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(Re)Writing Home: Unimagining and Reimagining Haitian Identity in Diasporic Literature from
the United States

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INTRODUCTION

The current political climate calls for a nuanced and contextualized study of the Haitian experience in the U.S. This historical moment in which the president of the United States would feel so inclined as to ask: “Why do we want people from Haiti here?” and “Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?” (Davis et al. 2018; Dawsey 2018). Trump singled out Haiti in these comments in the wake of his decision to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians in the U.S. which was initially instated following Haiti’s 2010 earthquake. The same man who promised Haitians “I will be your champion” during his presidential campaign made the decision to force 59,000 members of the Haitian diaspora who currently hold TPS to return to Haiti in July of 2019 (MSNBC 2017; Halls 2017, 5). The latest review of Haiti’s TPS conducted by the DHS reported that conditions which warrant the extension of TPS remain. The cholera outbreak caused by UN Peacekeeping forces and 2016’s Hurricane Matthew which followed the 2010 earthquake have only exacerbated the housing crisis and food insecurity throughout Haiti (Happel & Yaffe 2017, 1). This decision has thus garnered much opposition, resulting in the filing of multiple lawsuits against the Trump administration which are currently in progress (Riddle 2019; Rose 2019).

Given the ongoing fight to oppose the termination of TPS for Haitians, this study aims to document the response of the Haitian diaspora to the current political situation in the U.S. I am interested in how these individuals define and characterize their Haitian identity as well as how they respond to discriminatory stereotypes and immigration policies. I have found these sentiments most accessible and poignantly expressed in the literature produced by authors from the Haitian diaspora. This study thus constitutes a comparative, literary anthropological analysis of two post-earthquake novels written by Haitian women from the diaspora in the U.S. : Ibi

Zoboi's *American Street* and Katia D. Ulysse's *Mouths Don't Speak*. *American Street* is a *bildungsroman* about a Haitian girl, Fabiola, migrating to the U.S. with her mother who is detained despite having had her visa approved; Fabiola is thus forced to navigate her new and unfamiliar world without her mother's guidance. *Mouths Don't Speak*, on the other hand, is a narrative of return and rediscovery. After 25 years in the U.S., Jacqueline feels called to return to Haiti following the earthquake only to confront personal traumas in addition to Haiti's national trauma. Despite the contrasting narratives of these works, common lines can be drawn between the novels' depictions of Haitian identity and the reality of living between borders, their active negation of stereotypes, and their critiques of U.S./foreign intervention and interference in Haiti.

Given the importance of Haiti's history and, perhaps more significantly, the silencing of this history, I found it necessary to contextualize the topics referenced by Zoboi and Ulysse to gain a concrete understanding of the social, cultural, historical, and economic commentary which these authors infuse into their works. My analyses are, therefore, grounded in literary anthropology in which I treat the novels as cultural artifacts - anthropological subjects in their own right - which reveal key aspects of the Haitian experience in the diaspora. These analyses also engage directly with the intentions and ideologies expressed by the authors in interviews and notes on their works. This study thus pursues an informed and holistic understanding of these novels and the transnational social systems in which they are embedded as well as their crucial role in amplifying voices from the Haitian diaspora in the U.S.

THE CURRENT POLITICAL CONTEXT: TERMINATION OF TPS FOR HAITIANS

TPS is a temporary measure, an immigration status which "provides humanitarian protection to noncitizens who are unable to safely return to their country of origin due to an ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster, or 'other extraordinary and temporary

conditions” (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 4). It is granted under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) which allows the DHS to provide protection for 6, 12, or 18 months (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 4). A review of the receiving country’s conditions must be conducted a minimum of 60 days prior to the expiration of the status to determine whether the conditions which warrant TPS designation remain and, moreover, if it should be extended or terminated (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 4). TPS designation does not provide its holders “a path to permanent residency,” but instead protects individuals who hold TPS from deportation, allows them to receive an employment authorization document (EAD), and authorizes travel outside the U.S. (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 4).

TPS has strict and exclusive criteria to determine which individuals are eligible to receive this status. Eligible applicants are required to “have been ‘continuously physically present’ [in the U.S.] since the date of [*sic*] most recent designation” (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 4). Those granted TPS “must not have been convicted of a felony or two or more misdemeanors in the United States” and are “subject to all the mandatory bars to asylum” (Hall 2017, 5; Happel and Yaffe 2017, 4). TPS for Haitians is available to the 2.3 million individuals displaced by the 7.0 magnitude earthquake which devastated Port-au-Prince in 2010 and which killed approximately 230,000 people (Hall 2017, 4-5). It does not protect individuals who later fell victim to the 2010 cholera epidemic which was sparked by the irresponsible waste management practices of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti or Hurricane Matthew which devastated Haiti’s southern peninsula in 2016 (Yale 2013, 8; Ferreria 2016, 1).

Although TPS is not granted to Haitians singularly affected by the cholera epidemic or Hurricane Matthew, these disasters have been acknowledged as significant setbacks to Haiti’s recovery from the 2010 earthquake (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 4). The effects of the cholera

outbreak itself were considered a “new extraordinary condition” given that more than 9,000 Haitians had died from the disease and nearly 800,000 more had been infected (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 4; Alston 2018, 94). Before the epidemic, no case of cholera had been recorded in Haiti in its modern history (Lynch 2017, 2). Claims arose that the disease was introduced by an outside source which had been traced back to a MINUSTAH (UN Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti) base located near the Artibonite River (Payton 2017, 66). Although the UN denied these claims adamantly, an investigation of the base by a journalist soon after the outbreak revealed that “human waste [was] held in large open pits located above the tributary that locals said regularly overflowed (Payton 2017, 66). These initial claims have now been corroborated time and again by epidemiologists who have traced the disease’s point of origin to the UN base (Payton 2017, 66).

As if the cruel irony of the situation were not already apparent, just under three months prior to the outbreak, the UN General Assembly had recognized “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as...essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights” (Payton 2017, 65). In fact, with the hope of countering rumors that MINUSTAH soldiers “were poisoning the water in the canals instead of cleaning them,” peacekeepers created “educational components” of their mission to teach locals “to make better ‘choices’ when it came to the type of water they drank [and] how they disposed of their trash” (Greenburg 2013, 109). Other than the clearly hypocritical nature of this advice given the MINUSTAH’s own feckless waste management practices, they also have not taken into consideration the significant structural obstacles which hinder Haitians’ access to the water purifying tablets and bottled water which the UN recommends (Greenburg 2013, 109). Observers have been particularly disturbed by the outcome of investigations into the MINUSTAH’s practices given that “the people who violated

the organization's touchstone of ethical integrity were agents of the United Nations itself' (Payton 2017, 65). Although the UN certainly did not foresee the cholera outbreak, it still had control of its response to the epidemic. Instead of choosing to admit its negligence immediately, however, the organization has sought to shelter itself behind legal technicalities.

Despite ineffable evidence to the contrary, the UN dragged its feet in accepting responsibility for causing the epidemic. This tactic was strongly encouraged by the U.S. which feared that admission of "legal culpability for the cholera epidemic...could impose billions of dollars in costs on the United States and other U.N. member states" (Lynch 2017, 2). Philip Alston, a UN special rapporteur who investigated the international response to the epidemic, argued that "[b]y pushing the U.N. from the beginning to deny responsibility [for the outbreak] in spite of overwhelming evidence, the U.S. government has been the key player in denying justice to...victims" and their families (Lynch 2017, 2). The UN thus remained unresponsive to calls from many organizations and individuals to take responsibility and displayed a flippant disregard for those affected by the epidemic and the well-being of the entire nation.

When legal channels were pursued to argue for the UN's responsibility to "provide access to conflict resolution" for victims, 15 months after the claim was filed, the organization asserted that it was "simply 'not receivable' on the cryptic grounds that to do so would require 'a review of political and policy matters'" (Payton 2017, 68). After six years of sustained and intense criticism (e.g. that the UN's approach thus far had been "morally unconscionable, legally indefensible and politically self-defeating"), the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued a formal apology to the Haitian people for the MINUSTAH's responsibility in sparking the cholera epidemic and the UN's commitment to providing tangible compensation for those affected (Alston 2018, 96). This was certainly an improvement upon the UN's previous assertion that it

had merely a “moral responsibility,” rather than a legal obligation, to the victims – a rhetoric which has been employed many times throughout Haiti’s history (e.g. when French President Hollande claimed that France had only a “moral debt” to its former colony after it had drown the young nation in debt by imposing today’s equivalent of a \$21 billion indemnity on Haiti to cover France’s loss of ownership over Haitian bodies following the only successful slave rebellion in history which resulted in the founding of the world’s first Black republic) (Alston 2018, 72; Payton 2017, 6; Farmer 2006, 63). Although better than a moral commitment to Haiti’s well-being, the financial compensation which Ki-moon hopes to provide is dependent upon contributions made by UN member states (Alston 2018, 99). These funds are by no means secured, especially given that Trump has made it clear that he does not intend to provide any contribution to administer justice for victims of the outbreak (Lynch 2017, 1).

The UN’s failure to take responsibility for its negligence for over six years has not come without its consequences for the Haitian people. The organization’s inaction left Haitians more vulnerable to the next disaster the nation would face in 2016 – Hurricane Matthew, the country’s worst hurricane in over half a century (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 1). Thus, the devastation brought about by the earthquake and the public health crisis of 2010 was magnified by the destruction inflicted by the hurricane (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 7). The confirmed number of deaths from the Category 4 storm was 546, however, estimates projected that as many as 1,600 lives were lost (Kijewski-Correa 2018, 2; Happel and Yaffe 2017, 7). Hurricane Matthew seriously impeded the progress which had been made on improving Haiti’s water and sanitation infrastructure, causing estimates of cholera cases in Haiti to more than double immediately following the storm (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 18). Although the number of cases of cholera has decreased

significantly since 2010, the storm constituted another setback in the nation's efforts to contain and control the spread of the disease (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 17-18).

In addition, the storm displaced 180,000 individuals from Haiti's southern departments which has only contributed to the initial displacement of over two million individuals as a result of the 2010 earthquake and thus exacerbated the nation's housing crisis (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 1, 7). Following the earthquake, approximately 1.5 million individuals registered in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps; more than 37,000 people still remain in IDP camps according to a recent report and many more displaced persons have not been accounted for officially (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 9). In many cases, however, those who have left IDP camps were evicted and still experience highly precarious living situations (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 9). In fact, such individuals have often been given no other choice than to move into essentially condemned buildings which were severely damaged by the earthquake and/or hurricane and are not structurally sound (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 14). These conditions have led to the serious housing crisis which the country experiences to this day; the progress which had been made in creating permanent housing solutions has been hindered by Hurricane Matthew (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 15). Furthermore, the "twin natural disasters" of the 2010 earthquake and hurricane have ravaged the prospects of Haiti's agricultural sector (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 18). Food insecurity remains a major obstacle and threat to the Haitian people. Both in 2012 and 2017, this condition was found by the DHS to constitute a viable reason for the extension of TPS for Haiti (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 18).

Despite the recommendation of the DHS to extend TPS for Haiti, information which U.S. presidents have acted upon for years, the Trump administration has acted to terminate the designation. Since its initial re-designation, "the DHS has extended TPS for Haiti four times. It

has noted that conditions of designation for TPS remain and, more recently, that new, extraordinary conditions (tropical storms, instability and increasing food insecurity) have emerged that make Haiti unable to safely receive its nationals” (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 6). Reports carried out by multiple institutions thus attest to the danger TPS holders would face if forced to return to Haiti. Moreover, this act to end TPS affects not only the 59,000 Haitian individuals who hold TPS but also their loved ones. If the termination of TPS is finalized, the families of these individuals living in the U.S. would face the difficult decision to either remain in the country or move to Haiti. One report states that if these families are to remain together by relocating to Haiti, the nation could face the arrival of nearly 200,000 people (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 13). Considering that these members of the diaspora are key providers for approximately 250,000 relatives in Haiti, Happel and Yaffe argue that “[w]ere Haiti to experience a large influx of individuals who would transform instantly from net contributors into a population requiring support from the country...conditions would worsen so significantly that they would threaten to reverse the security and protection progress made in recent years” (Happel and Yaffe 2017, 22). The end of TPS in Haiti would thus have deleterious effects on Haiti’s security and the security of individuals entering the nation.

Given the many lives affected by the termination of TPS, there has been much opposition from Haitians and human rights organizations since the decision was announced in 2017. In October of 2018, U.S. District Judge Edward Chen filed a preliminary injunction (PI) against Trump’s decision, a lawsuit which fights the termination of TPS not only for Haiti but also for Sudan, Nicaragua, and El Salvador (Riddle 2018). The lawsuit argues that the decision “violated the Administrative Procedures Act, stemmed from racial discrimination, and infringed on the constitutional rights of TPS beneficiaries and their United States citizen children” (Riddle 2018).

As long as this PI is in effect, TPS holders will maintain their legal immigration status in the U.S. (Riddle 2018). Another recent development in the fight against the termination of TPS for Haitians has been the federal trial *Saget et al v. Trump* which took place at the beginning of January of 2019 in New York. The trial recently concluded, and the plaintiffs will issue their final conclusions on March 1st at which point the judge will make his decision on the future of TPS for Haitians.

As these individuals have taken legal action in the face of Haitians' current political situation in the U.S., Ibi Zoboi and Katia D. Ulysse utilize their literary voices to advocate for Haitians and their rights. Although none of their characters explicitly hold TPS, their novels depict the lives of members of the Haitian diaspora as well as address the impacts of the 2010 earthquake and U.S. immigration policy. As both of their novels were published recently, *American Street* in 2017 and *Mouths Don't Speak* in 2018, they constitute products and responses to the current historical moment in the U.S. Zoboi and Ulysse's writing humanizes members of the Haitian diaspora, allowing their readers to imagine and empathize with individuals who they may know only through statistics and (mis)representations in the mainstream media. The intimate portraits presented of these individuals in the novels thus provide another approach through which to document the response of the Haitian diaspora to the current political climate in the U.S.

LITERARY ANTHROPOLOGY AND CONTEXTUALIZING FICTION

Although literary anthropology constitutes a relatively young subfield of the discipline, it provides a productive lens through which to analyze and gain insights from literature in the realm of social science. As previously stated, this field of study treats novels as anthropological subjects in their own right, artifacts of the societies in which they are embedded that “[become]

both the creation[s] and the creator[s] of culture” (Łebkowska 2012, 41). In this understanding of literature, a novel thus mirrors the society from which it emerges and either props up or acts in defiance of existing social institutions. Definitions of literary anthropology abound; however, most seek to highlight the potential of establishing a dialogic relationship between literary studies and anthropology so as to provide a holistic understanding of works of fiction and their intimate connections to the societies in which they are created. Some theorize this connection between the fields from a more functional standpoint. Łebkowska (2012) suggests that the subfield should be conceptualized as the “anthropologization of literary studies” so as to “[encourage] using the tools and instruments of the literary realm, without forcing a complete resignation from scientific language” (Łebkowska 2012, 35). In a similar vein, Hanks (1989) advocates for “an anthropological framework for textual analysis” as a means by which to “[explore] the ties between macro-level social processes and micro-level aspects of textual form” (Hanks 1989, 100).

Engaging in these practices leads to new ways of understanding and extracting meaning from texts to gain insights into what Fassin (2014) refers to as “reality” and “truth.” He distinguishes these verities by characterizing reality as “horizontal, existing on the surface of fact” and truth as “vertical, discovered in the depths of inquiry” (Fassin 2014, 41). Literary anthropology provides opportunities to examine the dialectic relationship between reality and truth in literature, revealing the two ideas “not as equivalents but as concepts in profound and permanent tension” (Fassin 2014, 41). Fiction gives its authors the freedom to react to and draw from “reality,” using it as a framework or skeleton around which they structure the substance of “truth” which lies beneath reality’s “surface of fact.” The platform of storytelling thus allows for the implications of “reality” to be explored more fully, leading to what Fassin may describe as

the discovery of “truth.” As Albert Camus once observed, “fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth” (Haynes 2016, 137). Literary anthropologists are thus able to mine fiction for the influences of “reality” as well as for the insights of “truth” to which they may be limited through the conventional ethnographic method and the obligation to preserve factual accuracy.

The process of situating works of fiction in their sociopolitical contexts provides further depth to textual analysis; literary descriptions of culture provide valuable insights into both the sensible systems (i.e. language and behavior) and intelligible systems (i.e. values, relationships, politics, etc.) of societies (Poyatos 1988, xiii). This exchange between literary studies and anthropology creates many opportunities. For instance, an obstacle which ethnographers often face in conducting fieldwork is the risk that their simple presence in the field will skew the data or otherwise alter the behavior of their subject population. In reading a novel as an ethnographer would study their anthropological subject, there is zero interference: the actions of its actors are predetermined before the novel is even opened. The literary anthropologist may also code the text with which they engage just as the ethnographer would the transcriptions of interviews, noting behaviors and norms as well as tracing themes in the ideas and opinions expressed by characters in the narrative.

Theorists of literary anthropology also view the subfield as greater than the sum of its parts in that it reveals “perspectives hitherto unexploited but now born of the joint efforts of both anthropology and literature” (Poyatos 1988, xiii). This *gestalten* understanding of the subfield is echoed in Łebkowska’s association of literary anthropology with “trans-disciplinarity” which “is concerned, as the prefix ‘trans’ suggests, with what is between the disciplines, what goes through them, and is at the same time outside of them” (Łebkowska 2012, 36). Thus, just as members of the Haitian diaspora live their lives between the borders of Haiti and the U.S., literary

anthropology finds itself living between the disciplinary borders of literary studies and anthropology (Mignolo 2012). Mignolo argues that this particular position results in the development of a “border thinking” which places one in the unique mindset “*to think from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them*” (Mignolo 2012, 67). This positionality leaves one disposed to engage in “double critique,” drawing on the best from both traditions while recognizing the limitations of each, creating a space conducive to developing a holistic and critical analysis of the subject matter (Mignolo 2012, 51).

Particular emphasis has also been placed on literary anthropology’s potential to act as a platform on which stereotypes about cultures and peoples may be contested and on which historical events may be analyzed and reexamined from a multitude of perspectives (Poyatos 1988, xiv). This characteristic of literary anthropology is especially appealing in an analysis of Haitian diasporic literature given misconceptions about Haiti and Haitians in the international community. Both Ibi Zoboi and Katia D. Ulysse, the authors whose works will be treated in the subsequent analysis, have explicitly expressed their concern with negating stereotypes and debunking myths about Haitians (Kreyolicious.com 2017; Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). These authors write their characters to resist stigmatization and stereotypes projected upon them throughout the narratives. By further illuminating the social contexts of structural oppression on which these ideas have been constructed and the racist rhetoric on which their perpetuation relies, Zoboi and Ulysse allow readers to gain a deeper understanding of Haitians’ experiences. They also provide sociohistorical commentary on issues such as U.S. and foreign intervention in Haiti which at the time may have been framed in the media as benevolent acts of “charity” but were viewed by Haitians as manipulative. Many such interventions were indeed later proven to be in the best interest not of Haiti but instead beneficial to the country

administering said “aid.” In referencing these events within their narratives from the point of view of their characters, Zoboï and Ulysse provide new insights on the events from marginalized perspectives.

Despite the productive work which may be accomplished in a literary anthropological analysis of a work of fiction, Łebkowska cautions that there is a “danger of reducing or simplifying literature to cultural exemplification, or an exaggerated idealization” (Łebkowska 2012, 40). She calls literary anthropologists to recognize the limitations of the lens through which they analyze the text and not to mistake these as limitations of the text itself. Łebkowska argues that this anthropology of literature should instead acknowledge “the uniqueness of its research object,” to consider the limitless opportunities to analyze the novel’s characters and their experiences (Łebkowska 2012, 40). Łebkowska concludes that in their analysis of texts, “anthropologist[s] of literature [transform] specific conventions into documents of a cognitive character,” but that anthropology should not “utilize literature solely in order to find its own reflection” (Łebkowska 2012, 40-41). Thus, while literary anthropologists may read novels as culture, it is necessary to recognize the complexities and nuances of texts which offer many other opportunities for interpretation and analysis outside of the field.

In Zoboï’s and Ulysse’s novels, many more themes and topics are woven throughout the plots of these narratives than will be addressed in the subsequent analysis. Zoboï, for instance, focuses on themes from LGBTQIA+ acceptance to police brutality in both the U.S. and Haiti, while Ulysse addresses how trauma affects individuals and entire nations as well as the severity of class divides in Haiti. Zoboï has made a conscious effort to include a variety of topics in her novel, explaining “I covered a lot of issues because this is the reality of so many of our lives. If we are immigrants, we are also black girls in America, we are also dealing with poverty, urban

issues, underfunded schools...caring for sick family members” (Kreyolicious.com 2017). The diversity of the issues which these authors address, therefore, should not be diminished by the analysis of other features of the novels, as the works remain as multi-dimensional as the characters which inhabit them. As it is not possible to unpack every one of these themes to the full extent which each warrant, the topics which will be explored in the following sections are Haitian identity and the concept of home, the negation of stereotypes, and foreign (particularly U.S.) intervention in Haiti. The scope of this analysis thus focuses on aspects of the novels which resonate with the current historical moment and illuminate the experiences of the Haitian diaspora in the U.S. at this critical juncture.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS...

Some readers of literature prefer to align their consumption of novels with the literary theory which claims that the “author is dead” (Baldick 2015). This theory suggests that the reader should not strive to understand the intentions of the author in writing the work nor the biographical details which may have played a part in the novel’s conception. Instead, readers are directed to interpret the work from their own singular frame of reference, resulting in an analysis which may communicate more about the reader than the work. The aim of this comparative, anthropological literary analysis, however, is quite different. Contextualization of the social, historical, political, and economic factors which pervade works of fiction is, in fact, one of the stated goals of literary anthropology. Within this process of contextualization, it is thus productive to investigate the background of authors as well as their intentions in writing and publishing their works.

In comparing *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi and *Mouths Don’t Speak* by Katia D. Ulysse, it is beneficial to first examine how these authors’ experiences as members of the Haitian

diaspora articulate and how their intentions and ideologies relate. Remarkably, both Zoboi and Ulysse have been educators in the U.S. for the same number of years – both estimate having taught for approximately fifteen years (Remezcla.com; Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb). Both authors describe their experiences teaching in low-income areas which have clearly informed their works (Remezcla.com 2016; Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). Zoboi and Ulysse migrated from Haiti with their families when they were young girls and grew up in the U.S. while maintaining strong connections to their birth country (Zoboi 2017, 326; The Rumpus.net 2018). Given the convergence of such critical aspects of these author’s experiences, there are many elements of their works which merit comprehensive comparison.

Zoboi and Ulysse both celebrate and participate in Haitian culture through their modes of storytelling. The authors emphasize the importance of giving voices to all of their characters, a literary technique which has been referred to as *polyphony* – allowing a multitude of voices to be heard in one work (Day 2010). Zoboi has discussed the importance of highlighting the diversity of experiences throughout the transnational Haitian community, stating that in *American Street* “I tried to remedy that by literally giving each of my characters a voice. I had to step into their shoes for a moment in order to humanize them. I have a responsibility as a writer to provide context...so that my characters are not one-dimensional” (Kreyolicious.com 2017). This focus on providing a space in which multiple perspectives may be celebrated is also reflected in Ulysse’s style of storytelling. Although both *American Street* and *Mouths Don’t Speak* focus on a primary female protagonist, other voices interject throughout the narratives, episodes which Ulysse describes as “instances where another character’s motives are so overwhelming that they take the reins—even from the writer” (Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). According to this

philosophy of storytelling, the author does not simply choose to write a character; rather, each character's story demands to be heard.

Ulysse goes on to explain that this method of sharing stories is part of her heritage, relating that "I move within a story the way my great-grandmother told me stories. She shifted from character to character, giving each one—however peripheral—her own space to exist" (Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). Although she writes as a third person omniscient narrator which may ordinarily create a certain distance from characters, Ulysse clearly expresses the diverse thoughts, desires, and motivations of her characters. She seamlessly transitions from one character's perspective to the next to construct nuanced glimpses into complex interactions between characters who are each uniquely shaped by the weight of the personal and sociohistorical baggage they carry. Ulysse elaborates that "there are characters in this book who probably could have been omitted, but these people are what the Haiti in this book are all about" (Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). She thus explains that although some of the characters she writes may seem minor, the perspectives they share are major and, in fact, key to understanding the Haiti which Ulysse seeks to share with her readers.

Zoboi similarly provides spaces in which characters may tell their own stories, calling readers to acknowledge and empathize with characters they may ordinarily dislike. She writes in first person primarily as the female protagonist but interjects with stories in first person from other characters to remind readers at critical moments that all of her characters have reasons for the way they behave and the decisions they make. In addition to this manner of storytelling, Zoboi pays homage to the oral tradition of storytelling in Haiti and the relationship between a storyteller and her listeners. She explains that the storyteller begins by asking her audience if they would like to hear a tale with "a single call, 'Krik?'" Her listeners respond with a collective

‘Kрак!’ before she can begin” (Zoboi 2017, 328). She goes on to state that *American Street* “would not be possible without a whole village’s resounding ‘Kрак!’” and thanks the individuals who supported her with the opportunity “to share this gift of story” (Zoboi 2017, 328). Like Ulysse, Zoboi thus highlights the importance of acknowledging her community and heritage of storytelling.

Zoboi believes it is not only important to continue traditional methods of storytelling, but also to plant “symbolic seeds” throughout her work “so that culture and history continue to live on through story” (Kreyolicious.com 2017). She specifically references Toussaint L’Ouverture, a Haitian revolutionary hero, a number of Vodou *lwas* (spirits), and other historical events which she believes are important to highlight to preserve their legacies (Kreyolicious.com 2017). Zoboi also prefaces her novel with a Haitian proverb: “The rock in the water does not know the pain of the rock in the sun” (Zoboi 2017). This maxim may refer to the rampant socioeconomic inequality which exists throughout Haitian society. When applied to the context of the Haitian diaspora in the U.S., however, it may refer to various types of inequality, not only socioeconomic but also racial inequalities, which new members of the diaspora are forced to confront.

Ulysse similarly frames her narrative with a “symbolic seed” by using a popular Haitian saying as the title of her work – *Mouths Don’t Speak*. She explains that it is the “second part of an ancient maxim the elders used to warn those among us whose loose lips can get us killed. *Je wè. Bouch Pe*. Eyes see, but mouths don’t speak. I can imagine that during certain dictatorships, keeping one’s mouth shut was a way to keep yourself and loved ones alive” (Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). Ulysse traces the aphorism’s origins in Haiti to the Bible verse Psalms 115:4-8 and situates its function in Haitian society (Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). She references specifically its use under the tyranny of the Duvalier dictatorship, and the choice

which often had to be made by Haitians between turning a blind eye or speaking the truth of the regime's injustices. Ulysse thus pays homage to Haiti's oral tradition and history by centering her work around this proverb.

In interviews about their works, both authors discuss their concern with negating stereotypes of Haitians which pervade media representations of the country and its people. Zoboi discussed how she has approached her work thoughtfully with regards to representation, stating "I was very worried about how I presented my characters. I'm writing about Haitians and Haitian-Americans in ways I haven't seen before. I was careful about perpetuating stereotypes" (Kreyolicious.com 2017). Zoboi thus clearly concerns herself with the politics of representation and sees her writing as a platform on which to contest and debunk myths about people of Haitian descent and Haitian culture. Additionally, in the acknowledgements of her most recent novel *Pride*, Zoboi notes how the current state of the U.S. informs and affects her writing, explaining "I wanted to write a love story filled with sweetness, joy, and beauty. But our current political situation was a constant noise and distraction... The early drafts of something almost like a love story were a muddy pool of disappointment, anger, and fear" (Zoboi 2018, 291). Zoboi's awareness and reactions to the sociopolitical environment of the U.S. is thus evident in the social commentary which she provides throughout her novels.

Ulysse has similarly expressed her disappointment with the political climate in the U.S. and representations of Haitians in the media, highlighting the incident in January of 2018 in which "the president of the United States allegedly ditched the usual seven-word sobriquet, and called Haiti [a] 'S#!thole country'" (Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). The "sobriquet" to which Ulysse refers is "the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere," a phrase which has become the most popular introductory tagline to most journalistic articles about the country -- so

popular, in fact, that it was used as a clue for Haiti in the August 10, 2007 Wall Street Journal crossword (Crossword Tracker; Crossword Answers 911). Ulysse thus illustrates how negative stereotypes of Haiti pervade the media and highlights the importance of subverting such representations: “We are used to being insulted, which is horrible. There are countless people working hard to change the narrative.” (Book Q&As with Deborah Kalb 2018). While not all Haitian authors feel responsible for challenging stereotypes about Haiti in their literary works, Zoboï and Ulysse emphasize their desire to use their voices in the literary world to debunk myths about Haiti, to unimagine and reimagine Haitian identity.

In sum, an examination of Ulysse and Zoboï’s own experiences as well as their goals in creating their works provides invaluable context to analysis of their novels. The reader discovers how their experiences migrating to the U.S. as young girls and teaching in the U.S. have informed their writing. Zoboï and Ulysse employ methods of storytelling which reflect Haitian traditions and demonstrate how they can adapt such practices to illustrate the experiences of the diaspora. They also each incorporate “kernels” of Haitian history and everyday life throughout their novels including information about the nation’s religions, prominent figures, historical events, and popular expressions. Ulysse and Zoboï also explicitly express their concern for debunking myths about Haitians and Haiti in their work and contesting stereotypes engendered by the media. A firm understanding of these authors’ positionalities thus allows for a more informed reading of *Mouths Don’t Speak* and *American Street*.

DIASPORA EXPERIENCE IN *AMERICAN STREET* AND *MOUTHS DON’T SPEAK*

Haitian Identity and the Concept of Home

Haitian identity and nationality are often depicted as being inseparable from and ingrained in one’s corporeal being. In a study which sought to define Haitian identity in the

diaspora community in the U.S., many respondents described “ties to Haiti as formed from blood and inheritance” (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 107). Diasporas have been defined as constituting “[o]nly those migrants who ‘settle elsewhere’ from a common ‘place of origin’ and create a ‘home’ away from ‘home,’ and in whose social imaginary the place of origin holds some significant resonance” (Carpi & Stierstorfer 2017, 273). The “significant resonance” of Haiti for members of the diaspora is often linked to the fact that the nation was the first independent Black Republic, and the Haitian Revolution was the only historical “case of an enslaved people breaking its own chains and using military might to defeat a powerful colonial power” (Payton 2017, 1- 2; Farmer 2006, 63). The inheritance of Haiti’s national pride thus leads many Haitians to participate in the “the conflation of self, ancestry, blood, and nation” (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 107). This fact was empirically corroborated in the same study which found that “[w]hen asked to define what it meant to be Haitian, 82 percent of people we interviewed spoke of descent. Half of the respondents began their exposition by speaking of Haitian blood” (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 108). There thus exists a recurrent discourse which frames Haitian identity through an individuals’ physical connection and relation to the country. Moreover, it is explained that “[e]ven if you are naturalized [as an American], you keep Haitian blood” (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 123). It is clear that this sentiment of one’s enduring connection to Haiti is internalized by many members of the diaspora in readings of *Mouths Don’t Speak* and *American Street*.

In *Mouths Don’t Speak*, Jacqueline is physically connected to Haiti through the tradition which her mother continued of burying her child’s umbilical cord – “kòd lonbrit” – under one of the trees on her family’s property in Haiti (Ulysse 2018, 131). This link to Haiti gives Jacqueline strength, for when she faces adversity she reasons that “[h]er *kòd lonbrit* under that breadfruit tree had become one with the earth, and if the earthquake that nearly destroyed Haiti had not

touched those trees, she would survive too” (Ulysse 2018, 191). Her decision to return to Haiti stems largely from these inexplicable ties to her birth country which instill in her a need to rediscover herself. Jacqueline, therefore, expresses that “[s]he want[s] to remember the person she was long ago, before leaving Haiti. The country was a part of her no matter how much she tried to run away from it” (Ulysse 2018, 99). Before the earthquake, Jacqueline had been largely estranged from her parents who lived in Haiti and had not returned for 25 years; however, the catastrophic earthquake of 2010 serves as a call to action to reclaim her Haitian identity and sets her story into motion.

Fabiola must similarly negotiate her physical attachment to Haiti which she recognizes as both her “blood and inheritance” when she arrives to the U.S. in *American Street*. Although she was born in the U.S., she spent her entire childhood in Haiti before returning to the U.S. in high school to live with her aunt and cousins in Detroit. She thus relates that “this new family of mine is both familiar and strange – just like how I am American by birth and Haitian by blood, bones, and tears. Familiar and strange” (Zoboi 2017, 237). Fabiola highlights her difficulties in living between the borders of Haiti and the U.S.; however, as the previously-cited study indicates, her Haitian identity endures even though she is an American citizen. Her pride in her Haitian identity is evident throughout the novel, particularly when she chooses the topic of one of her essays: “I wonder if he can see a reflection of my face on that paper – if he can see me, my whole story... I wrote down everything I knew about the Haitian revolutionary hero Toussaint L’Ouverture and why he is important to me” (Zoboi 2017, 118-119). Fabiola continually reaffirms her connection to Haiti by embracing its history and her unbreakable ties to the country while also continuing to speak Haitian Creole and practice the Haitian religion of Vodou in the U.S.

Fabiola's cousin Chantal similarly feels this connection to Haiti even though it has been many years since she has returned. Using the same diction to describe her physical bond to Haiti, Chantal explains that "*Creole and Haiti stick to my insides like glue – it's like my bones and muscles. But America is my skin, my eyes, and my breath*" (Zoboi 2017, 117). Despite her many years in the U.S., Chantal's Haitian identity has not been lost but is simply distinct from her American identity, the two serving different functions in the construction of her self-image. Furthermore, Fabiola's arrival reminds Chantal of Haiti and revives her connection to the nation as she deliberates her personal definition of "home" : "*[Detroit] is my home. My mother is home. My sisters are home. And even you [Fabiola] ...you force me to remember the home I left behind. You make me remember my bones*" (Zoboi 2017, 117). Chantal is thus reminded of her physical connection to her birth country in Fabiola's presence and, in addition, acknowledges another important aspect of Haitian identity – family.

Fulfilling one's obligation to family is seen as a vital component of Haitian integrity. In the aforementioned study on Haitian identity, "[m]en and women spoke of family obligations in a tone of moral judgement," highlighting that individuals are defined by their "ties to family in Haiti and to Haiti as a nation" (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 61). Moreover, the study revealed that "the primary family value is obligation rather than love," particularly the obligation of financial support when an individual is able (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 77). This value is especially applicable when individuals have left Haiti to work in another country, for "they are aware of the suffering they escaped, [and] awareness of suffering is thought to compel action" (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 78). If these obligations are not met, the individual is thus judged as guilty of "bad faith" (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 79). One's Haitian identity is demonstrated through fulfillment of family obligations, therefore, revealing that "the nation is an extension of the family, and that

both family and nation can extend long distances and across the borders of states” (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 90). This fusing of familial and national obligations thus reveals the crucial role of family in maintaining national ties.

As family serves as a major theme in *American Street*, the importance of family obligation in Haitian culture is illustrated frequently. When Fabiola’s mother is detained upon their entrance to the U.S., Fabiola consoles herself through the knowledge of her family’s obligation to help her mother: “Family takes care of each other, I tell myself. We will get my manman” (Zoboi 2017, 13). Fabiola finds herself disappointed by how long the process to get her mother released takes, however, and believes her aunt and cousins are not putting as much effort into helping her as they should be. She is similarly disappointed by how her family welcomes her to her new home in Detroit. She asks herself “is this how you treat your family in America? There is no celebration for my arrival, no meal is cooked, no neighbors are invited to welcome me” (Zoboi 2017, 20). Fabiola doesn’t attribute this lack of hospitality to her family’s “bad faith,” however, preferring to attribute this difference to their adoption of American cultural norms.

Despite the differences between Fabiola and her family’s conception of family obligation, her aunt and cousins do fulfill their most important responsibilities as her relatives. When Fabiola and her mother were living in Haiti, her Aunt Jo had sent them remittances to pay for Fabiola’s English education and day-to-day living expenses. This phenomenon is nearly universal in the Haitian diaspora with “90 percent of Haitian immigrants send[ing] money to Haiti” to support their family members (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 11). In fact, “the dollar value of these immigrant remittances exceeds the amount of foreign exchange earned by Haitian exports,” making the diaspora’s support crucial to Haiti’s financial security as a nation ((Schiller & Fouron 2001, 11; Pulitano 2016, 10). As the study highlights, however, the need to fulfill this

responsibility is not dependent on love but on obligation. When Fabiola arrives to her new home, her Aunt Jo explains “[t]his is the house your uncle Phillip bought with his hard-earned money. This is the house your cousins were raised in. And now, I am so happy to share it with you.’ She doesn’t smile when she says this, and her words are as dry as cassava bread” (Zoboi 2017, 20). Aunt Jo’s contradictory welcome speech to Fabiola demonstrates the obligation she feels to invite her niece into her home, and yet her coldness reveals that she does not feel it is necessary to express familial love.

This expression of obligation rather than love is also prevalent in *Mouths Don’t Speak* through Jacqueline’s interactions with her estranged parents. When Jacqueline was ten, her parents sent her to the U.S. to continue her education, and 25 years later, she has only seen them a handful of times since her initial departure. Despite their estrangement, however, when the earthquake hits, Jacqueline’s sense of obligation is renewed. She grapples with negotiating her life in the U.S. with the turmoil into which her birth nation has been thrown, resolving that “[w]hat mattered was the near annihilation of her birth country now three thousand miles away from her front door. What mattered even more was finding her family” (Ulysse 2018, 10). After tirelessly investigating what has happened to her parents following the earthquake, Jacqueline finally discovers that they have survived but that her father has lost a leg after being trapped under a collapsed building. Although she has virtually no relationship with her parents, and they do not contact her to inform her that they have survived, she still feels a responsibility to go see her father, afterwards explicitly stating that she had “fulfilled her obligation to visit her father” (Ulysse 2018, 139).

As Schiller and Fouron’s (2001) study suggests, Jacqueline’s sense of obligation extends not only to her family but to Haiti as a nation. Instead of sending money to her parents who

belong to the wealthy Haitian elite, Jaqueline sends donations to rebuilding efforts after the earthquake, later reflecting that “[s]he could not recall how much she herself had sent, but it was plenty” (Ulysse 2018, 99). This sense of national obligation is one aspect of what Fouron and Schiller term “long-distance nationalism” defined as “a claim to membership in a political community that stretches beyond the territorial borders of a homeland. It generates an emotional attachment that is strong enough to compel people to political action” (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 4). This “emotional attachment” often arises from the difficulties which members of the diaspora face while adjusting to life abroad and may be accompanied by nostalgic “longing” for Haiti (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 93). Individuals thus engage in “affectionate recollections of the sweetness of Haiti” in times of disillusionment or adversity to reaffirm their Haitian identities (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 93). Fouron is Haitian himself and explained that in these circumstances he remembers: “I am from Haiti, the nation that won its independence by defeating the armies of Napoleon, the sweet Haiti of sunshine and warm breezes, the Haiti of my dreams” (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 39). Such long-distance nationalism and nostalgia can also grow out of a “void left by years of geographic and cultural separation” from an individual’s home country and may even spur a decision to return (Oliver-Rotger 2015, 2).

In *American Street*, Fabiola’s nostalgic longing for Haiti is illustrated by how she analyzes her experiences and processes her new life in the U.S. She responds to the near-freezing temperatures of Detroit when she first arrives with a craving for “hot, sizzling *fritay* from the streets of Delmas” (Zoboi 2017, 8). Fabiola similarly relates to her other experiences by evoking popular Haitian foods, explaining that one character’s “voice is as sweet as mangoes” while another’s is “like an overripe banana – too sweet and mushy” (Zoboi 2017, 48-49). She continues to characterize the voices of her new acquaintances in the U.S. by relating them to the

features of Haiti; one man's voice is "like the pebbled streets in Delmas, rough and unsteady" and the other's "like a warm sea breeze filling up the cold, dry air in this place" (Zoboi 2017, 2, 93). Fabiola also employs her nostalgic recollections of Haiti to communicate the unfamiliarity of her new environment, a place which is supposed to be her new home. She elaborates that "nothing here is alive with color like in Haiti. The sun hides behind a concrete sky. I search the landscapes for yellows, oranges, pinks, turquoises like in my beloved Port-au-Prince. But God has painted this place gray and brown" (Zoboi 2017, 47). Fabiola's reflection at once demonstrates her love and longing for Haiti as well as how she uses Haiti as a frame of reference to understand the new world which she has entered.

Jacqueline paints a remarkably similar picture of Haitian and U.S. landscapes when she returns to Haiti after spending 25 consecutive years in the U.S.: "Back in the States, there was concrete and steel outside her bedroom window. Here she had a garden filled with glorious orchids and birds of paradise" (Ulysse 2018, 145). Like Fabiola, Jacqueline also juxtaposes the concrete dullness of the American cityscape with the vibrant colors of the Haitian landscape which both protagonists know and love. When she lives in the U.S., Jacqueline expresses her nostalgia for this scenery through her paintings of Haiti. After the earthquake, however, they are no longer enough to connect her to her home country and she "must come to terms with...feeling displaced...and under the effects of cultural loss in the United States" (Oliver-Rotger 2015, 3). She thus resolves to return to Haiti, a journey that many diaspora members undergo which serves as "a sort of transitional stage that brings knowledge," allowing Jacqueline "to restock her memory...with the colors she needed to revive her canvases back home" (Ulysse 2018, 124, 139). Jacqueline also engages in the nostalgic act of remembering by rediscovering Haitian "vodou jazz" and relearning Haitian Creole in preparation for her return to Haiti (Ulysse 2018,

92). These nostalgic acts thus reveal the renewed sense of long-distance nationalism Jacqueline adopts in the wake of the 2010 earthquake.

Contesting Stereotypes

Jacqueline's choice to relearn Creole is significant given the integral role it plays in constructing Haitian identity throughout the diaspora. Andrew Spears (2010) asserts that "[t]he Haitian diasporic experience in the United States...has led Haitian immigrants...to construct a transnational linguistic identity, of which Creole language is a crucial part" (Spears 2010, 66). As is apparent in *American Street* and *Mouths Don't Speak*, however, this "transnational linguistic identity" is continually subjugated by the dominance of English in the U.S. The dominant ideology of assimilation constitutes a "flattening process" by which individuals are pressured to conform to dominant cultural practices, such as developing English proficiency, in order to be accepted by the society into which they have entered (Capri & Stierstorfer 2017, 290). Everyday interactions between individuals perpetuate and reproduce this ideology, most frequently in the form of what Huber (2011) refers to as "racist nativist microaggressions" (Huber 2011, 380). These constitute "subtle, layered, and cumulative verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color" which are predicated on the belief that "perceived racial differences" exclude People of Color from "belonging to the monolithic 'American' identity," which has historically been associated with whiteness (Huber 2011, 380-382). Ee (2013) explains that microaggressions related to an individual's linguistic identity most often discriminate against "first language use, English proficiency, or foreign accent," forces which are constantly at work in Fabiola and Jacqueline's lives (Ee 2013, 74).

Fabiola speaks her first language of Creole to hold on to her Haitian identity and draws on it as a source of comfort when she is separated from her mother; however, her Aunt Jo has

internalized the assimilationist mindset in the U.S. over time and prohibits Fabiola from speaking Creole in her house. When Fabiola first arrives at Aunt Jo's house, she assures her aunt that they will have Fabiola's mother released from the detention center: “*Matant Jo, n'ap jwen yon fason,*’ I say in Creole. ‘We will find a way.’” (Zoboi 2017, 17). Yet her aunt does not respond with the warm familiarity of Creole, instead requesting coldly “‘English, please.’ She stops and stares at me. ‘I hope your mother really sent you to that English-speaking school I paid all that money for’” (Zoboi 2017, 17). Fabiola is thus discouraged from speaking Creole altogether upon her arrival, and although her cousins are open to learning Creole phrases, her aunt has the final word. Soon after, she adds “[y]ou are going to have to pay me each time you speak a word of Creole in this house” to which Fabiola responds “[y]es, Matant,” only to be corrected again: “Aunt Jo. Say it just like that.” (Zoboi 2017, 19). While the reader may interpret the actions of Fabiola's aunt as stemming from a desire to protect her from the discrimination of dominant U.S. society, Fabiola is nonetheless highly affected and discouraged by her aunt's words.

In addition to being altogether barred from speaking Creole at home, Fabiola's sense of belonging and worth are constantly questioned by others on account of her English proficiency. Upon her arrival to the U.S., Fabiola's English skills are doubted when an immigration agent “speaks slowly, as if I am stupid” just after Fabiola finds out that her mother has been detained, only adding to her distress (Zoboi 2017, 4). Other individuals criticize and mock Fabiola's English proficiency, even her family and friends, making her constantly aware of what Steele (2010) refers to as “stereotype threat” which occurs “whenever we're in a situation where a bad stereotype about one of our identities could be applied to us...[and] [w]e know what ‘people could think’” (Steele 2010, 5). Fabiola's knowledge of this stereotype threat influences how she responds to her environment and those around her. When some classmates ask her to repeat

something she has said, Fabiola explains her reaction: “I don’t because I’ve heard that before. A laugh followed by ‘say it again’ means I’ve said something that makes me sound stupid” (Zoboi 2017, 194). This discrimination which Fabiola faces is thus not a one-time event but rather trails behind her in every encounter “like a balloon over [her head]” (Steele 2010, 5).

Fabiola also encounters stereotype threat when she is singled out because of her accent (Zoboi 2017, 51). She again internalizes previous discrimination she has faced which makes her uneasy when she must speak English in new situations. For instance, when Fabiola bumps into a passerby in the street, her response and thought process reflect her awareness of stereotype threat: “I quickly apologize with my very best English and step away. Any hint of an accent could be an invitation for judgment – that I’m stupid and I don’t belong here” (Zoboi 2017, 60). While Fabiola is constantly reminded of dominant society’s expectation that she be a fluent English speaker, she learns that she is not permitted to hold the simpler expectation that members of dominant society say her name correctly. One of Fabiola’s teachers says “[h]oney, tell me how to pronounce your full name,” while one of Fabiola’s friends attempts to change her name altogether (Zoboi 2017, 51). Although her full name is Fabiola Toussaint, her friend Kasim tells her “[y]eah, but I like Fabulous François better. It sounds important and shit. Like you’re some movie star” (Zoboi 2017, 200). Fabiola, however, does not accept this change, this “flattening process” of her Haitian identity and responds “[n]o. My name is my name and you can’t change it” (Zoboi 2017, 200). In refusing to alter her name for the convenience and appeasement of others, Fabiola reaffirms her identity and resists the pressures of assimilation in the U.S.

Jacqueline, however, has been exposed to the forces of assimilation for a much longer period of time given that she resided in the U.S. for 25 years before her return to Haiti. She has learned in which situations questions about her name will be posed, and so when she calls a

hospital to inquire after her father's health, "[a]s a matter of habit, she spelled out her last name" (Ulysse 2018, 45). The same homogenizing forces also pressured Jacqueline to abandon her first language of Creole altogether when she arrived in the U.S. as a young girl. She reflects on how "she had forgotten most of the language because she hadn't spoken it at all in twenty-five years," indicating how Jacqueline was socialized by messages pervasive in dominant U.S. society which devalue bilingualism in favor of "English [language] hegemony" (Ulysse 2018, 63; Huber 2011, 379). Jacqueline explains how she internalized these sentiments when she discusses her relationship with her first language: "As for 'picking up Creole again,' she agreed with the phrase. She did drop Creole, and had no regrets about it. She never planned to return to Haiti" (Ulysse 2018, 63). After the earthquake, however, Jacqueline challenges the dominance of English in her life when she chooses to take Creole classes as a means by which to rediscover her identity and prepare for her return to Haiti.

The shift in her attitude toward Creole is evident when she expresses that she is "excited at the prospect of relearning her mother tongue...she spoke Creole by instinct." (Ulysse 2018, 38). Yet Jacqueline's enthusiasm at "picking up Creole again" is tempered when she recognizes just how distant she has grown from the language. She adds that "all the Creole she had known a quarter of a century ago was like a pebble at the bottom of the sea: it would take a monumental effort to find it" (Ulysse 2018, 38). Jacqueline's process of re-acquiring Creole is thus bittersweet as she realizes her alienation from her first language but resolves to reclaim it. Her experiences are similar to those of others highlighted in diaspora theory who begin the process of remembering their "unfamiliar or forgotten cultures and histories" (Oliver-Rotger, 2013, 13). Jacqueline thus "half-jokingly" asks her Creole teacher "[w]hen can I start gathering the lost pieces of my own language?" (Ulysse 2018, 68). Despite her feelings of estrangement,

Jacqueline's knowledge of Creole comes flooding back to her, and soon she is determined to teach her daughter Amber the language, arguably so that she does not encounter the same feelings of alienation which Jacqueline has experienced (Ulysse 2018, 131). In these acts, Jacqueline thus begins to reject the English hegemony which has shaped her life since her arrival to the U.S.

Zoboi and Ulysse also highlight nativist discrimination which their characters encounter based more generally on migration status. Fabiola is forced to confront this discrimination in the midst of her separation from her mother who was detained despite having had her visa approved before their arrival to the U.S. Although Fabiola was born in the U.S., her presence and belonging are questioned when she returns. She faces this discrimination from friends and strangers alike, as it is her boyfriend Kasim who overtly asserts "[y]ou don't get it. You're just too different. You're not from here," in a disagreement (Zoboi 2017, 102). Although Fabiola and Kasim are close, this doesn't prevent him from having been socialized by dominant society to make nativist assumptions. In order to justify his behavior of which Fabiola disapproves, Kasim attempts to invalidate her opinion by attributing her disapproval to a lack of understanding of American culture. Instead of accepting Fabiola's point as valid, Kasim dismisses it by othering her and attributing their disagreement to her so-called deficiencies rather than a difference in opinion.

This pattern of nativist discrimination is continued when a detective asks for Fabiola's help in an investigation in her neighborhood and questions her belonging in the U.S., stating "[o]ur work is not without the help of good American citizens like yourself. You are an American citizen, right?" (Zoboi 2017, 90). Detective Steven's inquiry carries a value judgement, asserting that Fabiola's 'goodness' rests in her status and self-identification as an

American citizen. The detective's comments are thus manipulative in that Fabiola's worth is implicated in her response. The detective further coerces Fabiola by suggesting that contributing to the investigation will aid her in getting her mother released from the detention center.

Detective Stevens exploits child-parent separation which has been institutionalized by U.S. immigration policy to further her own investigation, revealing how institutions of power collectively perpetuate oppression of marginalized populations (Torres et al. 2018, 848). The detective thus abuses Fabiola's desperation to be reunited with her mother and benefits from Fabiola's trauma.

This trauma constantly weighs on Fabiola throughout the novel, as after leaving the airport where her mother has been detained, she expresses "it feels like I'm leaving part of me behind – a leg, an arm. My whole heart" (Zoboi 2017, 13). These sentiments persist and hinder Fabiola's adjustment to life in the U.S., as even when she experiences moments of happiness, she remembers that her mother is not there to share them with her. In one instance, she tries to hold onto these feelings of happiness, explaining "I try to be like air again. But thinking of my mother is like a long rope keeping me tied to the roof" (Zoboi 2017, 124). As Fabiola's mother raised her alone and is her only immediate family member, their separation affects Fabiola deeply, stirring up feelings of guilt when her mother is not there to experience the U.S. with her. She cannot comprehend why this separation has occurred as her mother's visa had been approved before their arrival to the U.S.

Fabiola's cousin Pri too wonders how Fabiola's mother could have been detained, asking "[s]o trying to come to America from the wrong country is a crime?" (Zoboi 2017, 17). Pri highlights the inconsistencies of U.S. immigration policy which upon further inspection reveal the racist structures pervading immigration practices (Torres et al. 2018, 847). Fabiola expresses

her disbelief at her mother's detainment in keeping with Pri's assertion that the definition of crime is conditional upon which country an individual migrates from. Fabiola relates her mother's situation plainly in stating "[s]he's in prison. *Prison!* Her only crime was coming here to this country to make a better life for us" (Zoboi 2017, 86). This experience teaches Fabiola to doubt other American "systems," for when her cousin Chantal instructs her to apply for financial aid and scholarships, Fabiola is hesitant, explaining "I don't trust it because my mother filled out American forms that promised her things, too" (Zoboi 2017, 221). In revealing the nativist discrimination which Fabiola and her mother face upon their arrival to the U.S., Zoboi demonstrates the significant small-scale and large-scale obstacles which face Haitians of the diaspora in the U.S. and how these individuals may conceptualize their encounters with such discrimination.

Ulysse also described racist nativist discrimination throughout her novel in discussing the experiences of one of Jacqueline's students in the sixth-grade art class which she teaches. Although Jacqueline had arrived in the U.S. when she was 10 and lived there for 25 years, she still understands the difficulties which come with adjusting to life in a new country, allowing her to empathize with her students who have recently migrated. While Jacqueline attempts to help her students, the principal of her school seems incapable of empathizing with these students and instead criticizes their supposed unwillingness to assimilate to American culture. When Jacqueline brings up one boy who is having a particularly difficult time and explains how the school might help him, the principal dismisses her ideas by claiming "[h]e's just lazy" (Ulysse 2018, 21). He continues by stating his own views on assimilation: "I've got a lot going on, but I still show up every day and do my job. I get that the kid's from a different country and needs to adjust a little. But don't let him fool you. These kids know exactly how things work here. When

in Rome, try to fit in with the Romans” (Ulysse 2018, 21). It is clear that the principal has no personal experience which allows him to relate to these students, and it seems he does not have any interest in understanding their experiences.

Although Jacqueline is forced to remain civil with the principal despite his expressions of nativist discrimination, she challenges him when he claims that if he wanted to, he could understand her students’ experiences through “Google.” He tells her “If I had to live in El Salvador for a minute, I’d figure it out...I can go any place in the world I want, whenever I want, and get along just fine. All I have to do is hit this button right here” (Ulysse 2018, 21). The principal then gestures to his high-quality computer and “ergonomically correct keyboard” which are rather rare sights to be seen in an under-resourced school such as theirs (Ulysse 2018, 21). He asks Jacqueline “[e]ver heard of Google? I don’t have to be in El Salvador to see how things are done down there. I don’t have to go to Uganda to understand what those people are going through. I can see it all from here” (Ulysse 2018, 22). This passage clearly demonstrates the principal’s privilege in his assumption that he could relate to the students’ experiences literally through the push of a button rather than accepting that these students have faced hardships that he cannot imagine. Upon hearing this comment from the principal, Jacqueline points out the ignorance and insensitivity of his comments and ends their conversation. Ulysse thus highlights how this nativist discrimination can occur to individuals in many settings as well as emphasizes the importance of solidarity and allyship as demonstrated by Jacqueline.

Fabiola and Jacqueline also face racist nativist microaggressions based on negative stereotypes and perceptions of the Haitian religion of Vodou. Hebblethwaite (2010) highlights how Vodou has been scapegoated and demonized by colonizing forces and other dominant powers since its emergence in Haiti (Hebblethwaite 2010, 3). He argues that claims which

characterize Vodou as “progress-resistant” are a perversion of reality given that the religion was crucial to uniting the enslaved persons of Saint-Domingue to fight for their liberation in the Haitian Revolution (Hebblethwaite 2010, 4). Hebblethwaite highlights how “Vodouists—unified under a spiritual system that preserved their cultural diversity—helped build, lead, and motivate the armed groups that ultimately established Haitian independence” (Hebblethwaite 2010, 7). His argument makes evident the hypocrisy of this “progress-resistant” rhetoric given that it was interpretations of the Christian bible which were used to justify slavery in Saint-Domingue and throughout the world. Vodou, on the other hand, constituted “a progressive tactic against an abominable colonialism established by the French” (Hebblethwaite 2010, 7). Yet dominant representations of Vodou continue to frame the religion as a problem rather than as a tradition which played a significant role in the only successful rebellion of an enslaved people in history. Hebblethwaite thus concludes that to view Vodou as an obstacle is to exhibit a “‘cognitive separation’...from historical and empirical reality” and to overlook Vodou’s ability to bring about positive social change in Haiti (Hebblethwaite 2010, 16).

Bellegarde-Smith and Michel (2012) state that Vodou “represent[s] key components of the Haitian national consciousness and serve[s] as [a repository] of knowledge and aesthetics” as well as acts as “a ritualized system of healing and of relating to larger cosmic forces within the universe” (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2012, 2). Whether a Haitian individual practices Vodou or does not, the religion remains an important part of cultural preservation and expression in Haitian society. Moreover, it serves as a source of cultural innovation in that it enables both “the continuation as well as transfiguration of ancestral traditions” (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2012, 2). Bellegarde-Smith and Michel highlight that Vodou itself, “as other African or African-derived religions, lends itself to monotheistic faiths in the establishment of one supreme,

omnipotent God” (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2012, 3). In Vodou, this God is known by a range of names, one of which is Bondye (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2012, 3). Vodouists, however, do not have direct contact with Bondye who is reached instead through contact with a large number of deities known as *Lwa* who serve Bondye (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2012, 3). As Vodou draws on various religious traditions, including Catholicism, these *Lwa* are often associated with Catholic saints, and each *Lwa* embodies a specific value of Haitian society (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2012, 2-3). Individuals are connected with a particular *Lwa* who acts, in a manner of speaking, as their “guardian angel” and who provides them with guidance throughout their lives (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2012, 2-3).

It is rare, however, that this description of Vodou is shared with dominant society, as the religion’s media representations are consistently pejorative. Zoboï explains that “[w]hile Vodou is practiced by many in the Haitian diaspora, it still has a negative stereotype in the media as being associated with evil and witchcraft” (Zoboï 2017, 326). This demonization of Vodou has only been possible through the religion’s juxtaposition with Christianity. Hebblethwaite explains that “the figures of ‘Satan’ or ‘demons’ are not anchored as the diametrical foes of God in [Vodou’s] mythology in the way they are in Christianity” (Hebblethwaite 2010, 5). It is thus only through the projection of the Christian imaginary, particularly of Manichean ideas, onto Vodou that the religion is vilified. Hebblethwaite states that this process constitutes a “superimposition of...especially Protestant ideology and imagery onto a religious system in which equivalent notions do not exist” (Hebblethwaite 2010, 6). This phenomenon has, therefore, had a major influence over the stories which the media tells about Vodou and over popular opinion of the religion in the U.S. in general.

The first myth about Vodou proliferated by popular media relates to the religion's name itself as it is often referred to by its misnomer – “voodoo.” Bellegarde-Smith and Michel explain that “[t]he term *voodoo* is a creation of the European American imaginary and should be rejected as it has been misconstrued to designate irrational, baseless, and unfounded myths about Vodou practices” (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2012, 2). As Fabiola continues to practice Vodou when she arrives in the U.S., she finds herself constantly having to correct her friends' and even her family's misconceptions about her religion. Her first friend Imani relates her perceptions of Fabiola's cousins when she explains “[a]nd 'cause they're Haitian, everybody thinks they do that voodoo shit. Is it true? Do they put hexes on people? I hear their mother is a voodoo queen” (Zoboi 2017, 53). Fabiola's first reaction is to laugh “because everything Imani says sounds so outrageous,” but she finds that it is not only Imani who has been taught these myths about Vodou (Zoboi 2017, 53). Fabiola must frequently explain to her cousin Pri that Vodou is important to her and not simply a game or “witchcraft” as it is seen in the popular imaginary. When Fabiola explains that she used to pray for her cousins and her aunt when she lived in Haiti, Pri asks “[o]h, you did some voodoo shit to protect us?” (Zoboi 2017, 63). Fabiola responds simply by stating “[i]t's not voodoo shit,” later explaining, “Pri, you have to treat it with a little more respect. It's not just my 'voodoo stuff,' It's my life” (Zoboi 2017, 63, 321). Fabiola is thus faced with the burden of debunking myths about Vodou which have been proliferated by the media and influence her friends' and family's perceptions of her religion.

Jacqueline must similarly confront these negative stereotypes about Vodou despite the fact that she does not practice the religion. In fact, given that she has spent much of her life in the U.S., she has internalized the negative connotations which have been associated with Vodou. When she first begins her Creole lessons and is still in the process of rediscovering her Haitian

identity, her Creole teacher introduces her to a genre of Haitian music known as “vodou jazz” (Ulysse 2018, 92). When Jacqueline initially hears the music, however, she scoffs, telling her teacher “[t]his sounds a lot like voodoo music to me...[a]nd just because I’m Haitian doesn’t mean I’m into that stuff” (Ulysse 2018, 92). Her reaction reveals that she has likely faced discrimination in the past based on myths about Vodou and assumptions that all Haitians practice the religion.

Jacqueline has thus grown accustomed to rejecting Haitian cultural products such as music which may be associated with Vodou as a means by which to protect herself from others’ prejudices. Yet through Jacqueline’s exploration of her Haitian identity, she comes to embrace vodou jazz as a valuable tool which allows her to connect with Haiti. She begins listening and dancing to the music regularly, and one night when her husband Kevin comes home, he asks “[s]ince when did you become addicted to that voodoo music?” (Ulysse 2018, 93). She corrects her husband by responding “[i]t’s called vodou jazz...It reminds me of Haiti. You could say I’m dancing with memories” (Ulysse 2018, 93). Jacqueline still faces discrimination based on dominant society’s negative perceptions of Vodou, however, now that she no longer holds an internalized stigma against the religion, she is able to correct others’ misconceptions about Vodou.

Many of the myths spread about Vodou which are consumed by vast numbers of individuals originate in film representations of the religion. Hebblethwaite explains that the “exploitation and demonization of Haiti’s religious and folkloric cultures by the North American entertainment industry have...damaged the religion’s reputation among the millions who watch such media” (Hebblethwaite 2010, 9). He elaborates that this process of misrepresentation began following the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934 and grew out of the imperialist imaginary

which institutionalized the fear of Vodou (Hebblethwaite 2010, 9). It is for this reason that “one website lists over 40 films that relate to ‘Voodoo’ and they are all in the horror genre” (Hebblethwaite 2010, 9). Jacqueline’s Creole teacher highlights the prevalence of the “voodoo” myth in the film industry after Jacqueline uses the term, explaining that “[w]hat people call *voodoo* is the crap somebody made up to sell movie tickets” (Ulysse 2018, 92). Fabiola similarly tells Pri that the Vodou she practices “is not the ‘voodoo’ you see in the movies,” explaining that “this is the stuff my mother practiced back in Haiti. She is a *mambo*, a priestess. This is how we pray. We see the magic in everything, in all people” (Zoboi 2017, 274). Fabiola thus works to undo Vodou’s misrepresentations in the media by describing how she prays to her *Lwa* and relies on them to guide her throughout her life. She reveals the purely irrational fear of Vodou which has been induced by horror movies about “voodoo” by painting her cousin an accurate portrait of what practicing the religion entails.

As Fabiola mentions, her mother is a *mambo* or Vodou priestess, and she is concerned that during her mother’s time at the detention center she will be persecuted for practicing her religion. As she does not have direct contact with her mother, Fabiola writes her a letter in which she questions why her mother has been detained. She asks “[i]s it because you are a *mambo*...*who held ceremonies in the courtyard of a Christian NGO building? Are they punishing you for that, Manman? Are they punishing me?*” (Zoboi 2017, 76). Fabiola’s questions hold considerable historical significance in that they evoke the history of Vodou’s persecution through international interference in Haiti. As described earlier, the U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915-1934 during which time Vodou was severely criminalized. Although anti-Vodou laws had already been in existence, they were rarely enforced until the arrival of U.S. marines at the start of the occupation (Hebblethwaite 2010, 9). Hebblethwaite explains that in one instance

“worshippers captured during a Vodou ceremony by the U.S. Marine unit ... were sentenced to 6 months hard labor in the project to construct a new police headquarters” under the occupation (Hebblethwaite 2010, 9). This persecution of Vodouists continued until late into the 20th century, as “[i]t was only with the Constitution of 1987 that prohibitions against Vodou were dropped” (Hebblethwaite 2010, 16). Although de jure sanctions against the practice of Vodou have ended, de facto discrimination against the religion is still largely prevalent today. One legacy of the historical persecution of Vodouists has been the presence of Christian NGOs who may provide conditional aid to Haitians based on their religious beliefs. The impact of these religious organizations and other instances of international interference in Haiti as highlighted throughout Zoboi’s and Ulysse’s work will be addressed in the following section.

International Intervention and Aid in Haiti

As if in a jeopardy response to Trump’s aforementioned question “Why do we want people from Haiti here?” Haitian author Paul Anvers inquires “How long will we Haitians be obliged to leave our country against our will?... Foreigners, you don’t want us in your country? At least let us live peacefully at home. Let us elect whom we want” (Farmer 2006, 149). Anvers words evoke a sentiment long expressed by Haitians with regards to foreign intervention and so-called aid in Haiti, that being largely one of distrust and frustration. Farmer (2006) highlights the effects of the U.S. occupations of Haiti first from 1915-34 and the USAID mission from 1977-79 as well as the disparity between American and Haitian opinions on these “interventions” (Farmer 2006, 19, 78). While many Americans have adopted a positive outlook on these operations, Farmer indicates that “Haitians have somewhat different memories of American solicitude” (Farmer 2006, 19). Farmer outlines the duplicitous nature of the U.S. presence in Haiti, including the economic and political gains which were sought by providing “aid” to the country. The

particular situation referenced in Anvers's quote refers to the CIA-backed coup of Haiti's first democratically-elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide who had refused to accept exploitative economic policies imposed by the U.S. (Farmer 2006, 144-45).

Given this track record of foreign intervention in the name of "development" in Haiti, it is not surprising that sentiments similar to those expressed by Anvers can be recognized in Zobo and Ulysse's writing. In *Mouths Don't Speak*, for example, Jacqueline's mother relates her views on the adventurous nature of her Haitian-American granddaughter by stating "[i]n a voice tinged with contempt" that "[c]uriosity is good to a certain point. Americans take it too far, in my opinion. They want to get into everybody's house and find out what you had for breakfast and dinner the night before" (Ulysse 2018, 134). Ulysse thus relates one perspective on the invasive nature of the U.S. presence in Haiti which is by no means as disinterested as it often paints itself to be. She also, however, provides the perspective of a U.S. marine, Jacqueline's husband Kevin, who was present during the coup against Aristide. He reflects on this episode in which "[t]he people were screaming in Creole – their president had been taken from them. Kevin's job was to escort the former priest out of Haiti" (Ulysse 2018, 31). Throughout the rest of the novel, Kevin expresses negative opinions about Haiti, particularly in his opposition to Jacqueline's return to Haiti with their daughter a year after the earthquake. He tells her "[t]he world is full of desperate people, Jackie. Desperate people are crazy. Haiti is full of desperate people. I've had my share of crazy. I don't want you there, and I do not want my daughter there" (Ulysse 2018, 105). Ulysse's representation of these perspectives through the medium of a novel allows her to flexibly juxtapose and create tension between these discordant views, painting a nuanced portrait of U.S. intervention in Haiti in both the eyes of its actors and those acted upon.

Zoboi addresses the impact of foreign intervention in Haiti throughout the course of her novel as well, in particular highlighting the presence of the MINUSTAH. As Fabiola and her cousin Pri discuss violence and police brutality in the U.S. and Haiti, Fabiola describes an instance “[d]uring *kanaval*...[when] [s]ome people were jumping on cars to dance and have a good time. But MINUSTAH thought they were making trouble. So they shot and we ran” (Zoboi 2017, 113). In this scene, the MINUSTAH is framed as a dangerous entity to be avoided and which, in fact, works against its professed goal of “peacekeeping” in Haiti even if unconsciously. Moreover, Fabiola portrays these forces as an ever-present fact of life in Delmas where she grew up, describing how in the evenings “the busy streets of Delmas began to empty out and no one but *vagabond* and MINUSTAH troops passed by on motorbikes and trucks” (Zoboi 2017, 12). Although this isolated reference to the MINUSTAH seems rather neutral, Zoboi’s decision to include it speaks to the normalization of this foreign presence in Haitians’ quotidian lives. Later, when Fabiola goes to a nightclub with her cousins in the U.S., she reflects that “[h]ere, it smells like the MINUSTAH troops who hang out at the clubs in Petionville on Saturday nights – alcohol, marijuana, and lust. Some of my friends would go for money and a good time, but I never liked it” (Zoboi 2017, 65). Fabiola thus relates what is to her an unpleasant memory of an American-style nightclub in Petionville, Haiti, highlighting the effects of the MINUSTAH presence in the country as well as locals’ impressions of these forces.

Ulysse also speaks to the presence of these clubs in Haiti when Jacqueline’s mother explains “[t]hey’ve opened so many nightclubs and restaurants to entertain and feed the peacekeepers and help-givers...Loud music plays until dawn. Our quiet neighborhood has turned into a vulgar dance hall” (Ulysse 2018, 121). Jacqueline’s mother again addresses the intrusive nature of foreign intervention in Haiti, evoking critiques of foreign aid administration by

observers following the earthquake. One such individual had mentioned her sighting of “aid workers enjoying a restaurant and sushi bar that advertise the safety of their food as imported from the cholera-free US” (Greenburg 2013, 100). Ulysse also references the beginning of the cholera outbreak in the months after the earthquake when Jacqueline watches the news as it “mentioned that people were now dying from severe diarrhea, vomiting, and dehydration – symptoms associated with cholera. But because that disease had been eradicated in Haiti one hundred years ago, infectious disease specialists were baffled” (Ulysse 2018, 62). As was discussed in a previous section, multiple reports on the disease confirmed that “Haiti had not recorded a single outbreak of cholera in modern times...when Haitians living near a tributary of the Artibonite river near the village of Mirebalais suddenly began falling sick in October 2010” (Lynch 2017, 2). When it was later found that the outbreak originated in a MINUSTAH camp, a fact which the UN long refused to acknowledge, ambivalence for foreign aid and intervention in Haiti only grew (Payton 2017, 66).

This stance on aid is echoed throughout Ulysse’s work when she writes that “Jacqueline was curious about all the Build Back Haiti Better progress the journalists raved about. She wanted to see with her own eyes what nonprofit organizations had done with the money they had collected after the quake” (Ulysse 2018, 99). Relief and recovery efforts have in fact faced harsh criticism given the minimal amount of progress which has been made in “building back better” especially considering how much money had been donated by the international community. Five years after the earthquake, one reporter for *The Economist* asked, “How did so many humanitarians bearing so much cash accomplish so little?” (*The Economist* 2015, 14). The reporter goes on to highlight that under 10% of the funding was administered through Haitian government agencies and still less money was provided to local NGOs (*The Economist* 2015,

14). The exclusive nature of foreign aid administration was further demonstrated by the fact that “[f]oreign aid agencies set up a logistics compound where they held meetings in English. That helped them co-ordinate with one another but left Haitian organizations in the cold” (The Economist 2015, 14). It is thus evident that many aid agencies did not make enough of an effort to collaborate with and contribute to federal or local efforts to rebuild in Haiti. The reporter concluded that “the 2010 tragedy could have been an opportunity to work through its institutions rather than around them, making them stronger. Unfortunately, Haiti's friends did not make the most of it” (The Economist 2015, 14). The slogan “build back better” was thus clearly not taken to heart by many aid agencies as instead of contributing to the amelioration of Haiti’s infrastructure by strengthening its local institutions, they attempted to administer aid with little involvement and instruction from Haitians themselves.

Ulysse further critiques the administration of aid after the earthquake by calling particular attention to the adoption of Haitian “orphans” to foreigners in the aftermath. Jacqueline reflects on this so-called aid, relating that she

had questioned how it was possible for these adoptions to take place so swiftly. The number of children being taken out of the country was disturbing. Everyone was so stunned by the tragedy that all they could do was praise these winged beings who swooped down from all corners of the sky to rescue Haiti’s orphans. There hadn’t been time to question whether or not the adoptions were even legal. Every day, it seemed, there was a new story about Haiti’s children being distributed to families throughout the world. Europe and North America scored the highest (Ulysse 2018, 181).

Questionable adoptions such as the ones Jacqueline describes indeed took place following the earthquake as Bajak (2010) highlighted in his coverage of the “Orphan Rescue Mission” carried

out by members of a U.S. Baptist church (Bajak 2010, 1). These individuals attempted to remove 33 Haitian children from the country but exerted little effort to locate their parents or caregivers and took them without the permission of the Haitian government (Bajak 2010, 1). Jacqueline's sentiments are not isolated considering Bajak had observed that this "mission" was "striking nerves in a country that has long suffered from child trafficking and foreign interventions" (Bajak 2010, 1). However well-intentioned it may have been, this group's actions only worked to contribute further to the understandable mistrust and disillusionment many Haitians experience in the face of foreign aid and intervention, especially the transportation of children without carrying out the necessary procedures. Bajak further explained that "parentless or lost children [were] more vulnerable than ever to being seized and sold. Without proper documents and concerted efforts to track down their parents, they could be forever separated from family members able and willing to care for them" (Bajak 2010, 2). Ulysse's commentary thus serves to highlight one of many stories that were easily lost in the whirlwind of news reports in the weeks after the earthquake as well as to provide an example of a foreign organization attempting to administer aid without consulting the Haitian government or locals.

Even prior to the earthquake, foreign "aid" has created significant problems in Haiti, one notable instance was the flooding of Haiti's market with imported U.S. rice. Schiller and Fouron highlighted that

Rice growing had been lucrative before the current flood of cheap rice imported from the United States entered Haiti. Many Haitians blame the increasingly desperate situation in Haiti on the influx of imported food and food assistance that provides cheaper food yet also destroys Haitian agriculture, making the country even more dependent on foreign aid (Schiller & Fouron 2001, 54).

This information highlights the unsustainable effects of foreign aid which in Haiti has often proven more harmful than helpful in the long term. Ulysse references this particular situation within the first ten pages of her novel as Jacqueline watches the news on IDP camps set up in Haiti after the earthquake. She notes that “empty plastic sacs emblazoned with the Stars and Stripes and the words *Enriched Long Grain Rice* served as privacy walls... More *Made in the USA* rice bags covered the dirt floors of these sheds” (Ulysse 2018, 10). Her description of the building materials for these IDP tents clearly illustrates the undeniable excess of imported U.S. rice in Haiti. Later, upon her return to Haiti, Jacqueline finds that her childhood street like the IDP camps is filled with “thousands of empty rice bags festooned with their *Made in USA* logo” (Ulysse 2018, 119). Her Creole teacher openly comments on the detrimental effects that U.S. rice subsidies have had on the Haitian agricultural sector by asking rhetorically, “How can you make a living when the country is littered with cheap rice from the good old US of A? (Ulysse 2018, 68). Ulysse thus works to reveal the adverse impacts of foreign intervention not only as an isolated occurrence after the earthquake but as a continuation of a legacy of uninformed and irresponsible foreign aid administration throughout Haiti’s history.

CONCLUSION

A contextualized, anthropological analysis of Zoboi and Ulysse’s works reveals the abundance of social commentary which *American Street* and *Mouths Don’t Speak* contain as well as provides an example of how members of the Haitian diaspora are responding to the current political situation in the U.S. Their novels demonstrate how individuals in the Haitian diaspora conceptualize and live out their Haitian identities while they live between the borders of Haiti and the U.S. Moreover, these authors utilize their literary voices to bring attention to the various forms of discrimination which members of the diaspora may face throughout their lives

in the U.S., including but not limited to prejudice related to their race, English language ability, immigration status, and religion. They also provide commentary on the presence of the U.S. and other members of the international community in Haiti throughout their novels to highlight the responsibility these powers should acknowledge in creating and/or contributing to the obstacles which the nation faces today. Zoboï and Ulysse, therefore, provide an opportunity for readers to gain a deeper understanding of the current experiences of the Haitian diaspora in the U.S., allowing them to meet accessible and multi-dimensional Haitian characters in the pages of these novels which they would likely not encounter in the mainstream media.

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