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Searching for Home: Im/migration, Deportation, and Exile in Haitian Popular Cinema

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes concepts of home while considering themes of im/migration, deportation, and exile in three Haitian popular films: Dyaspora $100, Kidnappings, and Deported. Through analysis of these films, I examine what "home" may mean for Haitian diasporic communities. As I show, the economic impact of transnational migration is a critical factor here. The films depict the ways in which Haitian immigrants maintain, negotiate, and build identities both individually and collectively. The chapter demonstrates the complexity of identity and belonging particularly for young people who have been deported to Haiti, often finding themselves alienated while at "home" in a space that is not welcoming. Throughout, I explore some of the ways in which home is a fluid and complex space for Haitians in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora.

Keywords: home, belonging, identity, immigration, transnationalism

Lakay se lakay. Home sweet home. There's no place like home.

As I write, Haiti has once more been thrown into a period of turmoil. The past few weeks have been filled with anti-government protests demanding that Jovenel Moïse, the current president, leaves the country. The protesters have accused Moïse of corruption and of mishandling funds from the Venezuela Petro-Caribe oil discount program, which was supposed to help Haiti through various social programs and infrastructure building for health and education after the 2010 earthquake that devastated the country. [1]

Lakay se lakay. Despite Haiti's ongoing political, social, economic, geopolitical, and historical unrest, many Haitian immigrants dream of returning home. Many Haitians living in the diaspora—whether in the United States, Canada, the Bahamas, or other islands in the Caribbean—wearily follow the instability in the country, feeling saddened and angry because they believe in the possibility of attaining a less tumultuous alternative for the country. The fact that Haiti was able to do so much at *Bwa Kayiman*—the place where slaves gathered to make a pact in 1791 to free themselves from the grasp of the French empire's greed or die in the attempt is an indelible part of their collective historical memory. Yet, over two centuries later, Haiti's history too often reflects displacement, disorder, and disaster—a trajectory that has pushed many of its citizens to try their chances elsewhere. During and after the 2010 earthquake, over a decade ago, communities rallied together in a *rasanbleman* [gathering], and for a short time, there was a fire within many to re-build Haiti from the ashes of the earthquake. Yet today, ongoing violence and instability threaten to destroy the country's limited and weak infrastructure along with its important cultural patrimony.

Social, political, and economic instability in Haiti is directly linked to migration. For instance, during almost three decades of dictatorship under the François and Jean-Claude Duvalier regime, hundreds of thousands of Haitians fled the country. All told, over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there have been four main waves of immigration: first, under François Duvalier's regime (1960s); second, under Jean-Claude Duvalier's regime (1980s); third, during Jean-Bertrand Aristide's term as president (1990s); and fourth, after the earthquake (2010). [2]

In the short documentary film *Exil* (2016), director Richard Sénécal captures Haitian actress Gessica Généus's powerful testimony of

the 2010 earthquake. In a tearful voice, Généus proclaims: "*Haïti c'est un pays où il n'y a pas de juste milieu, soit tu aimes ou tu haïs* …" [Haiti is a country with no middle ground, either you like it or you hate it] (Sénécal 00:3:00-00:3:08). Généus further notes: "*Je voulais être au coeur de tout cela, je voulais comprendre, je voulais savoir comment on allait s'en sortir*…" [I wanted to be in the heart of it all, I wanted to understand, I wanted to know how we were going to get out…] (Sénécal 00:9:02-00:9:09). In regard to her forced exile in Paris after the earthquake, Généus explains: "*Je ne pense pas vivre ici éternellement mais j'aime bien Paris… Je ne suis pas triste d'avoir quitté Haïti je suis triste de ne pas pouvoir rester*…" [I do not want to live here forever, but I like Paris. I am not sad that I had to leave Haiti, I am sad that I am unable to stay (in Haiti)] (Sénécal 00:10:11-0010:42. Généus' recollection of her experience and very intimate testimony of the earthquake suggest the complex reality of leaving Haiti. For many diasporic Haitians, regardless of the reasons they were compelled to leave Haiti, they are still in search of tangible ways to remain connected to it. There is an urge to feel the place *with* and *in* you, to consciously and unconsciously consume it, to return there, whether virtually or physically—yet this impulse is not simple, not unitary. Even as they may crave returning to it, Haitians are fully aware of the challenges that living in Haiti involves,. At the same time, they are cognizant on a daily basis of the challenges of living in the diaspora, even as large Haitian communities in cities like Miami, Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, or Brooklyn provide a sense of community and some continuity. Even in contexts where Haitian migration has been extensive, Haitian immigrants still face social, political, economic, and racial marginalization.

The link to Haiti provided by popular movies is therefore a vital aspect of daily life, a means of communication comparable to Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media forums that today help Haitian (and other) immigrants remain connected to their homelands. At the same time, as they tell stories that these immigrants can relate to, these media also enable immigrants to reconceptualize and re-create "home." As Haitians in exile comment on Haitian popular films on Facebook and via YouTube, they take ownership of these narratives, adding layers of text that enfold the stories within their lived realities. [3]

The films I analyze here—*Dyaspora $100* by Godnel Latus, *Kidnappings* by Mecca AKA Grimo, and *Deported* by Rachèle Magloire and Chantal Regnault—highlight the problematic relationships to the meaning of home that arise in the context of Haitian migration and return. Home becomes a site of complex negotiations and immigrants must manage hostile, unwelcoming, and racist interactions. Edwidge Danticat notes that sometimes Haitians in Haiti use the term *dyaspora* to denote the rift between those who have remained in Haiti and those who have emigrated and to exclude those living outside of Haiti, letting them know that they do not belong. [4] Depending on the linguistic context, *dyaspora* in Creole can be synonymous with *outsider* or *other.* Here, I use the term to refer to Haitians or people of Haitian descent living outside of Haiti, preserving the complex resonances it carries as a signifier of difference that may be impossible to overcome, the ambivalence of living in two cultures, and perhaps not fully belonging in either one. Sometimes, as we will see in the documentary *Deported* (2013), it becomes impossible to reconcile the two cultures. Thus, the concept of *dyaspora* is always in flux, its meaning never fully stable and determined.

Dyaspora san dola/Dyaspora $100

Dyaspora san dola/Dyaspora $100 (dir. Godnel Latus, 2012) illustrates this complicated concept as it shows the double life that many Haitians in the diaspora negotiate in order to create the illusion for members of their community living in Haiti that life in the United States is easy. A *YouTube* search reveals that the two titles, *Dyaspora san dola/Dyaspora $100,* are used interchangeably. Indeed, there is an ironic play on words here, as *san* means both "without," and "one hundred" in Creole; therefore the film's title can be translated as "diaspora without any dollar" or "one-hundred-dollar diaspora." The title thus embodies the simultaneous hope and despair that tend to characterize the Haitian immigrant experience—the hope that people must cling to

despite all the odds that may be stacked against them, and the despair that shadows life in which the realities of poverty cannot be overlooked.

The main character in the film is Dous Raymond, a hustler who has been living in Miami for about 15 years. He is involved with several women, including one who lives in Haiti and with whom he spends a lot of time talking on the phone, making false promises. In preparation for traveling to Haiti to see her, he borrows jewelry from a friend, planning to try to impress her – an indication that women in Haiti do not actually know that those in the diaspora are not wealthy. Yet, he also suggests that these women *expect* the *dyaspora* to go to Haiti to flaunt their money and that not performing wealth in this way would actually be a problem—it is the social role and even the duty of the *dyaspora* to provide this (likely false) spectacle of easily-won wealth and well-being. The women in Haiti that he is referring to *suspect* that the *dyaspora* are not wealthy, even though everyone seems to take that wealth at face value. In other words, the (male) dyaspora come back to Haiti and perform wealth, and the women apparently believe their performance—but in fact, the women's trust in this performance is yet another performance that is meant to help them get as much money from the man as possible while he is in Haiti.

In fact, people living in Haiti understand more and more the hardships faced by those who live in the dyaspora, in part thanks to the ways life in a global and transactional world has been shaped by ongoing exchanges facilitated by technology. While many people in Haiti still dream of migrating to the U.S. (or elsewhere), they understand better (in part through films like *Dyaspora $100*) that life is not that easy in the U.S. and that many people who return to Haiti are lying about their economic status. Thus, many levels of performance take place here simultaneously. In the end, after flaunting his wealth in Haiti, Dous returns to the United States broke and up to his neck in debt.

This film also highlights the complex realities that feed into the common expectation that those who have been living in the diasporic community will help the newly arrived get settled and find jobs. The notion of *mache ansanm,* which means "walking together," conveys the expectation that people are part of a community and not stranded individuals. The idea of *walking together* underscores the need for Haitian immigrant communities to provide mutual support. We further find it echoed such in Creole-language proverbs as *Vwazinaj se fanmi* [Neighbors are family] and *Anpil men chay pa lou* [With many hands the load is lighter]. We also find it in the concept of *rasanblaj*—a way of being, a way of understanding one's community.[5] *Rasanblaj* is manifested by one individual toward another, as a family welcomes other members' siblings, cousins, and family or friends and helps them settle down in the new country. It is also visible through the countless benevolent associations and churches of various denominations that support newcomers and help them with housing, jobs, and decent living. [6] When Haitians leave Haiti to become part of a new community, they leave behind (physically, emotionally, mentally) their family, community, and comfort zone. As they integrate into their new community, they form a new kind of *rasanblaj*. In many Haitian diasporic communities, it is a way of life, a survival strategy, a mechanism by which individuals help others obtain agency and survive in the new culture. When *dyaspora* travel to Haiti, however, most only tell a partial story of the complexity of the *rasanblaj* that enables them to survive in the United States. Indeed, they fabricate narratives that make it appear as if they achieved success on their own and as a result of their individual efforts. In a sense, they absorb and perform the ideology—indeed, the mythology—associated with the "American Dream," which rests on the (false) foundation that the U.S. society offers a level playing field in which all can achieve success regardless of their origins.

The reality of this exchange economy in which appearances are crucial is complex. When someone who lives in a foreign country such as the United States, Canada, or France returns to Haiti, the assumption made in Haiti is that the person has money and power. As a result, they are put on a pedestal, since living abroad is a status marker. For example, in the house of some Haitian friends in Chicago last spring, I heard a Haitian woman in her early 30s explaining to her former mother-in-law how, when she returns to Haiti with her white American husband, people

who used to humiliate her and her mother now want to befriend them, and treat them like princesses. Similarly, in *Dyaspora $100,* we see the ways in which Haitians in the diaspora misrepresent their lives in the U.S. to family and friends living in Haiti. The film challenges the idea of the U.S. as an Eldorado where everyone has unlimited access to material objects as well as economic and political freedom.

Dous Raymond represents Haitians from the diaspora who go to Haiti to participate in this exchange of affective transactions. *Dyaspora se ATM* [diasporas as ATMs] is a common expression that describes Haitians from the diaspora who go to Haiti and flaunt their U.S.-earned money. The phrase also refers to the fact that while they are in the U.S., people in Haiti call them to send money, as if they could simply go to an ATM to withdraw it. For example, in the film, Dous Raymond constantly gets these requests from the women with whom he is involved in Haiti. We see him on the phone sweet-talking the women, promising them money. For many people, returning to Haiti to show off and live "*la belle vie*" [the good life] if only for a week or two and spend money they don't have is a way to escape the harsh realities of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment and their feelings of non-belonging in the U.S. When they return to Haiti, they embody (consciously and unconsciously) a sense of pride in having made it, even if they are struggling. Others put them on a pedestal, hoping to get something from them (in terms of money or material goods), and this in itself is an affirmation of their success. Returning home with the trappings of wealth (even if these are founded in debt), they enjoy comforts they cannot afford in the diaspora. For example, the film depicts Dous Raymond being pampered by his girlfriend, as she does his nails, feeds him, etc. He does not have the time or the means to enjoy such luxuries in the U.S. because he has to work to make ends meet. Thus, Dous has two distinct identities, in a diasporic form of double consciousness. He must struggle to maintain the lies that he uses to maintain both these selves, including the welathy façade he projects in Haiti.

Still, for Dous, traveling to Haiti offers a way to affirm, "I am here, I belong, I exist," and my money can go far. For many returnees, it is a way to forget, albeit temporarily, the micro-aggressions, racism, and humiliation they face as immigrants, both from white people and sometimes from members of other minority groups. It is a way to rehumanize themselves. Although the fact that these "*dyaspora san dola*" represent or misrepresent themselves is problematic—they are helping to create an idyllic image of *lòt bò* [the other side)], making those who live in Haiti imagine, and even dream of, a false reality—to a certain extent it is understandable.

Kidnappings

While some *dyaspora* return to Haiti by choice, others are forced to return. Some Haitians are deported to Haiti after having lived in the United States and Canada for most or all of their lives. For them, Haiti is not home, and they are in fact strangers in a strange land. The issue of deportation has had important social resonances in Haiti, as we see in the film *Kidnappings* (2008). Since 2004, following Bertrand Aristide's alleged kidnapping, kidnapping has become prevalent in both Haiti and the Haitian diaspora. In October and November 2012, the issue of kidnapping in Haiti took a twisted turn when Clifford Brandt, the son of one of Haiti's elites, was arrested for kidnapping the son and daughter of a business rival. Up to that point, kidnapping in Haiti had been considered a crime committed by gangs known as *chimè* who generally reside in slums like Cité Soleil, a neighborhood west of the airport in Port-au-Prince. Ever since, kidnapping has become a commonly represented topic in Haitian popular culture, and *Kidnappings,* directed by Mecca AKA Grimo, shows that the business of abduction is indeed complex, and cannot be dismissed as simply the province of those, such as gang members, who tend to operate outside the law. Indeed, the economy of valuable bodies in Haiti cannot help but echo the economic origins of the nation as part of an island referred to as the *Perle des Antilles* for the vast wealth that flowed to France from its cane fields, where enslaved Africans and their descendants were forced to work. There is a certain terrible logic to this re-inscription of bodies as valuable commodities even within the context of the First Black Republic, for Haiti has

never been allowed to escape the debt it was deemed to owe to the European enslavers and colonizers in the aftermath of the revolution. We may wonder, why are whites not kidnapped? If this were the case, the kidnapping trade would have stopped. But whites have never suffered the cruelties that people of color (no matter their status) have suffered *en masse* within the African diaspora in the "New World." Moreover, the trade is profitable for those in power, and they do not really want it to stop. The joke among Haitians in Haiti and in the diaspora is that if NGOs and international workers from the United Nations and USAID had been kidnapped, there would have been real intervention that would have put an end to this trade long ago.

Set against the backdrop of Port-au-Prince, Haiti's overpopulated capital, *Kidnappings* tells the story of Mario and Jacques, two ex-convicts who used to live in Miami. The language used in the film is a mix of English and Creole, and the Creole is subtitled in English, so it is clear that it is meant for a Haitian American audience. There is very little French, except when reporting background news and between the government and the elites. While the story is fictional, it is based on a reality that many Haitians and Haitian Americans recognize.

In the film, Mario is arrested and deported to Haiti by the U.S. government after beating his wife severely in a fit of jealousy. Meanwhile, Jacques leaves Miami on his own to avoid returning to jail. When Mario initially arrives in Haiti, he tries to look for work, initially working on a wharf. He soon realizes that Haiti is not home: "I was 4 years old the last time I left this country," he says. "It's like I am a stranger in my own home… I had no family to take me in…." (Mecca AKA Grimo, 00:03:57-04:31). Mario does not speak French and his Creole is rather poor. Like many Haitians who grew up in the U.S., he can understand but he cannot not speak it. Especially if they live in Haitian communities such as Miami, Haitian immigrants might understand enough Creole to merely get by. Mario is also dark skinned. In contrast with Jacques, who is light skinned and speaks French as well as Creole, Mario doesn't understand the way colorism and class function in Haiti. In effect, he doesn't fully understand Haitian cultural codes. This unfortunate combination of factors makes it hard for him to understand, negotiate, and navigate Haiti. Not long after arriving, he runs into Jacques, whom he knew back in Miami. The latter convinces Mario to become his right-hand man in his kidnapping business. The two thus join forces in the large-scale kidnapping industry in Haiti, the main goal of which is profit at all costs.

The structure and political economy of kidnapping is complex. Because of the weak political and police infrastructure in Haiti, it is never quite clear what parties are involved in the kidnapping business, nor who is truly in charge. *Kidnappings* opens with the following text: "Canada and the U.S. have deported 1,019,848 aliens back to the Caribbean and Central America for fiscal year 2003—individuals who were born there but, in many cases raised in North America. Whose problem are they?" (00:00:24-00:39). Thus from the outset, the filmmaker links the kidnappings in Haiti to the deportation policies pursued by the United States and Canada.

As a light-skinned man who can easily pass as a Haitian bourgeois, Jacques fares better than Mario. He speaks Creole, French, and English, and he knows that "you're either part of the elite or you're poor...there's no middle class… in Haiti." Being light-skinned and assumed to be a member of the bourgeoisie, Jacques enjoys a level of social mobility and agency that gives him easy access to certain places and opportunities that would otherwise be off limits. Moreover, he is connected to people from all walks of life, from flight attendants to the chief of police, as well as other kidnappers. Like in this movie, the kidnapping business in Haiti is facilitated by a network of people. The flight attendant traveling between Haiti and Miami gives Jacques the names of potential victims whose families have money; the chief of police, Guy Baptiste, also works with Jacques, and indeed, in their relationship, it often appears that Jacques is the one calling the shots. There are a great number of individuals involved in this kidnapping operation, but it is Jacques who is the leader. Meanwhile Mario is not quite sure what he's doing, and his work for Jacques challenges the preconceptions of Haiti he had developed while living in the United States, as we see in the

following exchange:

> *Jacques:* Haiti is a small country with a lot of money … Why do you think people would be doing what they're doing if it weren't profitable?" (0037:13-0037:24)
> *Mario:* Jacques, I don't know if you realize this or not, but Haiti is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere right now.
> *Jacques:* And probably the smallest where 2% of the population own the wealth of the whole country … (0037:13-0037:38)

The exchange continues thus:

> Jacques: Haiti is a land of two extremes. Two social classes far removed from each other. So I guess it was that distance between the impoverished majority and the 6% of affluent population that would compel me to intervene and join the kidnapping industry … 1% of the population own the wealth…They don't put money back in this island. (0043:13-043:48)

Jacques uses the extreme disconnect between the rich and the poor to make his operation lucrative. Yet he also considers himself a benefactor, a sort of philanthropist who gives jobs to people and plans to reinvest his kidnapping profits back into the country. On the one hand, the film depicts Jacques as a kind of Robin Hood hero or even a trickster figure who wants to help the poor by taking from the rich. On the other, he is contributing to the stereotypical image of a violent, lawless Haiti where many NGOs are taking advantage of the lack of infrastructure and profiting from people's poverty. Thus, the business of kidnapping is profitable for many NGOs as well because it helps them to continue the discourse of the instability in Haiti, giving them the opportunity to play the role of the savior. [7]

In another scene, when the kidnapper is attempting to rape and torture a young woman whom he has kidnapped, the woman screams at Jacques, "Pa manyen m…Ou fout [pral] nan lanfè!" [Don't touch me. You're going to hell!] His matter-of-fact response is, "Lanfè se jwèt monchè. Se nou k lanfè a wi. Se nou k Lisifè a wi. Ou panse ke moun lakay ou, paran ou se kondui bèl Leksis, papa ou se vwayaje tout lajounen avèk lajan peyi a. Epi nou menm nou nan kaka sou beton an. Se naje pou n naje pou n sòti" [Hell is a game. We are hell. We are Lucifer. You think [your family], your parents [should be] driving around in a Lexus and your dad is using the country's money to travel. [Meanwhile] we (are) starving on the pavement. We gotta find our way out] (00:33:25-00:33:59). [8]

This conversation takes place in Creole with English subtitles, highlighting issues of class difference within Haiti. The young kidnapper is angry, and his vicious attack on the woman he has kidnapped and is guarding is an attack on the Haitian upper class, which is exploiting the masses. It is generally the people with money and power who have the ability and resources to manufacture kidnappings. Thus, the wealthy arrange for the kidnapping of other wealthy people. Many of the people who can actually afford to pay the ransom are directly or indirectly connected to the kidnapping mafia. As the young lady who is being kidnapped fights off her attacker, she angrily asks why he cannot go and get a job. In response, he asks if she really thinks it's so easy for them [the kidnappers] to find work.

The idea of *naje pou nou sòti* [swim to get out] illustrates the survival mindset that is such an integral aspect of daily life for the majority of Haitians. According to *Forum Haiti,* this phrase was used in 1999 by then President Préval during his speech. It has been debated what exactly he meant in the context, but in popular parlance this expression generally means that one must find one's way out without waiting for others (the government, Haiti's ruling class, or the international community) to help. [9] In this context, the kidnapper is justifying his act by saying that since the young lady's father is part of the elite, which is stealing the country's money, he must do whatever he needs to survive. There is a song of the same title by the Haitian group Djakout Mizik (2000), [10] which encourages people to figure out how to get out of every situation: "Alò m pa kòn naje…yo vle fòse m janbe…Pa gen kannòt, pa gen sovtaj pou m sòti]…Yo di lanmè move, naje pou n sòti" [I

do not know how to swim but they want to force me to cross [the sea]…There is no sailing boat, no life vest but you ask me to get out…They say the sea is dangerous but you have to swim to get out] (00:58-00:3:09). This song illustrates the way in which, on the one hand, the Haitian society has a deeply communal spirit and that Haitians depend upon one another for survival, while, on the other, at a certain point it is up to each individual to find their own way out of crisis.

The film comments on the fact that kidnapping in Haiti is supported by the Haitian government itself, along with the upper class and the international community that is supposedly "protecting" Haitians. Many Haitians and Haitian-Americans commonly believe that the booming business of kidnapping is a direct result of the U.S.'s policy of deporting people with criminal records back to Haiti without any clear coordination with the Haitian government. Watching the film, we are struck by the nonchalant, even mundane way in which the kidnappings takes place—as if such events are not only commonplace but also permissible. Every now and then, in an almost sarcastic way, the film includes several scenes in which a television newscasts in French reports on how the UN, the Haitian National Police, and MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) pretend to be working together to stop the kidnappings and assure more security in Haiti. In one striking scene, the chief of police finishes a report on the government's desire to secure the country and a few seconds later he's discussing a particular kidnapping case with Jacques.

Although Jacques and the chief of police always speak in English when they communicate with each other about kidnapping deals, at the end, when the chief arrests Jacques, he speaks to him in Creole, telling him, "*Ou wè Ayiti, ou pa konnè Ayiti. Se yon tè glise*" [You see Haiti, you don't know Haiti. It's a slippery land]. Here, he is referring to a very common Haitian proverb, "*Ayiti se tè glise*," which has a number of possible translations, such as "Don't believe what you see or hear" and "Haiti is unpredictable."

Kidnappings shows the kidnappers to be in possession of more resources and power than the police, a fact which makes it easy for the police to become corrupted. Deeper than this, however, it shows how economic instability is connected to violence at all levels: emotional, physical, verbal, and psychological. Many of the kidnappers are searching for a way out of the cycle of poverty. Some are on the lowest rung of the social hierarchy and do anything to survive. On the other hand, however, the people who are orchestrating the kidnapping, like Jacques and the chief of police, have power and money. Although Jacques claims to have certain altruistic motives, other kidnappers portrayed in the film view this as nothing more than a get-rich-quick business.

Kidnappings perpetuates the stigma of deportees as inherently dangerous, but at the same time it depicts a reality that Haitians in diasporic communities discuss among themselves. In fact, when some people travel to Haiti, they do not tell others when they are arriving, even family members, for the fear of putting themselves in danger of being kidnapped. Most Haitians know someone who knows someone who has been kidnapped, and whose families had to negotiate a ransom. People often referred to this exchange as *règleman de kont,* or a payback. Since Haiti is a small country where it sometimes seems as if everyone knows each other, it is easy to facilitate kidnappings. Oftentimes, kidnapping is done by someone who holds a grudge against an individual or their family and who sets up a way to kidnap that person, Sometimes, kidnappers are people who think that those living *lòt bò dlo* [on the other side] in the diaspora have money and should pay a ransom for it. Thus, quite a few of the people involved in the business of kidnapping, whether directly or indirectly, not only perceive those living in the diaspora as having money, but also feel that they should pay their dues to those who stayed behind.

Deported

Like *Kidnappings*, the documentary film *Deported,* directed by Rachèle Magloire and Chantal Regnault (2012), portrays diasporic Haitians who have been rejected by both the U.S. government and the Haitian society. Both films start with an unattributed quote that highlights the film's overall views toward

immigration, deportation and their connection to kidnapping. *Deported* (2013) begins with the voice of a man in the background: "1,895 days I did my name was 87740, that's my name…" [11] And then immediately we see the close-up of a man with tears in his eyes. He repeats, "87740." Immediately afterward, the following quote appears on the screen:

> Since 1996, under a new Antiterrorism Act, every immigrant living in the United States with a criminal record is eligible for deportation. The crime ranges from driving while intoxicated and domestic violence to homicide. After serving their sentence these individuals are sent back to their homeland. (*Deported*)

Since 1988, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has deported thousands of immigrants for "aggravated felonies."[12] At first, this included offenses like murder and drug trafficking. However, since 1996, that list has extended to perjury, counterfeit, obstruction of justice, and other nonviolent crimes. In spite of the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act (HRIFA) of 1998, which allowed Haitians who filed for asylum before December 31, 1995, to be granted permanent residence in the United States, the deportation of Haitians has continued. [13] According to a 2009 Human Rights Watch report titled "Forced Apart," 20 percent of the people deported were legal residents who had committed minor nonviolent offenses. [14] There is not much known about these immigrants because no official data has been published.

There is not a clear mechanism in place between the United States and Haiti to help these individuals. In fact, once they are sent back to Haiti, there are no social reintegration and rehabilitation programs to ensure their immediate or eventual re-entry into the community. Sometimes, families will pay the law enforcement in Haiti just to allow them to enter the country without any legal formality. In *Detain and Punish: Haitian Refugees and the Rise of the World's Largest Immigration Detention System,* Carl Lindskoog traces the history of immigration in the United States in the late twentieth century through the story of Haitian refugees. He writes: "The United States incarcerates more than 400,000 people every day for immigration-related violations. It has the largest immigration detention system in the world… More than half of these detention facilities are privately operated with virtually no regulation or oversight" (1). Who gets deported from the U.S. is directly correlated to a racialized ideology of criminality.

The United States' policy of mass deportation over the past decade has targeted communities of color from Latin America and the Caribbean. Former ICE director James M. Chaparro, in an internal memo made public in 2010, discussed the "goals" that were set in place for ICE field office directors, including that of deporting 150,000 immigrants per year. For the average person who does not understand the complex immigration industrial machine, this creates the illusion that the United States is protecting Americans (meaning mainly whites) from immigrants who are mainly black and brown. [15] This legal discrimination was exacerbated after 9/11. In a memorandum published by ICE in 2011, its director John Morton noted: "The removal of aliens who pose a danger to national security or a risk to public safety shall be ICE's highest immigration enforcement priority." [16] Hiding behind the idea of "national security," new laws enable discrimination against and criminalization of immigrants via the Criminal Alien Program, [17] whereby people are deported even after they served their sentences. There is also a program known as Secure Communities, through which individuals can be deported even before they are convicted of minor offenses, such as traffic violations. The reality is that these programs target people who appear to be undocumented, and they work with state and local law enforcement to collaborate with immigration authorities to increase their arrest quota by deporting people to "make America safer." In actuality, these targeted "criminals" and "alien fugitives" are for the most part people who have settled in the United States for a long time and who have families who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents. But the deportation policy deployed by ICE has effectively criminalized them by presenting them as threatening "others" who have come to take the jobs of good, upright American (mainly white) citizens.

Deported is a documentary, and, in this sense, it is different from the other films I discuss here. Part of my point, however, is that all of the films I analyzed have a distinct “documentary” quality to them. A key feature of all these stories is that they present readily available reflections of real life that enable people within the Haitian diaspora to see themselves and their lives and thereby understand their experiences more fully. *Deported,* for example, paints a grim picture of daily life for a group of young Haitian-born American and Canadian men, mostly in their early 20s to 40s, who have been deported to Haiti from the United States and Canada after completing their sentences. The film is in English, but the men profiled are referred to as *depòte* in Creole, which is the Creole pronunciation of the English word “deported.” Oftentimes, these men do not speak Creole or French, though some are able to understand some Creole. When the men who are deported arrived in Haiti, they are taken to the Haitian Police Headquarters where they their fingerprints are taken. We see many of them carrying a plastic or paper bag or a box. As they are registering, many of them are not able to respond when they are asked for their names.

Culturally American or Canadian, these men face stigmatization and isolation in the country in which they were born but that they no longer know. culturally speaking, then, they are completely alienated from their country of origin. And even when they still have family members in Haiti, these come across to them as total strangers. As one man says, “I left here in 1979, summer … I was taken directly to the airport… I met my mom for the first time when I was 6 and a half years old.” They go from being the “other” in the United States to being the “other” in Haiti. The men interviewed say that they are blamed for every crime that takes place in Haitian society, especially kidnapping and stealing.

One man, Frantz, has the number 2,190 written on the wall in the one room that he calls home. That number serves as a reminder of the number of days he spent in jail in the U.S. He describes the harsh conditions he faced there. Even in jail he was alienated, for he could not identify with the gangs, and so he used to get beaten up. He says in a tearful voice, “Each human being is somebody’s child. And I am tired of being judged by anybody.” He is a community activist and works with kids. He is trying to teach the younger Haitian kids not to judge any deportee, trying to help them understand that they need to learn to get to know people first before judging them. Frantz also openly discusses his life as a deportee so that children can learn from his mistakes and understand that a deportee is someone like them.

Some of the men who appear in the film state that they are trying to build support groups so that they can help each other survive in Haiti. A man named Joel, for example, has founded an organization for deportees. Manno, another deportee, has founded *Koze Kreyol,* an organization that seeks to help deportees create sustainable livelihoods by making music, selling CDs, and creating radio programs. These men assert that they, and others like them, have names and individual identities—they are not just “*depòte*.” For people like Manno, staying busy and finding solace in music are also ways to craft an identity and sense of belonging in a society that does not welcome them. The songs they create highlight their daily struggles to exist in a hostile environment and the ways they are marginalized and judged as criminals simply because, for example, they wear earrings. In Haiti in general and even in some Haitian communities in the U.S. and Canada, men who wear earrings are seen as “bums” or people who are not “good” enough, who are Americanized (in the negative sense of the word). Wearing earrings is viewed as not proper for people of certain class, religion, etc. (although it is more accepted in artistic circles, among musicians and artists). They also describe their plight living in the U.S., even though they may have lived there most of their lives. They talk about being in prison and the exclusion they felt there. They refer to the U.S. as “Babylon,” [18] a term they draw from their prison experience, suggesting cross-cultural exchanges with the Anglophone Caribbean and even the possibility that, in certain ways, some may identify more closely with Anglophone Caribbean cultures or African American culture(s), rather than with the Haitian culture.

Like Manno, Etzer, another deportee who has been living in Haiti for 8 years, finds strength through music. He writes songs for his children who are living in the United States about his life as a "DP," the experience of being deported, and what his life is like now. He writes about trying to make amends to his family, and especially his children. He links his deportation to cultural differences in child rearing in the United States and Haiti. He says, "If you love your kids too much in America, they take your kids away from you if you discipline them, put them in foster care and them they become part of the system of crime." This comment points to the ways in which the U.S. legal system polices black men, black parents, and immigrants in general — themselves the subjects of state surveillance— in terms of how they raise their children. In addition, Etzer's observation highlights complex cultural issues, including the fact that what is considered abuse in one culture may not be viewed as such in another. He further recounts that the reason he was sent to jail was because he spanked his son and then he was accused of abusing him. As a result, the son went to several foster care homes and got caught up in the circle of crime and is currently serving time in a jail in the United States. Etzer's children are shown in the documentary, and this seems to be the first time that they are hearing a complete version of the story from their father's perspective. They seem happy to see their father and to hear his account of events, but the film does not go into detail about their relationship with him.

Verlaine, a 39-year-old man who was recently deported, left Haiti when he was three years old; while living in the U.S., he was arrested on a burglary charge. "Being in Haiti is like being in hell," He observes. He laments that people automatically judge him without knowing who he is. Later in the documentary, we find him working as a volunteer. As he contends, "I keep myself busy to not get in trouble, I volunteer at the General Hospital." The film shows him slowly acculturating to life in Haiti, though it is very challenging for him. His family in the U.S. also told him that they cannot afford to keep sending him money. They viewed him as a burden. So, it seems as though he is resigned to figuring out how to handle this situation on his own.

Another man, Richard, a deportee who has been in Haiti for almost 20 years, talks about grappling with the nature of national/racial belonging. He had to accept that, even though he had lived in the U.S. for a long time, he still was a Haitian. As we learn in the film, he was repeatedly reminded that he is just a black kid from Haiti who was going to be deported even after he believed he paid his debt to the U.S. society. His story summarizes the complexity of trying to survive in Haiti after he was forced to leave the United States and return to a country that you do not know, that is not ready for you and is not welcoming towards you because it is dealing with its own issues of survival. Richard notes, "I don't feel like the Haitian society is responsible or should have to deal with the result of a product of the American society or American environment." He goes on to say,

> I consider myself to be a survivor… I mean I've been here 20 years. A lot of the DPs that I meet are in shock when I tell them that I've been here 20 years. They're like "20 years! How did you do it?" I mean you're really [a] hard guy because they've been here 2-3 years and they feel like they're losing their mind. I mean I'm not an angel and I've never claimed to be an angel. I just find that the consequences of my actions surpass my actions. The punishment that I received from the United States of America by sending me here I think are exaggerated. I mean … [one] should not be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment. For me this is cruel and unusual punishment. To be sent somewhere where you have nobody and you don't have a job, you don't have family, they just send you there and said live ... 20 years is a life sentence in the United States … I've done my life sentence … I've learned my lessons. What more do you want from me? Do I have to die here? This is jail for me. This place is a mess.

Richard seems to identify more with the United States, but even there he was marginalized. He was a Haitian in the United States, while in Haiti, he is neither American nor Haitian. This is the other side of the diasporic experience, in

which *dyaspora* means *not belonging*. And the importance of this film, as well as the others I discuss in this essay lies in part in the way it helps to create another space of belonging that actively makes room for and allows for the ongoing co-creation of diasporic culture—itself a possible homeland.

The film ends on the following note: "On January 12, 2010, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake devastated Port-au-Prince. 300,000 people died or are missing. One year later deportations to Haiti resumed." Two of the deportees featured in the film have died, while others are still trying to find a place and create a life for themselves.

By labeling Haitian immigrants as only *economic* immigrants, U.S. policymakers and the general public alike fail to comprehend the links between immigration, criminality, and political and economic instability. Those who are deported to Haiti have the potential to become transnational criminals in a country with no infrastructure, which further contributes to the country's problem with kidnapping, as the character of Mario dramatizes in *Kidnappings.* [19] As they return to a Haiti that is not home, these men's sense of belonging, identity, and hope, and any vision for the future they may have had are shattered. In such a situation, what remains is helpless efforts to survive, and if their own survival must be achieved to the detriment of others, then so be it.

Conclusion

Dyaspora $100 demonstrates the complexity of life for a marginalized immigrant who is doing his best to survive. In this film, as in *Kidnappings* and *Deported,* we come face to face with the immense complexity with which immigrants grapple as they try to create a sense of home. This is in part because home is a fluid entity that is constantly changing. Both *Kidnappings* and *Deported* function in part as cautionary tales in an environment in which parents are fully aware of the dangers their children face in a society that views them as *de facto* criminals only because of the color of their skin. [20] Many parents in Haitian diasporic communities try to prevent this fate by attempting to instill religious values in their children and encouraging them to be active in religious communities so that they will stay in school and not engage in the criminal behavior that could get them deported. For many immigrant Haitian parents (especially those who have to support family members back in Haiti as well) who have to work day and night to make the ends meet, , child-friendly community activities are among the factors that help them maintain a sense of identity that keeps them in school and fosters positive role models. The religious institutions and religious leaders who are active in those communities sometimes help parents raise their children. They continue the Haitian tradition of "*Anpil men chay pa lou*" [with many hands the load is not heavy] and support each other in creating spaces for their children to grow and thrive in these new environments.

Religion, and more specifically faith, helps Haitians in these diasporic spaces to not feel alienated, to maintain their sense of self-worth, and to educate their children to have a better life economically, socially, and politically. At the same time, diasporic cultural sites help families maintain affiliations to their homeland, preserve their tradition and culture, understand their history, and hold on to collective memories while creating new ones. Being in a space where their culture is valued and affirmed can also help Haitian youths who are living in a state of double consciousness as they try to come to terms with who they are as young people, to understand what it means to be both Haitian and American, and to navigate life at the intersection of race, class, religion, and language. While the United States may offer opportunities for material prosperity, the very process of migration imposes a certain fluidity of identity. Haitian youths have to negotiate when to act "American" and when to act "Haitian." Sometimes the lines are blurry as they perform these different identities in terms of language and culture.

Thus the transnational experience for Haitian immigrants is complex not only culturally, but also politically, economically, and socially. They must find strategies that allow them to adapt and adjust socially while honoring and maintaining their culture. At the same time, they must come up with strategies for survival in the United States because they face dislocation, loneliness, and humiliation as people from a country considered

by many as nothing more than “the poorest country in the Western hemisphere,” and more recently a “shithole country.” The young people (mainly men) shown in these three films have become “the immigrant other” both in the United States and in Haiti. They are dehumanized in order to justify their oppression. This in and of itself is a logical next step in the horrific history of colonization. These are victims of a structural violence and therefore they may no longer care or think about their own humanity, let alone that of others. At times, they internalize the role of their own oppressor and become oppressors themselves, continuing a cycle of violence. Yet these films privilege their voices and foreground ways with which they handle transnational challenges as they try to create hybrid communities that they may never get to call home.

Endnotes

[1] For more information about what originally triggered the protests and to get an overview of the larger socio-historical, economic, and political context behind the latest round of unrest in the country, listen to the rapper K-Lib Mapou’s song “Petrospective (Petro-Education)” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8fSmMutGyA. Accessed 10/9/2019. Also check the following online sources: https://www.irinnews.org/news/2019/02/19/briefing-haiti-s-new-crisis-and-humanitarian-risks (accessed 9 Oct. 2019), https://haitiantimes.com/2019/02/07/haitian-times-news-roundup-feb-7 /(accessed 9 Oct. 2019), and https://www.tikkun.org/newsite/haitis-unfinished-revolution-is-still-in-effect (accessed 9 Oct. 2019).

[2] In “Engaging the Haitian Diaspora: Emigrant Skills and Resources Are Needed for Serious Growth and Development, Not Just Charity,” Tatiana Wah writes, “Haitian American organizations estimate that there are well over one million persons of Haitian descent in the U.S.A, which constitutes roughly 15 percent of the current population of Haiti… Roughly 43 percent of the Haitian diaspora resides in the United States” (59). According to the Migration Policy Institute, since 2010 there has also been a large influx of Haitian immigrants to Brazil, too, since which time the Brazilian government has granted humanitarian visas and permanent residency to about 98,000 Haitians. Chile has also seen a large increase in the number of Haitian immigrants post-earthquake. According to the 2010 US Census there are about 907,790 Haitians (foreign and native born) living in the United States, with Miami having the largest concentration of Haitians followed by New York and Boston.

[3] A large number of radio and television programs in Creole are also broadcast on local Haitian radio stations in e.g. Miami, Brooklyn, and Boston. These programs help enable Haitian diasporic communities to regularly engage in long-distance home-making and remain connected to current events in both Haiti and the Haitian diaspora.

[4] See Chapter 3, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*.

[5] Gina Athena Ulysse explores this concept fully in a special issue of *e-misférica* that she edited.

[6] For more information about how Haitians support each other in the diaspora and in Haiti, see *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* by Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, especially Chapter 5: “The Blood Remains Haitian: Race, Nation and Belonging in the Transmigrant Experience.”

[7] See “NGOs and the Business of Poverty in Haiti” by Kevin Edmonds: https://nacla.org/news/ngos-and-business-poverty-haiti; for instance when a Czech and Belgian humanitarian aid worker were kidnapped in 2010, it made the news, but when Haitians are kidnapped it rarely make the news outside of Haiti. For more information, see https://www.radio.cz/en/section/news/kidnapped-humanitarian-aid-worker-in-haiti-released. Accessed 10/9/2019.

[8] The translation is not accurate. The word “kaka” [shit] is not translated.

[9] For more information on this subject, see http://www.forumhaiti.com/t1439-naje-pou-nou-soti-le-vrai-sens, accessed 9 Oct. 2019.

[10] For the lyrics, see https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Djakout-Mizik/Nage-Pou-Soti, accessed 9 Oct. 2019.

[11] Due to problems with accessing this film, I am unable to provide times for the clips.

[12] For an overview of the various executive orders and the rules that govern the ICE, visit the following sites: American Immigration Council (https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigration-enforcement-priorities-under-trump-administration); Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (https://www.ice.gov/removal-statistics/2017);

and the Federal Register (https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/01/30/2017-02102/enhancing-public-safety-in-the-interior-of-the-united-states). All accessed 9 Oct. 2019.

[13] For more information on HRIFA and an overview of U.S. Immigration Policy on Haitian Immigrants, see https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21349.pdf, accessed 9 Oct. 2019.

[14] For more information, see https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/04/15/forced-apart-numbers/non-citizens-deported-mostly-nonviolent-offenses, accessed 9 Oct. 2019.

[15] For more information, see “National Insecurities: The Apprehension of Criminal and Fiugitive Aliens” by Tanya Golash-Boza, in *The Immigrant Other: Lived Experiences in a Transnational World*, edited by Rich Furman, Greg Lamphear, and Douglas Epps, p. 24. See also https://www.aclu.org/news/controversial-memo-immigration-detention-quotas-raises-doubts-about-ice-leadership, accessed 9

Oct. 2019.

[16] For more information, see https://www.ice.gov/doclib/news/releases/2011/110302washingtondc.pdf, accessed 30 Aug. 2021.

[17] For more information see "Criminal Alien Program" at https://www.ice.gov/criminal-alien-program, accessed 30 Oct. 2019.

[18] The term "Babylon" has been used by Jamaicans to compare their experience of being brought to the American continent with that of the Jews who were brought to Babylon.

[19] It is hard to find exact statistics on the number of Haitians who have been deported to Haiti since the 2010 earthquake. In my interview with Rachèle Magloire, co-director of *Deported,* she stated that the lack of statistics is due to the fact that the U.S government does not provide numbers to the Haitian government and the latter does not have the necessary infrastructure to keep record of the number of deported. For a better understanding of the complex detention industrial complex, see *Detain and Punish: Haitian Refugees and the Rise of the World's Largest Immigration Detention System* by Carl Lindskoog (University of Florida Press, 2018). For more information, see various statements about deportation of Haitian immigrants to Haiti including "Statement by Secretary Johnson Concerning His Directive to Resume Regular Removals to Haiti" in September 2016 at https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/09/22/statement-secretary-johnson-concerning-his-directive-resume-regular-removals-haiti, accessed 13 July 2019; and "Statement by Secretary Johnson on Haiti," https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/10/12/statement-secretary-johnson-haiti, accessed 13 July 2019. According to the July 14, 2016 press release "Written Testimony of ICE Deputy Director Daniel Ragsdale for a House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Hearing Titled Recalcitrant Countries Denying Visas to Countries That Refuse to Take Back Their Deported Nationals" for the fiscal year 2015, "the leading countries of origins for removal were Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and EL Salvador." The full report is available at https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/10/12/statement-secretary-johnson-haiti, accessed 31 Aug. 2021.

[20] In her study of the role of religion in the lives of Haitian immigrants, Margarita A. Mooney analyzes how religion can help support families and create a space of belonging for first-generation immigrant children. She notes, "… [In] Miami, some evidence indicates that religious participation has reduced the number of second-generation Haitians experiencing downward assimilation." She further states, "The strength of cultural and institutional mediation increases the chances of upward mobility among second-generation immigrants. As first-generation Haitians and their leaders in Miami were more successful at establishing various forms of mediation, such as religious communities and social services centers with a broad range of activities, stronger relationships with state and civic leaders, and greater sources of funding for their social programs, Haitians in Miami will likely achieve more upward social mobility than Haitians in Montreal or Paris" (Mooney 201).

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