community; the depleted slave who survived against all odds but is socially dead.¹¹ But this monstrous presence may have another, more visceral source as well. Since slaves



1.2 Detail of Nelson's altar. Photo by the author.

often lacked proper ritual mortuary care, their death was deprived of ritual recognition, which meant that “the border between the dead and the living is not properly sealed.” For this reason, the suffering and angry dead became a menace threatening the living. As Valérie Loichot has put it, the deceased deprived of ritual strike “back at the system responsible for [their unmarked death] in the first place.”¹² This confirms Haitian medium Georges René’s interpretation that the *baka* are slave souls seeking revenge on the living for their distress. As one *curandero* (popular or folk healer) put it, “The *baka* isn’t real, because it hasn’t got a body by itself, but it has a reality.”¹³

In the wake of slavery, forms of spirit work emerged in which the living work with the dead through “mystical labor.”¹⁴ Ritual specialists like Ernst Nelson channel these disembodied spirits and put them to use. On their own, these spirits can wreak tremendous havoc. This was the case after the 1937 massacre, when Haitian victims of the slaughter became vengeful spirits that hovered over the land they had lost when they fled.¹⁵ Or after the 2010 Haitian earthquake, thousands of unburied dead victims were said to have become *lougawou*, causing furniture to fly out



1.3 Sign for Sosyete Dyab (Djab), a Haitian secret society, with Creole sayings. Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2010. Photo by the author.

of second-story windows as far afield as Little Haiti in Santo Domingo, an area where Haitian traveling merchants reside.¹⁶ Like the *pwen*, the *baka*, and the *djab*, the *zonbi* is a “manufactured, unnaturally vitalized power,” a spirit of the dead that is trapped and conveyed by the invisible hand of an agent (fig. 1.3).¹⁷ The *baka* that shape-shift into animal form are specific to Hispaniola, but they bear a strong resemblance to morally ambivalent minor spirits with the power to both heal and harm, such as the *buck* of Trinidad, the *bacoo* of Guyana, the *bakru* of Surinam, and Amazonian practices that anthropologist Neil Whitehead has described as “dark shamanism” and which have become a feature of political power in the circum-Caribbean.¹⁸ Thus the *baka* should be seen as part of a multispecies story of imperial violence and of spiritual power likely deployed as weapons of the weak during slavery, and may share a common etymology in *buck* or *bokjs*, the derogatory Dutch term for Amerindian, which derives from the word for “he-goat.”¹⁹ Another possible source is *mbakára*, which is an Ibo/Efik term for white man.²⁰ This lineage would also connect with the contraband trade in slaves and mules that long linked Hispaniola to Venezuela and the eastern Caribbean through Curaçao.



I.4 Sign for Piedra Imán (lodestar) and zonbi for sale. Elias Piña, Dominican Republic, 2016. Photo by the author.

The zombie has long been represented in Hollywood film as the depleted husk of a person who has had their soul removed, but that is not necessarily the primary way in which it functions in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.²¹ The term *zonbi* derives from the Central African Kikongo word for “spirit” (fig. I.4), and Haitian talk about zombies is more centrally concerned with the work done with the disembodied souls rather than the soulless bodies. Ethnomusicologist Martha Ellen Davis has noted that in the Dominican Republic there is no real distinction between the dead and the living; the dead are merely invisible “vibrant matter,” which make their presence known through the sensory realm since, like animals, they cannot speak.²²

One source for zonbi practice is indigenous Arawak beliefs that spirits can be conveyed into stones or animals such as the sacred *zemi* power object, which itself had agency since it could speak, make things,

grow, and roam on its own. Archaeologist José Oliver has described this as an expression of the “partible character of persons,” since the zemi could extract, contain, and neutralize illness as well as shape-shift, taking different forms.²³ As in Nelson’s testimony, the bottle as spirit container is a root metaphor and a “perspectivist shifter like Clark Kent’s phone booth” since it can trap a spirit and empower a spell, just as spirits can be sent to reside in other containers. The bottle (*bouteille*, *botella*) is also a container for herbal medicine.²⁴

The zonbi also has roots in Central and West African beliefs about embedding spirits in power objects such as *minkisi* (pl.; sing., *nkisi*), which accords the spirits personhood, as well as in male secret societies like the leopard-men of Nigeria or the Tabwa lions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which have the ability to shape-shift at night and were the basis for the secret maroon associations of colonial Saint-Domingue (fig. I.5).²⁵ The uncanny personhood of the zonbi bears a strong resemblance to West and Central African and Amazonian practices in which animals and objects have agency and animating spirits can be transferred from one vessel to another; thus the body is seen as an “envelope.”²⁶ Shape-shifting was also a feature of Iberian witchcraft during the seventeenth century, when women in particular were said to be able to transform into goats, fowl, and rats.²⁷ In historian Caroline Bynum’s categorization, these diabolical entities are hybrid creatures and do not represent true metamorphosis.²⁸

Zonbi (*zonbi astral*) can be harnessed and sent as supernatural assistants to do things such as secure child support, enact vengeance against a wayward spouse, or steal another’s crops. Zonbi are errant spirits that can also afflict a person who incites jealousy. Georges René, for example, was plagued by a zonbi that affixed to his leg, causing it to become swollen and painfully inflamed until he could see a specialist who could remove it; he attributed his affliction to *jalouzi*.²⁹ Ethnomusicologist Elizabeth McAlister has written that during the Easter carnivalesque rite called Rara in Haiti, secret society members carry brooms with which they sweep up zonbi to “heat up” and energize their troupes; after the procession, they return the zonbi to the cemetery.³⁰ Ethnobotanist Wade Davis discovered that bones and thunderstones (celts) are key ingredients in zonbi preparation alongside puffer fish toxin, and that the ingredients are placed in a jar and buried in the coffin of a dead infant before use.³¹ Similar to Hollywood depictions, the zonbi is an emblem of horror.



1.5 *Baka* sculpture by André Eugene of a boy turning into a pig. Atis Rezistans studio, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2012. Photo by the author.

While they represent a single genre, baka stories appear in three distinct narrative idioms of tales of self and other.³² The first represents fugitivity, in which a person transforms into an animal or something else—often to escape from authorities. This idiom was canonized during the Haitian Revolution when runaway slave and conjurer François Makandal bragged that he had escaped from jail by turning into a mosquito.³³ Baka stories can form masculine encounter narratives in which the eyewitness comes across these wily spirits in animal form at night, as we shall see in chapter 6. Baka can also be cast as supernatural assistants, engaged in surreptitious protection or thievery, or as covert profit generators. All of these variants appear in this study, but I focus here on the baka's appearance via an animal host.

PHANTOM CAPITALISM

As in Michael Taussig's classic formulation in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*, baka stories would be classed as devil pact tales; alternatively, I characterize baka as "commodity familiars," an analytic that reduces

them to one singular defining motif of the stories—profit as theft—since the elusive creature enables the stealth acquisition of wealth, albeit at a grave cost.³⁴ Thus clandestine ownership of a baka often emerges as an explanation for otherwise inexplicable wealth acquisition. Secrecy is a key aspect of this phenomenon, which one might say is actually a characteristic feature of Latin American capitalism, since the motor of capitalist investment and its profits has long been invisible to locals on the ground.³⁵ This folk view of capitalism in the Caribbean makes sense, since from the start capitalism was an alien process—investment capital, technology, labor, managerial staff, and profit were all exogenous to the island, and the product itself was shipped overseas. Yet while these narratives clearly critique excessive and exogenous profit (baka, djab, pwen, and zonbi are all moneymaking *maji*, in Haitian parlance), there is much more going on in these stories than just a popular commentary on inequality.

The baka shares with other Latin American commodity familiars such as the zonbi an “essential foreignness,” or telltale signs of whiteness. For example, zonbi beef turns deathly pale, and the bakru and Trinidadian buck crave bananas and milk—a breakfast popularized by the global fruit monopoly firm United Fruit.³⁶ More examples are the siren spirit, which prefers whiskey; blond mermaids who dole out cash; and stories in St. Lucia of a sea demon in the form of a huge white man astride an enormous steed that drags a chain behind it.³⁷ The spirit that guards the Oruru mine in Bolivia, El Tío (the uncle), has a large phallus and a cowboy hat. And industrial steel water tanks and jeeps are often said to be telltale signs of the dreaded Andean *pishtaco*.³⁸ These demons are specifiers of a long history of foreign extractivism and surreptitious flows of profit; rumors course that the dreaded *ñaqak* of Peru seek human fat to pay off the foreign debt.³⁹ Anthropologist Mary Weismantel has focused on how these stories convey *longue durée* patterns of exploitation. As she has said of the Andean *kbarisiri*, “It is this pregnant narrative of social and material history, made visible in the pishtaco, that makes his body an object of fascination and disgust. Embedded in its possessions and its flesh is the record of what it has done to Indians in the past, and the threat of what it is about to do again.”⁴⁰ These apparitions resonate with the Ibo etymology of *bukra* as “white man.”⁴¹ Unlike Taussig, I avoid the term *devil* here because of the way this flattens these spirits into a Christian model of demonology when, as Haitian sculptor André Eugene told me, from the perspective of believers they are *puissants* (powerful), but not necessarily evil.⁴²

The fact that these phantasms are fetishes of the foreign also relates to the fact that they represent a particularly modern form of labor, commodity production—which, as Karl Marx has said, is a “social hieroglyphic” of concealed labor time investment, a fact that renders every commodity a public secret. Commodities are mysterious since they “conceal rather than disclose” the social character of labor; thus, like the baka, they reek of “magic and necromancy.”⁴³ These conditions of labor “superexploitation” first associated with slavery later accompanied the rise of industrial agriculture in the post-emancipation period. This type of agriculture created intensive work conditions so harsh they demanded new forms of labor servitude, such as debt peonage and long-distance labor migration, to staff them; West Indians and above all Haitians were brought in as contract labor to cut cane on US-owned plantations in the Dominican Republic and Cuba.⁴⁴ No wonder baka rumor panics have coalesced around foreign-owned sugar plantations (such as the Haitian sugar firm HASCO, in the 1920s, and the sugar producer Gulf and Western, which operated in the Dominican Republic in the 1970s with Haitian labor receiving the paltry wages of 34 cents an hour; laborers’ encampments were described as “slave labor camp[s],” and efforts at organizing there would be met with jail time or torture) and industrial free trade zones (where all inputs, capital, and products are foreign-owned).⁴⁵

Baka narratives are not traditional folklore but rather popular commentary on the particular forms of surreptitious wealth generation that expanded in the twentieth century but have been a central component of Caribbean labor regimes since Christopher Columbus’s arrival. These labor forms have a long and dark history in the Caribbean, where indentured servants were spirited away through a toxic combination of debt coercion, “‘trick’ and ‘cheat’ . . . [and] ‘allurements and deluding falsities,’” and where slavery ruled through the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ As ground zero of Spanish colonization, Hispaniola experienced massive violence, famine, and epidemics that wiped out 90 percent of the Indigenous population, eliminating its existence as a corporate community within thirty years. With steel weapons and attack dogs, Europeans overcame Indians and then worked them to death. As the Taíno population receded, Santo Domingo became the central hub of Amerindian slavery, as upward of 650,000 Indigenous people were enslaved, uprooted, and shipped around the Atlantic, although mortality was very high.⁴⁷ Santo Domingo was also the first site of African slavery in the New World, as some twenty thousand enslaved people arrived by the 1550s to staff

mining camps and sugar plantations until Spanish attention shifted to the mainland.⁴⁸ Death was a central point of intersection and shared experience between Amerindian and African slaves.

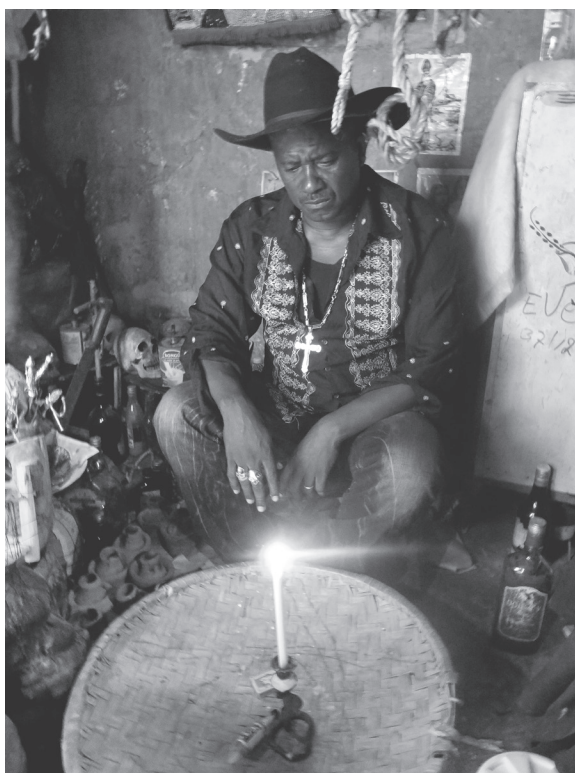
The annihilation caused by Latin American colonialism commenced with gold mining and the repartimiento system of forced labor drafts, which led, as Marcy Norton has put it, to “the dispossession of Indigenous labor, land, and, often, life.”⁴⁹ Conditions were so dire that Indians often chose suicide over working for the Spanish.⁵⁰ Indigenous slaves and West Africans quickly took over Hispaniola placer gold mining after the rapid demise of the Taíno; some of the Africans likely brought with them mining skills that located them as “intermediaries between nature and culture,” and they were rumored to be sorcerers with command over the supernatural, such as the earth spirits that guarded the ore.⁵¹ Indeed, a possible linguistic leftover from the early mining economy may be the fact that the notion of being ravaged by malevolent spirits is often conveyed through the idiom of eating. And the devil pact logic presumed that minerals could be acquired only through sacrificial exchange relations between humans and underground spirits—which were not respected by the Spanish, of course.⁵² West African miners, who like marabouts were “masters of secret things,” were also said to be able to transform into animals. Similar rumors of shape-shifting continue to be whispered today on the island about the clandestine secret societies of Haiti.⁵³

Narratives about spirit demons such as the baka condemn the new system of profit and human expenditure that first gold mining and later slavery and plantation agriculture brought to the Americas; thus they represent a folk vision of capitalism from the perspective of labor that highlights the violence required to produce profit for social outsiders. These stories denounce the terrible human cost of the “plantation machine” that made Saint-Domingue the richest French colony in the eighteenth century.⁵⁴ But this is not just a generic rejection of capitalism by a partially uncaptured peasantry, as Taussig would have it.⁵⁵ It is a wholesale rejection of a new form of brutal industrial technology that created invisible profit through the violent expenditure of unfree labor. These stories condemn what Marx termed the “‘monstrous’ world of commodities [generated] by one of capitalism’s most blatantly violent appropriative mechanisms, slavery.”⁵⁶ As devil pact tales, baka narratives give voice to a popular excoriation of the particular form of capitalism brought to Latin America, which consumed people to produce phantom

profits, which accrued to foreigners and elites. In the Caribbean, this type of capitalism deployed industrial technology on the plantations, which have been described as “factories in the field.”⁵⁷ Anthropologist Karen Richman has said that the *pwen* mimics the alienation of labor power. As she puts it, through the *pwen*, “peasants symbolically control and make sense of their incorporation as producers of alienated wage laborers.”⁵⁸ Baka narratives are a genre of “occult cosmology” with formulaic signature elements such as industrial technology, clandestine cash, and signs of Haiti (long a symbol of capitalist profit to Dominicans, due to its history of colonial grandeur); they express moral indignation at flows of illicit wealth that do not trickle down and are not shared.⁵⁹ This helps explain why Dominican assembly plants have had *bacá* sightings that so terrified workers that the plants had to be shut down.⁶⁰ As Richman has put it, *maji*’s “illicit powers descend from the above and the outside”—thus from exogenous powers.⁶¹

No wonder the very words for “work” in Haiti (*travay*) and in the Dominican Republic (*trabajo*) have a diabolical cast to them, since they are also the terms used for sorcery.⁶² This folk view yokes debt as a nexus of social obligations to violent death as part and parcel of capitalist production. Profit is here cast as dependent upon blood sacrifice, which corresponds to the proposition that ritual human sacrifice may have accelerated in West Africa when Caribbean plantations expanded the slave trade, as West African leaders sought to expiate their sin of being complicit in that trade.⁶³ In Haitian and Dominican popular parlance, the blood sacrifice requisite to capital accumulation is conveyed through idioms connoting voracious eating—a figure of speech that resounds with slave rumors concerning fears they would be consumed by the human “butchers” who were their enslavers.⁶⁴ Perhaps this history helps explain why the term for cultural outsiders among the maroons of Suriname is *bakaa*.⁶⁵ Correspondingly, when the *mystère* (spirit) Grand Chemin arrives and puts Ernst to work, Ernst puts on a cowboy hat—a gesture that marks the arrival of a powerful outsider (fig. 1.6).

If the *baka*/*bacá* first emerged as a sign of now-traditional forms of stealth profit such as foreign-owned sugar mills and lottery vendors, it has also been repurposed for novel “mysterious modes of accumulation” and dark money, such as political graft and narcotrafficking, which came to light under neoliberalism.⁶⁶ In the postcolonial period, *bacá* narratives have continued to express moral condemnation of new forms of surreptitious wealth generation, which in the twentieth century have



1.6 Avadra Grand Chemin at work, 2018. Photo by the author.

increasingly flowed through the state. This occurred during the crony capitalism of the regimes of Rafael Trujillo (1930–61), in which profitable monopolies were doled out to family members and his henchmen, and during the regimes of Joaquín Balaguer (1960–62, 1966–78, 1986–96), which sanctioned bribery and corruption on the part of the police and civil servants and which were sustained through flows of US economic and military assistance.⁶⁷ These regimes were propped up by clandestine military support as the United States sought to keep communism out of the hemisphere since it could threaten US economic interests.⁶⁸ Balaguer's time in office also saw the decline of sugar, the traditional staple crop, and IMF structural adjustment policies such as currency devaluation were imposed in response to the growing debt crisis. The state then promoted tourism as a revenue generator. The Dominican Republic has since become the most-visited island in the Caribbean, yet this has not generated growth in jobs and has only accelerated the expansion of underemployment and the informal sector.⁶⁹ These forms of clandestine

wealth continued under the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD), which developed ironclad control over state and party finances upon Leonel Fernández's rise to power in 1996, which came about through an alliance with Balaguer's Reformista party and continued a patronage regime in which party members were allotted *botella* (sinecure) positions as clientelistic rewards from 2004 to 2016.⁷⁰ The PLD imposed a lucrative tourist tax in 2018, but flows of surreptitious wealth increased dramatically as the Dominican Republic became a major money-laundering hub for drug profits using shell companies; the amount of money that had its origins concealed in this way reached \$260 million in just three years, generating cash for bribes to police and government officials.⁷¹ All this took place during a period of economic decline, including a massive banking crash in 2003, that resulted in most Dominicans today being forced to rely on informal-sector work and relations of trust through *fiao* (credit) at the *colmado* (corner grocery) to get by.⁷² Baka/bacá are not just signs of hidden wealth; they can also be emblems of covert state violence, an element that links the secret police of strongmen Trujillo and Balaguer in the Dominican Republic to François and Jean-Claude Duvalier's paramilitary force in Haiti, the Tonton Macoute.⁷³ This helps explain why the animals left behind by the ethnic Haitians fleeing the 1937 massacre were said to be baka and should not be touched.⁷⁴

Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have proposed that across the globe “occult economies”—“magical means to material ends”—have surged since the 1990s as a result of a volatile combination of scarcity and deregulation.⁷⁵ Because my archive of popular baka narratives is oral, I am not often able to historicize these rumors, even if some of my informants indicated that bacá visitations were more frequent during their youth (during the years of the Balaguer regime) than they are today. But beyond the actual ebbs and flows of surreptitious wealth and violence, a key factor driving sorcery accusations today, I would argue, is the rise of evangelical Protestantism, which has seen the number of its adherents increase tenfold since 1960.⁷⁶ Pentecostalism in the Caribbean has staked its claim on the grounds that it can stamp out “Satanism” (unlike Catholicism, which is perceived as coterminous with African-identified practices such as vodou/*vodú*), and its increasingly martial imagery has fueled a militant zealotry and a call to “spiritual warfare.”⁷⁷ Adepts see conversion to Protestantism as a defense against malignant forces such as zonbi and baka.⁷⁸ Evangelical Protestantism defines vodou as a form of witchcraft, a view that has instigated periodic moral panics, such as

after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti when vodou temples were attacked by Pentecostals as rumors surged that the temblor had resulted from a *vodouisant* devil pact.⁷⁹ Richman has argued that Protestant discourse makes *lwa*, *wanga*, and *djab* (vodou deities, charms, and malevolent spirits, respectively) “hyper-real”; they are reified so that they can be ritually extirpated.⁸⁰ The role of Pentecostalism in fomenting rumors about shape-shifting is not always apparent, but it certainly has served to amplify and spread baka/bacá rumors, especially when those rumors are picked up by television and digital media.⁸¹

It has been said that sorcery discourse persuades through the power of metaphor. Anthropologist Michael Jackson has written about how metaphors mediate between the body and social environments; they are not just a means of saying things but also a way of doing things.⁸² Sorcery practice, however, is also reflective of the precarious agency of the poor, for whom there are many constraints on their field of action. This was the case for a woman I met in San Juan de la Maguana, Ángela, who sought out a mystical “work” when she was running for a local-level political office against a powerful contender. But her rival managed to usurp the spell to his own advantage, winning the post through her device. Of course, sorcery discourse is also a means of empowerment, through enacting the “persuasive force of . . . articulated visions.”⁸³ Anthropologist Jeffrey Kahn thus argues that stories of *djab* must be seen as an alternative form of reality, since they have the power to shape social events.⁸⁴ Baka are also fundamentally a way of thinking through questions of power and the ethics of its deployment. As Charlotte Otten has put it, lycanthropy narrative “is not escapist: it is realistic.”⁸⁵

This study homes in on the question of the animal host within these sorcery narratives and practice and how, as “cultural objects,” baka phantoms convey the past.⁸⁶ Drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu, one might say that these spirits convert history into the supernatural.⁸⁷ Chapter 1 explains why the invasive species brought by Columbus became spirit demons, conveying the horror of conquest from the Indigenous people to the African slaves who arrived in their wake. Chapter 2 explores a mysterious suicide said to be caused by demonic cattle specters surging across the border, invoking ties of interdependency that have long bound Dominican cattle to Haitian markets; but this particular episode also articulated Dominican political rivalry and rumors of ill-gotten illicit wealth. Chapter 3 treats stories of baka in the form of fearsome black dogs, a version that resonates with the history of canines as technologies

of terror used to force the rebellious into submission—first the indigenes and later African slaves during the Haitian Revolution. Chapter 4 analyzes *bacá* narratives as haunting tales of loss and longing in stories about the creole pig in the aftermath of the military's pork slaughter across the island in 1979. Women formed a large percentage of the small pig farmers in the Dominican central frontier who recounted to me their despair at the loss of the creole pig in the aftermath of the army slaughter, since female heads of households have long relied on the family pig to pay for school fees and cover domestic emergencies. Chapter 5 examines *bacá* rumors that swarmed around La Manicera, a vegetable oil processing plant associated with one of Trujillo's henchmen and a man whose nickname was "Colón" (the Spanish version of the name Columbus).

The final chapters shift from history to performance to consider the meaning of *bacá* storytelling and representations of animals within popular culture. Chapter 6 discusses the semantics of *bacá* stories as vehicles of masculine bravado that transform the narrators into trickster heroes. Chapter 7 shifts to the genre of the grotesque, focusing on the figure of the animal in Carnival masquerade as well as its role as masculine partner, foil, and rival and the pleasures of artful braggadocio and popular humor; it thus celebrates the bawdy verbal arts that embrace the animal and the history of free-range beasts and the men they long sustained on Hispaniola.

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NOTES

PREFACE. FROM THE MOUTH OF THE GOAT

- 1 *Boca del chivo* (goat's mouth) in Dominican Spanish means "gossip." The baka forms part of a "squad" (to quote Herskovits) of spirit demons that includes the *lougarwou*, *galipote*, *zonbi*, *djab*, and other supernatural entities. These have received considerably more treatment in Haitian ethnography than in the ethnography of the Dominican Republic but are usually only mentioned in passing. An exception on Haiti is Thylefors, "Poverty and Sorcery," chaps. 6 and 7. See also Hurbon, *Voodoo*, 60; Hurbon, *Le barbare imaginaire*; Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, chap. 5; Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo*, 84; Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 239–43, 336, 340, 352; Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, 288–89; Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 113, 136, 285; Brown, *Mama Lola*, 143; Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi"; Bourguignon, "The Persistence of Folk Belief"; Charlier, *Zombies*; Davis, *Passage of Darkness*; Simpson, "Loup Garou and Loa Tales"; Simpson, "Magical Practices"; Lauro, *The Transatlantic Zombie*. A very similar phenomenon in the Anglophone Caribbean is the duppy or the jumbie, which is mentioned in Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 43; Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, eds., *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*; and Wong, *Jumbie Tales*. For Dominican treatments of the bacá, see Ubiñas Renville, *Historias y leyendas*, 129–39; Ubiñas Renville, *Mitos, creencias y leyendas*, 25–28, 40, 193, 292, 352–55; Labourt, *Sana, sana*, 183–86; Inoa, *Diccionario de dominicanismos*, 29; Krohn-Hansen, "Magic, Money and Alterity," 136; Brendbekken, "Beyond Vodou," 37; Deive, *Vodú y magia*; Roorda, Derby, and González, *Dominican Republic Reader*, 413; Pérez y Pérez, *Algunas*, 13; and García-Cartagena, *Bacá*. The demonic creature of Puerto Rico, the *chupacabra*, which killed animals (which the baka can do as well), is treated in Román, *Governing Spirits*; and Derby, "Imperial Secrets." Davis, *La otra ciencia*, discusses forms of protection from errant spirits in chap. 5; see also Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo*, 85, for a discussion of *ougans* (vodou priests) sending and removing spirits. Richman, *Migration and Vodou*, has a chapter on Haitian spirit work that forms

part of the dreaded *petwo* or *pwen* vodou practice; sorcery is also treated in the epilogue. Esteban Deive discusses Dominican witchcraft in *Vodú y magia*, chap. 9. As with *bacá* and *baka*, I use *vodú* for Dominican instances of this religious complex and *vodou* for Haitian ones, although when I quote authors who used alternative spellings I have left those as is.

- 2 Derby, “Haitians, Magic, and Money.” For more on the 1937 massacre, see Derby and Turits, *Terreurs de frontière*; Turits, “A World Destroyed”; Cadeau, *More Than a Massacre*; Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola*; Bosch Carcuro, *Masacre de 1937*; Myers and Paulino, *The Border of Lights Reader*.
- 3 Derby, *The Dictator’s Seduction*, chap. 6.
- 4 Derby and Werner, “The Devil Wears Dockers.” In this case the *bacá* appeared in the form of a small black man, as it often does. Herskovits mentions that the dead can be imaged as dwarves in *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 249.
- 5 See Pires, Strange, and Mello’s excellent article “The *Bakru* Speaks.” West Indians formed part of the labor force for the Dominican sugar industry in the early twentieth century, and Dominican faith healer Olivorio Mateo’s assistant was West Indian.
- 6 Taussig treats public secrecy in *Defacement*, 5. Perhaps due to a long history of authoritarian rule under the Trujillo and Balaguer regimes and periodic campaigns against vodú, many Dominicans prefer to keep their relationship to the spirit world private, as in the merengue song “La cruz de palo bonito,” which contains encoded references to vodú elements such as the palo de cruz (plant of the cross), which offers protection from powerful spirit demons such as *bacás* and *zonbi*. The song also indirectly references a practitioner’s devotion to St. Antonio (who, as a *lwa*, is known as Legba). See “‘La Cruz de Palo Bonito’ por Miriam Cruz.” Thanks to Raúl Fernández for this reference. For more on similar Caribbean errant spirits, see Crosson, *Experiments with Power*; Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah*; Paton and Forde, eds, *Obeah and Other Powers*; and Ochoa, *Society of the Dead*. A key difference between obeah and vodú/vodou, however, is that in the West Indian nations of Trinidad, Jamaica, and the Bahamas obeah remains illegal today.
- 7 *Campesino* is the Spanish term for “small cultivator,” although some border livestock producers consider it disrespectful. See Bautista, *Si me permiten hablar* (that text spells *bacá* as *vaca*, but the accent and pronunciation indicate that it refers to a spirit demon and not a bovine).
- 8 Lachatañeré, ¡¡*Ob mío Yemaya!*!, a collection of Orisha foundational narratives from Cuba, for example, contains no shape-shifting. How-

ever, within the foundational narrative of the Abakúa secret society in Cuba, a fish is converted into Sikán; see Brown, *The Light Inside*, 46.
 9 I discuss this in “Trujillo, the Goat.” For example, in popular speech *chivo* has a variety of meanings: It can refer to something that is phenomenal, someone who is nervous, or someone who cannot be trusted. And *chivirica* means “coquettish.” Many more of these popular sayings can be found at <https://www.tiktok.com/@felixbaezr/video/7358835990401944878> (accessed August 24, 2024). Herskovits mentions Haitian sayings about goats in *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 265.
 10 Thus conforming to the Arawak distinction (identified by Santos-Granero) between long-domesticated plants, which are classed as sublime, and the more recently domesticated ones, which are classed as grotesque. See Santos-Granero, “The Virtuous Manioc and the Horny Barbasco.” I discuss a similar cultural splitting among Dominicans between gringo and creole chickens in Derby, “Gringo Chickens with Worms.”
 11 Ricoeur, “Memory—History—Forgetting,” 475.
 12 Sugar cane was grown during the colonial period, but the Dominican economy was not dominated by sugar, it never had a sugar boom as did Saint-Domingue and Cuba, and sugar remained regionally specific. See González Llana, “Isla de Santo Domingo.” On sugar and Cuban deforestation, see Funes Monzote, *From Rainforest to Cane Field*.
 13 DeLoughrey and Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies*, 9. As revenants, they are thus specters of history; see Musharbash and Presterudstuen, “Introduction,” 10; Johnson, *Spirited Things*.
 14 Anne Eller uses the term “center-island” in *We Dream Together*. For more on the history of Haitian-Dominican relations, see Fumagalli, *On the Edge*; Eller, *We Dream Together*; Nessler, *An Islandwide Struggle*; Walker, “Strains of Unity”; Ulrickson, “*Esclavos que fueron*”; Turits and Derby, “Haitian-Dominican History.”
 15 Alicia Sangro Blasco, personal communication; Beckman, “What’s Left of Macondo?” This genre commenced in the Caribbean, however, with Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World*, which included runaway slave Makandal’s shape-shifting.
 16 Hirsch and Spitzer, “Testimonial Objects,” 358. For more on Indigenous slavery, see Stone, “War and Rescate.”
 17 For more on the massacre, see Turits and Derby, “Haitian-Dominican History”; Derby and Turits, *Terreurs de frontière*; Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola*; Cadeau, *More Than a Massacre*; Hintzen, *De la masacre*; García-Peña, *Borders of Dominicanidad*. Haitians are linked to the “bitter money” derived from cane cutting, which is associated with slavery; see Shipton, *Bitter Money*, and Derby, “Haitians in the Dominican Republic.”
 18 Quoting Derek Walcott. See Stoler, “Introduction.”

- 19 Diamond, *Collapse*; Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight*.
 20 As monsters typically do; see Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” Krohn-Hansen has argued that *bacá* narratives forge a divide between Haitians and Dominicans on the island (“Magic, Money and Alterity”).
- 21 Tsing, “Unruly Edges,” 144. For works that offer an entangled view of the island, see Matibag, *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint*; Eller, *We Dream Together*; Nessler, *An Islandwide Struggle*; Fumagalli, *On the Edge*; Mayes and Jayaram, *Transnational Hispaniola*; and Maríñez, *Spirals in the Caribbean*.
- 22 Smith, “Dialoging with the Urban Dead.” Smith and I observed Dominican *curanderos* (popular healers) receiving the spirits through a Barban court pour in visits in 2015 with ten healers in Elías Piña. Dominican vodú is treated in Davis, *La otra ciencia*; Andújar Persinal, *Identidad cultural*; and Ripley, *Imágenes de posesión*. Haitian vodou is treated in Deren, *Divine Horsemen*; Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*; Richman, *Migration and Vodou*; Brown, *Mama Lola*; and Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*. It should be noted that the spirits are called the 21 *divisiones* or *les mistères* or *los misterios* by many practitioners, however, and not vodou/vodú.
- 23 Meyer, “Religion and Materiality”; Smith, “Dialoging with the Urban Dead”; Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean*.
- 24 Although when the highway was built from Thomassique, Haiti, to Hato Viejo, Dominican Republic, motorcycles started appearing more and more. Foul smells can also indicate foul play; I was told that a sign that a Dominican zonbi maker in Elías Piña was up to no good was the horrific odor of his shrine. For more on sensing the spirit world, see Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean*.
- 25 Eller, *We Dream Together*.
- 26 Hinche (Hincha) was located within Dominican terrain through the eighteenth century. Another set of cattle networks linked the elite of Santiago de los Caballeros with Dajabón and Cap-Haïtiën, but it is very difficult to cross the Dominican frontier from Pedro Santana to Dajabón, so these were distinct routes. For more on these northern links, see Cassá, “Rebelión de los capitanes.” For more on Bánica’s colonial past, see Hernández González, *La colonización de la frontera*, 133–45; Mora Oviedo, *Bánica*.
- 27 For more on Ramírez, see Lundahl and Lundius, *Peasants and Religion*.
- 28 These beliefs are not uncommon. Caudillos (rural strongmen) Buenaventura Báez and Pablo Mamá were also said to have such protection, as did a rebel leader who called himself Romaine-la-Prophetesse during the Haitian Revolution (Eller, *We Dream Together*, 42; Eller, “Raining Blood,” 435; Vanhee, “Central African Popular Christianity,”

259; and Rey, *The Priest and the Prophetess*). There has been extensive intermarriage between these clans, as can be seen in the list of names in Mora Oviedo, *Bánica*, 192–99. This anecdote also is a reminder that the border has long served as a refuge for outlaws from both sides of the island; Baud, “Una frontera—refugio”; Baud, “Una frontera para cruzar,” 5–28.

29 Dominican general Valentín Alcántara defected to the Haitian army in the nineteenth century. This view also associates Haitian vodou with the ability to magically generate cash; see Derby, “Haitians, Magic, and Money”; Filan, *Vodou Money Magic*.

30 “The Roots of *La Sentencia*: An Interview with Rachel Nolan”; Wooding, “Haitian Immigrants and Their Descendants.” Another border-crossing phenomenon is that the Haiti-based series of clinics Partners in Health has a Dominican partner organization, Socios en Salud, that provides primary health care to Dominicans and Haitians in Elías Piña; see Garry, “Crossing Rivers.” For more on cultural mixing on the border, see Derby, “Doña Pico’s Story.”

31 Altman, “Revolt of Enriquillo.”

32 Yingling, “Maroons of Santo Domingo,” 27.

33 Clastres, *Society Against the State*; Baud, “Una frontera—refugio”; Baud, “Una frontera para cruzar.” The Haitian opposition that ousted Jean-Bertrand Aristide also took refuge in the border area, and crossing the border has long served as a means to escape political authorities, as was the case for Don León Ventura, co-founder of the Palma Sola Liborista community, which sprang up upon Trujillo’s death, and the Union Patriotique, a Haitian Dominican organization, formed against the US occupation of Haiti but organized across the border (Martínez, *Palma Sola*; Lundius, *The Great Power of God*; Lundahl and Lundius, *Peasants and Religion*). Today this rather unpoliced area may be a site of drug and human trafficking as well in ways that complicate the link between licit and illicit activity, since some local officials appear to be involved in contemporary illicit trade. See Schendel and Abraham, *Illicit Flows*, 7; Baud and Van Schendel, “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands”; Baud, “State-Building and Borderlands.”

34 For more on the closure of the border due to cholera, see Andrews, “Sinks for the Press.”

35 Block, “Healing Waters of the Caribbean.”

36 Lundius, *The Great Power of God*; Lundahl and Lundius, *Peasants and Religion*; Bettelheim and Derby, “Olivorio Altars and *Espiritismo*.” For more on the crackdown on popular *curanderismo* during the US occupation, see García-Peña, *Borders of Dominicanidad*.

37 Lundius, *The Great Power of God*, 103–12; Lundahl and Lundius, *Peasants and Religion*. There is an image of Bánica’s thermal baths in

Moreau de Saint-Méry, “Vue de l’entrée.” Martha Ellen Davis describes this region as part of a “mystical geography”; see her prize-winning book, *La otra ciencia*; her edited volume, *La ruta hacia Liborio*; and her documentary, *The Dominican Southwest*. See also Bettelheim and Derby, “Olivorio Altars and *Espiritismo*,” and Giovanni Saviño’s documentaries about the religious practices of the region: *Misterios*, *La comarca fija de Liborio*, and *The Culture of Palo*. This region also has *indio* ancestral spirits who live under the water; see Pešoutová, *Indigenous Ancestors*.

- 38 Pešoutová, *Indigenous Ancestors*, 242–47.
- 39 Krohn-Hansen, “Magic, Money and Alterity,” 134.
- 40 Sharpe, *In the Wake*. Historian Joseph Miller has noted how “evidence of the past survives, yet it is often indirect, muffled and mixed in complex ways with information from the present”; he also describes anecdotes as an important oral genre in Miller, “Introduction.”
- 41 The course was called “After the Earthquake: Popular Memory as History in Haiti” and was funded by a LASA/Ford Special Project Grant, took place in 2011, and was co-taught with Watson Denis, Teresa Barnett, and Andrew Apter.
- 42 *Pájaro* literally means “bird,” but in this context it is a figure of evil and forms part of a range of avian-related euphemisms for death, such as the owl, which is said to be an *ave de mala suerte*, an omen of bad luck or even death. It is not just the bacá that is frightening to some, however. Fear of the spirit world drives many into evangelical Protestantism and Adventism since Catholicism may be seen as coterminous with vodú/vodou; see McAlister, “From Slave Revolt”; Thornton, *Negotiating Respect*. Thus conversion can serve as a defense against sorcery as well as a license to practice it. It can also be seen as a more powerful form of protection; see Richman, “The Vodou State”; Richman, “A More Powerful Sorcerer.”
- 43 James, *Doña María’s Story*, 173.
- 44 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 100. On island memories of trauma, see Suárez, *Tears of Hispaniola*.
- 45 Ricoeur, “Memory—History—Forgetting,” 475.
- 46 Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*.
- 47 Ricoeur, “Memory—History—Forgetting,” 478. A massive lighthouse, the Faro a Colón, was built by Joaquín Balaguer in 1992 for the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s arrival, and Dominican authorities claim that the country houses his remains. See Krohn-Hansen, “A Tomb for Columbus in Santo Domingo.”
- 48 Blanco and Peeren, “Introduction,” 11–12; Caruth, “Unclaimed Experience.” Jeffrey Alexander has theorized cultural trauma as when “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous

- 49 event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness” (“Toward a Cultural Theory of Trauma,” 307).
Whitehead, *Of Cannibals and Kings*, 54.

INTRODUCTION. SPIRITS, HISTORY, AND POWER

Epigraph: Boukman Eksperyans, *Libète (Pran Pou Pran Li!)*, Island Records, 1995.

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- 1 For more on Nelson, see Smith, “Dialoging with the Urban Dead.” For more on Haitian secret societies, see Laguerre, *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti*; Davis, *Passage of Darkness*. Secte Rouge and Cochon Gris secret society members are reported to turn into cattle and pigs and then return to human form in Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 216.
- 2 This comment reflects the braggadocio I discuss in chapter 7, but in actual fact baka shape-shifting is not random, as Perez y Perez, *Algunas de las creencias y supersticiones*, 13, and others contend. The Haitian term for shape-shifting is *dedoubleman*.
- 3 Eating is also the idiom for soul removal through witchcraft among the Bakongo; see MacGaffey, *Religion and Society*, 143, 145, 147; Bockie, *Death and the Invisible Powers*.
- 4 Here is the interview in Creole:

EN: Moun sosyete Bizango o Sanpwèl kap tounen nan ason, tankou yon kalbas, tankou yon lamp ou yon kart—yo kap tounen sa ki li vle nan tè. Yo kap tounen kochon, yo kap tounen chen. Yo kap tounen bèf ou kochon ou kabrit. Si se kochon, nan sosyete Bizango, ou pa kap manje-li. Yo kap tounen chen. Depi ou fè pati sosyete Bizango ou Sanpwèl, li pèdi anpil bagay, lè ou enskri nan sosyete, lè ou antre nan sa. Si ou gen yon pitit, nan sosyete a, sosyete kap pran piti ou. Sanpwèl manje vyann. Si se moun ki te tounen animal, yo kap manje li. Si ou manje vyann la, fòk ou peye pou li. Ler ou antre nan sosyete sa, yon moun fòk antre ou. Gason ak fanm kap mache nan sosyete sa paske se sosyete Sanpwèl ki rele van. Nan Sanpwèl fanm kap antre. Lè yo fè ceremoni, yo gen yon boutèy espesyal, yon boutèy maji a. Yo gen yon boutèy espesyal—se nam Sanpwèl sa a ki te kontwole sa. Boutèy yo kap tounen nimpò ki animal. Yo kap tounen nan ti chen, ti chat, nan kochon. Tout ce posib. Yo kap ale nimpò ki plas. Nan sosyete Sanpwèl, yo kap ale a Pot-au-Prince o Jérémie ak Sanpwèl. Yo kap ale a Jérémie. Nan yon nuit, sosyete Sanpwèl kap vizite tout Ayiti.

LD: Eske ou kap manje moun nan fòm animal?

EN: Non, paske se nan fòm animal sèlman nan nuit. Si se yon kochon lougawou, se yon malfaitè. Moun Sanpwèl ak moun Bizango se moun malfaitè. Lougawou kap tounen animal e lap tounen kay. Li tounen chat o gwo kochon ou li ka tounen nan gwo bèf. Si ou vann sa nan mache, lap mò. Bèf sa, lè ou manje sa, lap tiye li.

- 5 Haitians call these practices *maji*. I use the term *sorcery* here with some trepidation since during the colonial period such allegations fueled anti-Black racism and could land African-descended subjects in jail, since *sortilèges* (spells) were outlawed and there were periodic crackdowns against African-derived religions during the US occupation and the Trujillo regime. See García-Peña, *Borders of Dominicanidad*; Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*; Paton and Forde, *Obeab and Other Powers*; Paton, *Cultural Politics of Obeab*. However, scholars of popular religion in Brazil, Cuba, and Amazonia, where sorcery is not illegal today, use the term; see Parés and Sansi-Roca, *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic*; Taussig, “History as Sorcery”; Richman, *Migration and Vodou*; Whitehead and Wright, *In Darkness and Secrecy*.
- 6 By “commodity familiar” I mean spectral manifestations of capitalism—a variant of Marx’s commodity fetishism.
- 7 Smith, “Dialoging with the Urban Dead,” 67. This is what Karen Richman has termed the “interpersonal theory of disease” (“Mortuary Rites,” 154). On bottles used for wanga or spells, see McAlister, “A Sorcerer’s Bottle,” 305–22. On illness sent via sorcery, see Farmer, “Sending Sickness,” 6–27; Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation*. This function corresponds to the justice logic of assault sorcery; see Crosson, *Experiments with Power*; Charlier, *Zombies*; Davis, *Passage of Darkness*. Elizabeth McAlister treats secret societies and their spiritual work with *zonbi* in *Rara!*, chap. 3. For Cuban secret societies, see Miller, *Voice of the Leopard*; Brown, *The Light Inside*. I use the Haitian spelling *zonbi* when referring to its meanings on the island of Hispaniola, and the spelling *zombie* when referring to the Hollywood representations.
- 8 Skulls and bones are “spirit-embodiment” objects; see Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 118.
- 9 As Crosson has put it in *Experiments with Power*. See also Whitehead and Finnström, *Virtual War and Magical Death*, 20.
- 10 Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, 37; McAlister, “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites,” 457.
- 11 McAlister, *Rara!*, chap. 3; Forde, “Introduction,” 2; Lauro, *The Transatlantic Zombie*, 17–18; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 85, 97; Sharpe, *In the Wake*; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

- 12 Loichot, *Water Graves*, 12–13; Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, 254. Forde calls these “bad deaths” in “Introduction,” 5; see also Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden*, 248, on “duppies.” Richman stresses the importance of mortuary rites in Haiti in “Mortuary Rites,” 142.
- 13 Brendbekken, “Beyond Vodou,” 36. The quote from Georges René was taken from a conversation at a ceremony on November 1, 2010—the first Day of the Dead after the 2010 Haitian earthquake. This was a very charged event, of course, since three hundred thousand people had perished as a result of the earthquake.
- 14 Forde, “Introduction,” 4; Routon, “Conjuring the Past,” 641; Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 159–200.
- 15 Brendbekken, “Beyond Vodou,” 35.
- 16 I heard these stories when I arrived in Santo Domingo two weeks after the Haitian earthquake, which occurred in January 2010. The loupawou is gendered female and is typically a woman who turns into a turkey; this accords with the fact that most traveling Haitian vendors are women. For more on these—which are called *brujas* in the Dominican Republic—see Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night*; Simpson, “Loup Garou and Loa Tales”; Simpson, “Haitian Magic,” 97. The *loup-garou* is also part of French folklore; see Milin, *Les chiens de Dieu*; Smith, *Monsters of the Gévaudan*.
- 17 Richman, “Mortuary Rites,” 147; Kahn, “Smugglers, Migrants, and Demons”; McAlister, *Rara!*, chap. 3; Santos-Granero, “Introduction.” In Haiti, pwen has been called a form of sympathetic magic; see Richman, *Migration and Vodou*, 16. Intriguingly, there is an ethnic group in Central Africa called the Baka who are rumored to have shape-shifting abilities; see Köhler, “Half-Man, Half-Elephant.”
- 18 Whitehead and Wright, *In Darkness and Secrecy*, 2–3. Beck, *To Windward of the Land*, discusses the *bolum*, *baku*, *bok*, or *bakru*, xxxi; however, in the West Indies, due to the long history of criminal prosecution of obeah, these forms of magic are seen by some as the work of the devil (Beck, *To Windward of the Land*, 218–19; Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah*; Savage, “Slave Poison/Slave Medicine,” as well as other essays in Paton and Forde, *Obeah and Other Powers*; Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*; Smith, “Genealogies of Gede”; Wong, *Jumbie Tales*). See Crossons, “What Obeah Does Do” on moral ambivalence toward obeah in Trinidad.
- 19 Van Berkel, *The Voyages of Adriaan van Berkel to Guiana*. Guyana was a Dutch colony for a time and Amerindians often served as guides there. Thanks to Vikram Tamboli for this citation.
- 20 I am grateful to an anonymous reader for these etymological insights. For more on sorcery as a form of resistance to slavery, see Garrigus, *A Secret Among the Blacks*; Garrigus, “Like an Epidemic.” *Becara* was the

- term for “white man” in colonial Jamaica (Thicknesse, *Memoirs and Anecdotes*, 77).
- 21 On the zombie, see Ackermann and Gauthier, “The Ways and Nature of the Zombi”; Davis, *Passage of Darkness*; Charlier, *Zombies*; Lauro, *The Transatlantic Zombie*; McAlister, “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites”; McAlister, *Rara!*; Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*; Derby, “Zemis and Zombies.” It is important to note that Black Atlantic religious practices are constantly innovating in relation to new technologies, a point stressed by Sánchez in “Channel-Surfing.”
- 22 Davis, “Afro-Dominican Religious Brotherhoods,” 60; Forde and Hume, *Passages and Afterworlds*; Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean*; Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*. On the US version of the zombie, see Lauro, *The Transatlantic Zombie*.
- 23 Oliver, *Caciques and Cemi Idols*, 50; Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis”; Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy’s Point of View*; García Garagarza, “The Year the People Turned into Cattle”; Musgrave-Portilla, “The Nahualli”; Sousa, *The Woman Who Turned Into a Jaguar*; Derby, “Zemis and Zombies.”
- 24 Erikson, “Myth and Material Culture,” 107; McAlister, *Rara!*, 104. The bottle as spirit container is also referenced in baccoo narratives in Guyana, since the baccoo pelts its adversaries with bottles and bricks; see “Buxton Baccoos Keep Up Attacks on Family.” Thanks to Vikram Tamboli for this reference.
- 25 MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power”; MacGaffey, “The Personhood of Ritual Objects”; Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*; Roberts, “‘Perfect’ Lions”; Pratten, *The Man-Leopard Murders*.
- 26 Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis,” 470–71; MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture*.
- 27 Crespo Vargas, “Inquisición y artes mágicas,” 350; Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*; Hagler, “Exhuming the Nahualli”; Sousa, *The Woman Who Turned Into a Jaguar*; Norton, *The Tame and the Wild*, chap. 2.
- 28 Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 30.
- 29 An example of what Farmer has called “sending sickness.” The visceral power of jealousy is discussed in Brown, *Mama Lola*; Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*.
- 30 McAlister, *Rara!*, chap. 3.
- 31 Davis, *Passage of Darkness*, 112–14.
- 32 On genre, see White, “‘They Could Make Their Victims Dull,’” 1383.
- 33 Simpkins, Johnson, and Brice, “The Makandal Text Network.” For more on vodou as resistance during the colonial period, see Pluchon, *Vaudou, sorciers, empoisonneurs*.
- 34 In Haitian Creole this is called an *angajman*; see Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 242; Krohn-Hansen, “Magic, Money and Alterity.” For

- another example of devil pacts as explanations for wealth, see Tutino, "From Involution to Revolution in Mexico," 813. For more on devil pact narratives, see Crain, "Poetics and Politics"; Edelman, "Landlords and the Devil"; de la Torre, "The Well That Wept Blood"; Gordillo, "The Breath of the Devils"; Gordillo, *Landscapes of Devils*. Profit made from sugar, which in particular is associated with slavery, is what Parker Shipton describes as "bitter money" in *Bitter Money*.
- 35 For discussion of stories of zombie labor working at the US-owned HASCO sugar plant in the 1910s, see Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, chap. 2; Richman, *Migration and Vodou*. In his introduction to *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai also notes that concealment of money flows can give rise to forms of fetishism. Georg Simmel discusses the money form in his essay on secrecy, noting the "unattainable secrecy" its "facilities of dissimulation" enable; see Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy," 467.
- 36 On banana consumption in the United States, see Striffler and Moberg, *Banana Wars*. A prime example of Chiquita's promotion of banana consumption in the United States is *Chiquita Banana's Recipe Book*, which contains thirty-seven ways to incorporate bananas into sweet and savory dishes. Thanks to Elizabeth McQueen for this citation. Zonbi meat is that of a spirit which has been shapeshifted into an animal. For more on zonbi meat, see Bulamah, *Ruínas circulares*, 121–22. It is usually beef but it can be pig or horse.
- 37 For more on these associations between illicit powers and foreignness, see Pires, Strange, and Mello, "The *Bakru* Speaks," 14; Richman, *Migration and Vodou*, 154; Beck, "West Indian Sea Magic," 194–202, esp. 195; Derby "Imperial Idols"; Weismantel, "White Cannibals"; Weismantel, *Cholas and Pisbtacos*; Santos-Granero and Barclay, "Bundles, Stampers, and Flying Gringos." On commodity aesthetics, see Palmié, "Thinking with *Ngangas*," 860.
- 38 Nash, *We Eat the Mines*; Ferry, *I Am Rich Potosí*; Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*.
- 39 Wachtel, *Gods and Vampires*, 83.
- 40 Weismantel, *Cholas and Pisbtacos*, 194.
- 41 Thanks to an anonymous reader for this insight.
- 42 Personal communication, 2011. The binary moralism of Christianity is also not shared by polytheistic religious systems such as Haitian vodou and Dominican vodú. However, evangelical Protestants and some Catholics may see them as witchcraft. Chakrabarty takes up the problem of translating minority histories in "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts."
- 43 Marx and Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 324.
- 44 The term *superexploitation* is from Wald, "Gulf and Western's 'Slave Labor Camp'"; see also Melillo, "The First Green Revolution." This

- practice also came to associate Haitians with cane cutting, a debased form of labor associated with slavery, which in turn gave rise to anti-Haitianism; Turits and Derby, “Haitian-Dominican,” 43–53.
- 45 On HASCO, see Seabrook, *Magic Island*, cited in Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*; Wald, “Gulf and Western’s ‘Slave Labor Camp’ in Dominican Republic”; Derby and Werner, “The Devil Wears Dockers.” These rumors often appear during moments of global economic distress for which the reasons are not clear on the ground, such as the Depression in the 1930s and the debt crisis in the 1970s (when prices shot up overnight for basic commodities under IMF austerity policies, resulting in massive protests).
- 46 Wareing, “Violently Taken Away,” 1–22.
- 47 Stone, “War and Rescate”; Van Deusen, *Global Indios*.
- 48 Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean*.
- 49 Norton, *The Tame and the Wild*, 77. For Marx, placer mining would be considered merchant capitalism, the antecedent to industrial capitalism.
- 50 Altman, *Life and Society*, chap. 2.
- 51 Eagle notes that West Africans were placed in the gold mines of Hispaniola (“The Early Slave Trade,” 142). On West African mining, see D’Avignon, *A Ritual Geology*, chap. 2. As she explains, Europeans interpreted this spirit world as the work of the devil. See also McNaughton, *The Mande Blacksmiths*, 48–50, on blacksmiths’ secret powers; Herbert, *Red Gold of Africa*; Roberts, “The Place of Iron in African Cosmologies”; Rosen, *Fires of Gold*, 38; and chapter 2.
- 52 See Bockie, *Death and the Invisible Powers*, which explores Kongo mortuary beliefs and notes that the term *eating* is used frequently to convey spirit predation (see, for example, 46 and 51). Eating is also a motif in popular narratives of diabolism in Gordillo, “The Breath of the Devils,” 40–42; Gould, *To Lead as Equals*, 29; Nash, *We Eat the Mines*, ix.
- 53 McNaughton, *Mande Blacksmiths*, 48–50. Roberts discusses the “‘enchanted technologies’ of iron smelting” in “The Place of Iron in African Cosmologies.”
- 54 Burnard and Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine*; Richman, *Vodou and Migration*.
- 55 Taussig, *Devil and Commodity Fetishism*.
- 56 Palmié, “Thinking with Ngangas,” 864.
- 57 Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*. Palo Monte in Cuba also involves a pact; see Palmié, “Thinking with Ngangas,” 862.
- 58 Richman, *Migration and Vodou*, 218.
- 59 White, *Speaking with Vampires*, chap. 1; West and Sanders, *Transparency and Conspiracy*, 6; Derby, “Haitians, Magic, and Money.”

60 Derby and Werner, "The Devil Wears Dockers."
 61 Richman, *Migration and Vodou*, 154; Smith, "Dialoging with the Urban
 Dead," 78.

62 Richman, *Migration and Vodou*, 224, contrasts the terms *do* and *work* as
 moral antinomies that correspond to the right and left hands of vodou,
gine versus *maji*. *Trabajo* is also a term for sorcery in Cuba.

63 Pietz, "The Spirit of Civilization," 29–30.

64 Equiano cited in Woodard, *The Delectable Negro*, 40. Descourtiz men-
 tions that slaves thought they had been captured so that Europeans
 could drink their blood (*Voyages d'un naturaliste*, 25). Turner discusses
 the history of cannibalism narratives dating from slavery in *I Heard It
 Through the Grapevine*, chap. 1. Eating is also an idiom for commodifi-
 cation and inequality in Gordillo, "The Breath of the Devils." Interest-
 ingly, while individual eating is suspect (hence the vilified *comer solo*;
 Mateo, "The 'Eat Alones,'" 373), feeding others is a social good (Rich-
 man, *Migration and Vodou*, 160; Stevens, "Manje in Haitian Culture"). I
 return to this topic in chapter 7.

65 Gomes da Cunha and van Velzen, "Through Maroon Worlds," 256. We
 also heard about a violent baka attack in Carriacou (Grenada) from
 Winston Fleury (personal communication, 2013), so this specter exists
 beyond Hispaniola.

66 Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies," 282.

67 Rumors about whether Balaguer's longevity in office could be ex-
 plained though mystical protection were fueled through his sister
 Emma, who participated in Santería. In addition, Balaguer was widely
 rumored to have little men who swept spirits away from his home with
 tiny brooms. Bacá rumors could also be registering covert repression
 (denied by the regime as well), as we shall see in chapter 5. For more
 on the Trujillo regime, see Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction*; Turits, *Founda-
 tions of Despotism*; Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door*. On Dominican
 politics, see Hartlyn, *The Struggle for Democratic Politics*.

68 While the topic is beyond the scope of this account, the United
 States, of course, has played a major role in enabling and support-
 ing these regimes starting with the military occupation of Haiti and
 the Dominican Republic by the United States (1915–34 and 1916–24,
 respectively), when the first national armies were created. Rafael
 Trujillo was an officer in the US-trained national guard, from which
 he launched the coup that landed him in office for over thirty years.
 The United States intervened to oust the democratically elected
 regime of Juan Bosch in 1965, and the Duvalier dynasty was sup-
 ported by the United States for its role in keeping communism out of
 the hemisphere. For more on these events, see Renda, *Taking Haiti*;
 Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door*; McPherson, *The Invaded*; Calder, *The*

- Impact of Intervention*; Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*; Abbott, *Haiti*. Yoder treats Balaguer's use of "sports patronage" to curry favor with the masses through baseball in *Pitching Democracy*, 108.
- 69 Gregory, *The Devil Behind the Mirror*, chap. 1; Krohn-Hansen, *Jobless Growth*.
- 70 Krohn-Hansen, *Jobless Growth*, 18.
- 71 Asmann, "Drug Ring Exposes Massive Money Laundering." The extensive political graft of the PLD since its ascendancy in the 1990s came to light in 2017 in the Odebrecht corruption scandal, in which Dominican politicians were exposed as having partaken in some \$92 million of illicit profit; see Pineda, "Dominican Republic Arrests Officials." Thanks to Samuel Bonilla Bogaert for bringing this issue to my attention.
- 72 Hippert, *Not Even a Grain of Rice*; Krohn-Hansen, *Jobless Growth*.
- 73 For an example of state violence under Balaguer, see Del Pilar Sánchez, "Bosch forma escuela durante polémica."
- 74 Derby, "Haitians, Magic, and Money."
- 75 Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies." This accords with Dayan's assertion that there was a surge in evil spirits in Haiti in the 1990s with the rise of export subcontracting, internal migration, violence, and poverty; see Dayan, "Vodoun, or the Voice of the Gods," 29.
- 76 Thornton, *Negotiating Respect*, 4.
- 77 McAlister, "The Militarization of Prayer in America," 2; Thornton, *Negotiating Respect*, chap. 3.
- 78 Richman, "The Vodou State," 277; Richman, "Religion at the Epicenter."
- 79 "Pat Robertson Says Haiti Paying for 'Pact with the Devil'"; McAlister, "From Slave Revolt."
- 80 Richman, "The Vodou State," 281.
- 81 For example, "Haiti Rumors Woman"; "Aterrador un baca golpea hombre"; "Dicen 'Bacá' atemoriza residentes en Oviedo"; "Aparece un bacá en el paraje Limonae"; "Existen o no existen los Bacá." Davis, *The Dominican Southwest*, includes two interviews about the bacá, clearly demonstrating the fear of this phenomena on the part of someone who I presume to be a Pentecostalist. For more on evangelical Protestantism in Haiti, see McAlister, "Possessing the Land for Jesus."
- 82 Jackson, *Paths Toward a Clearing*, 149; West, *Ethnographic Sorcery*, 63. The previous paradigm for understanding identification with animals, of course, was totemism; see Smith, "I Am a Parrot (Red)."
- 83 West, *Ethnographic Sorcery*, 57; Thylefors, "Poverty and Sorcery in Haiti."
- 84 Kahn, "Smugglers, Migrants, and Demons."
- 85 Otten, *A Lycanthropy Reader*, xiii.

- 86 Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm,” 15.
 87 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78.

CHAPTER 1. PRETERNATURALIA: OF TALKING COWS

Epigraph: Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 3–25. Thanks to María Elena García for bringing this text to my attention.

Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at the “Thinking with Animals” panel at the Dominican Studies Institute conference in 2020; at the University of California, Irvine in 2015; at the University of Florida, Gainesville; and at the University of Leiden in 2016 where it benefited from commentary by Peter Pels, among others. Some passages of this chapter were previously published in “Zemis and Zombies: Amerindian Healing Legacies on Hispaniola,” in *Medicine and Healing in the Age of Slavery*, edited by Sean Morey Smith and Christopher D. E. Willoughby (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021), and in “Doña Pico’s Story and the Long History of the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands,” *Revue d’Histoire Haïtienne*.

- 1 Moreno Fragonals, *El ingenio*; Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*.
- 2 An important exception is Norton, *The Tame and the Wild*, 77 and chap. 3, which underscores the role of livestock in the dispossession of the indigenous population in the Americas.
- 3 Watts, cited in DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley, *Caribbean Literature*, 19; Morban Laucer, “Fauna extinguida.”
- 4 Mychajliw, “On the Extinction (and Survival).” For more on the history of extinctions in Latin America, see Vergara, “Animals in Latin American History.”
- 5 Liliana Dávalos and Miguel Núñez Novas cited in Weisberger, “Humans Doomed Caribbean’s ‘Lost World.’” Some eastern Caribbean islands have maintained more robust animal populations, but Hispaniola was the launching pad for Spanish colonialism and its violent dispossession.
- 6 Mychajliw, “On the Extinction (and Survival).” See also Upham, “Past and Present.”
- 7 Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*.
- 8 Del Toro, “Foreword,” ix.
- 9 What the Comaroffs and Sanders and West have called an occult cosmology; see Sanders and West, “Power Revealed and Concealed,” 6. *Pájaro*, which means “bird,” in this context is a generic term Dominicans use to describe the devil or any animal that might be evil,