

‘There is No Female Word for Busha in These Parts’: Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham and Women’s Experience in 1930s Haiti and Jamaica

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IN THE MID-1930S, TWO AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN—ZORA NEALE HURSTON and Katherine Dunham—battled for supremacy as anthropological researchers in Haiti and Accompong, Jamaica. As female anthropologists, Hurston and Dunham gave greater attention to the experience of women in Haiti than male commentators had done, and were alert to forms of gendered violence that male writers had overlooked or downplayed. Yet in staking their claims to mine the riches of Caribbean cultures in the aftermath of the United States’ military occupation of Haiti (1915-1934), these researchers based in the northern metropole were inevitably in the position of privileged outsiders, engaged in what Stephanie Batiste terms ‘imperialist looking’ (11-12, 168)—and in their territorial rivalry, Hurston and Dunham saw each other as competitors rather than potential collaborators.

Neither Hurston nor Dunham was blind to the imperialist dimensions of her project. Dunham refers to having ‘invaded the Caribbean’ in her 1969 book *Island Possessed* (3), the title of which puns on multiple forms of ‘possession’, while in her 1938 account of her Caribbean travels, *Tell My Horse*, Hurston playfully imagines herself as ‘President of Haiti’, appointing US-trained Colonel Calixe of the Haitian national guard as her military head (89). Moreover, both Hurston and Dunham were circumspect about anthropology’s pretensions as a neutral

'science', and challenged the conventions of anthropological writing by foregrounding their subjective viewpoints and employing irony, ambiguity and creative license in ways which expose the limits of their capacity to 'know' Caribbean cultures authoritatively.¹ This common ground suggests the two women might productively have worked together. That they worked against each other can be attributed, at least in part, to their dependence on white male patronage in competing for grants and institutional support.

Ironically, this gives rise to analogies with the patriarchal features of Haitian society each perceived in her fieldwork, and which Hurston in particular presents as perpetuating women's oppression and sexual subjection in Haiti. Exploring these connections enables us better to appreciate ways in which Hurston and Dunham themselves suggest continuities between Caribbean and United States settings in *Tell My Horse* and *Island Possessed*. This in turn raises questions for contemporary critical conceptions of a division between 'Global North' and 'Global South'.

Invasion and Revision

The US occupation of Haiti stimulated a range of political and creative responses, with 'lurid accounts of savagery and cannibalism' and 'voodoo' serving an appetite for sensational exoticism, while also reinforcing the discourse of imperialist paternalism which sought to justify the intervention (Dash 22; Renda 19-20). It also sparked protest, especially from African American activists, writers, and artists, for whom the memory of the Haitian Revolution continued to serve as a symbol of black freedom and political autonomy, and whose creative and critical responses also tended to offer more positive images of Haitian history, culture and politics (Batiste 81).

Against this background, Hurston's *Tell My Horse* presents a more complex case. In sections, Hurston's text seems to reproduce the paternalistic discourse of American imperialism, yet such assertions break down on inspection or are undermined elsewhere. For instance, Hurston's apparently laudatory description of US forces bringing a 'white hope' to Haiti appears in a chapter titled 'The Rebirth of a Nation', invoking D.W. Griffith's infamous blockbuster film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which celebrated the Klu Klux Klan as the saviours of the white South (72), and was released the same year the US invaded Haiti, so that American imperialism in 'the wreck of a colony' (81) is implicitly linked to anti-black racism on home soil (cf. Duck 138). In the same chapter, Hurston evokes the violence of Caco guerrillas against their fellow Haitians in terms which seem to justify

¹ On 'positionality' and ambivalence about claiming authority in the tradition of 'feminist ethnography', see Lamothe 120.

intervention: 'The hunks of human flesh screamed of outrage. The blood screamed. The women screamed', Hurston writes, and imagines a Haitian peasant woman crying '[t]he black man is so cruel to his own, *let the white man come!*' (69, original emphasis). But this faith in white salvation seems misplaced when Hurston introduces a Haitian who styles himself a 'black Marine' and shows off phrases he picked up from American marines during the occupation: 'Jesus Christ! God Damn', and suggests 'perhaps you would like me to kill something for you. I kill that dog for you' (71).

Like so much of Hurston's work, *Tell My Horse* is best read as a performance in the Africanist 'trickster' tradition (cf. Renda 291, 300 and Batiste 168)—whether we think of the United States' Brer Rabbit or the Haitian Ti Malice—with the curious result that in voicing an imperialist discourse which seems to subordinate Haiti within a hierarchy of cultures, she is acting in accordance with practices which *link* black folk cultures across the US South and the Caribbean.² One glaring instance of feigned naivety occurs in Hurston's account of an exchange with the ex-US Navy pharmacist turned 'Voodoo' priest, Doc Reser, in which Hurston asks how a white man who had been on friendly terms with Haitians for so many years could yet have 'no kingly crown'. When Reser explains (or *mansplains*) that 'Haitians will make a good friend of a white man, but hardly a king', Hurston affects astonishment: 'Not even a *white* man?' (247). While emphasising Reser's ties with American business interests, Hurston alludes to intimate relations between Reser and some of his young female adherents, and offers a troubling depiction of his asylum's female detainees caged behind 'heavy chicken wire', one of whom is disciplined harshly after approaching a male inmate (255-6).

Similar ambivalence emerges in Dunham's *Island Possessed*. Writing in postcolonial Senegal three decades after Hurston, with an established career and financial security, and when the decolonisation movements which shaped today's 'Global South' were further advanced, Dunham could afford to be more critical of the American occupation. She refers openly to the 'atrocious' conduct of US marines (11), for which the benefits of 'new hospitals, roads' and other 'public works' were small recompense (25). Yet even in critical mode, Dunham can seem to speak the paternalist language of the imperialist power looking down on inferior spaces further south, referring to Haiti as a 'troubled little black island' which was 'going through one of its characteristic blood baths' when the United States sent in 'raw Southerners' to intervene (73).³ She characterises various Haitian customs as 'primitive', and takes a patronising tone when she contends

² Hurston herself points out these figures' common West African roots (25). Notably, writers of Haiti's Creole elite were also turning to black folk roots in response to the US occupation: see Dalleo 2-3, 173 and Duck 132-3 on Hurston's response.

³ On the longstanding linkage of southern-ness with otherness and inferiority in US discourse, see Greeson 11-2.

that, of Haiti's revolutionary heroes, Toussaint L'Ouverture was the only one 'free of savagery, who did not revert to ... primitivism', since he was 'educated' and 'a man of culture' (163). Crucially, however, Dunham is self-conscious about the 'intellectual snobbishness' she brought to her first Haitian encounters (7), and is capable of turning the paternalistic gaze back upon her homeland, as when she describes Haitians tolerating Americans 'as one tolerates rich retarded children' (73). And far from distancing problems of violence and unrest in the 'little island', Dunham suggests 'Haiti was good practice ground for what goes on now between black and white in the United States of America' (73). Like Hurston's, then, some of Dunham's overt statements appear to endorse cultural hierarchies that her work elsewhere challenges.

Both women were warier of promoting a positive view of the Haitian revolution and of Haiti's success as a free modern republic than many previous African-American commentators, such as James Weldon Johnson, who called Haitian independence 'the one best chance that the Negro has in the world to prove that he is capable of the highest self-government' (cited in Twa 26). Hurston's and Dunham's greater circumspection can be read in gendered terms. In celebrations of Haiti's revolutionary history by both US and Caribbean male writers, there was a strong masculinist emphasis, just one example being Frederick Douglass's citation of the Haitian revolution as a demonstration that '[w]e are men and our aim is perfect manhood, to be men among men' in an 1893 pamphlet on lynching (cited in Hodes 206).⁴ But Hurston and Dunham look beyond revolutionary and anti-imperialist violence for materials on which to base positive constructions of Haitian culture and identity, recognising women's full and vital contribution to Haitian daily life, most evident in their rendering of the prominence of women in *vodou*. They also evince a concern with the wrongs suffered by women, from the patriarchal structures constraining their life choices to more violent forms of oppression and exploitation.

Mules and Women

Writing to her Guggenheim grant administrator Henry Allan Moe from Jamaica on 24 September 1936 and 26 August 1937, Hurston addressed him as 'busha', translating the term as 'Jamaican for boss', and observing '[t]here is no female word for busha in these parts. Women have not that prestige' (Kaplan 385-6, 404). The remark presages the special interest in gender relations *Tell My Horse* exhibits. The very first chapter calls Jamaica the land where 'roosters lay eggs', describing how mixed-race Jamaicans would boast of their English or Scottish

⁴ On women's marginalization in celebrations of Haiti's revolutionary history, see Daut 200-8; Moitt 126-8; Dayan, Haiti 47. On the 'masculinist discourse' surrounding both the Haitian Revolution and resistance to the US occupation in Haiti itself, see Dalleo 21, 101 and Sheller 158.

fathers but never mention 'the black mother', 'until you get the impression that he or she *had* no mother' (6, 8, original emphasis). In her 1942 memoir *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston repeats the complaint: 'never a word about the black mama. It is as if she didn't exist. Had never existed at all' (276). For Hurston as for Judith Butler, 'discourse itself effects violence through omission' (Butler 34), and in its very first pages, *Tell My Horse* seems to announce a counterstrike on behalf of Jamaican and Haitian women—although in so doing, the text omits to mention how Caribbean women like Una Marson were themselves giving voice to feminist causes in this period.⁵ This (presumably unconscious) incongruity exemplifies how Hurston oscillates between imperialist arrogance and sensitivity to the subjective limitations of her viewpoint.

The centrality of gender in *Tell My Horse* is especially apparent in how the chapter titled 'Women in the Caribbean' (Chapter 5) facilitates the study's segue from Jamaica to Haiti, rather than an account of physical travel. The 'woman question' thus is literally pivotal, providing the bridge from one Caribbean space to another. Like Hurston's treatment of the American occupation, this chapter's critique of Jamaican and Haitian gender relations appears to affirm a hierarchy of cultures in which the United States emerges as superior and enlightened. But the rhetorical distance breaks down on close reading, as Hurston's naïve tone and simplistic, even infantile expression betray the irony of her generalisations about women in the United States:

It is a curious thing to be a woman in the Caribbean after you have been a woman in these United States. It has been said that the United States is a large collection of little nations ... and that is right. But the thing that binds them all together is the way they look at women, and that is right, too.

The majority of men in all the states are pretty much agreed that *just for being born a girl-baby* you ought to have laws and privileges and pay and perquisites. ... [T]hey consider that you are born with the law in your mouth, *and that is not a bad arrangement either*. The majority of the solid citizens strain their ears trying to find out what it is that their womenfolk want so they can ... get it for them, *and that is a very good idea and the right way to look at things*. (57, my emphases)

The gauche inelegance of the word choice ('girl-baby') and the ingenuous redundancy of so much of the yea-saying (if it is 'a very good idea' does it also need to be 'the right way to look at things?') together render the attitudes suspect. This alerts readers to the irony of still-more-sanguine pronouncements to follow, as

⁵ On Marson's Jamaican and international activities in this period, see Jarrett-Macauley 74.

Hurston hails 'Miss America, World's champion woman' as enjoying a 'God-given right to be the most important item in the universe' (note how the objectifying 'item' undermines the assertion of feminine power, while the distinction between 'womenfolk' and 'citizens' who 'get [things] for them' relegates American women to a passive position). Hurston affects indignation as she contrasts the Caribbean, where it is men who are privileged ('The usurpers!', 58). 'Women get no bonus just for being female down there', she tells readers, as if this were acknowledgedly the case throughout the United States. Adding that men's 'sex superiority' in the Caribbean 'is further complicated by class and color ratings' (58), Hurston claims a man in the United States can 'marry whenever he falls in love', regardless of 'class lines' or 'shades-of-color lines' (59). In the Caribbean, however, a lower-class woman 'has no rights which [a man] is bound to respect' (59). This unmistakable allusion to the US Supreme Court's infamous declaration in the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857 that the black man had 'no rights which the white man was bound to respect', creates a rhetorical link between Haitian and US practices even as Hurston asserts their difference—a link borne out when we consider the illegality of interracial marriage in the majority of US states at the time Hurston was writing.

The chapter's naïve assertions are glaringly at odds with Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935)—a study of folklore and hoodoo in Florida and Louisiana, which includes accounts of gendered violence far more graphic than anything shown in *Tell My Horse*, and also deals with discrimination against darker-skinned women within the black community. It still more directly contradicts Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), written in Haiti but set in Florida, in which Nanny states that 'the nigger woman is de mule of de world' because 'de white man throw down de load [to] de nigger man' who in turn 'hand[s] it to his womenfolks' (24). This closely parallels the statement in *Tell My Horse* that, in the Caribbean, '[i]t is assumed that God made poor black females for beasts of burden' and that 'it is just considered down there that God made two kinds of donkeys, one kind that can talk' (58). That Hurston evidently saw more continuity than contrast between women's experience in the Caribbean and the US South becomes explicit in *Tell My Horse* when Hurston describes her intimacy with 'a very intelligent young Haitian woman', which reached the stage 'where neither of us lied to each other about our respective countries' but 'freely admitted' their respective and common wrongs, while honouring their connection through African-derived religious practices—anticipating the trend in recent scholarship to position the US South or sectors thereof as part of the 'Global South' and/or as culturally circum-Caribbean (Bone 30).

Hurston's contention that Caribbean women endure harsher conditions is not all irony, however, and her tone shifts when she cites specific instances of Haitian women's vulnerability to sexual assault, deception and public humiliation. Writing of a young typist raped by a member of the mulatto elite and abandoned by her

fiancé, Hurston is sharply sarcastic: 'what becomes of her is unimportant', since '[t]he honor of two men has been saved' (61). The bitterness persists when she critiques a practice in which a man may return his bride after marriage by proclaiming he was 'not the first' (61), while the bride has no way to prove her virginity before marriage (giving rise to the invasive practice of premarital 'testing' memorably depicted by Edwidge Danticat in her 1994 novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*). In short, the patronizing register in which Hurston presents gender relations 'down there'—a phrase repeated thrice (58-9)—is part of the complex performance in which an othered southern space serves less as a foil than an ironic mirror for US American ways, but in which observation of local experiences remains important.

In *Island Possessed*, Dunham likewise suggests unfavourable contrasts between Haitian and US gender relations. As well as commenting on women's subordination through the practice of polygamy among Haitian peasants, she reports that she found 'hospitality codes more French than American' in upper-class Haitian society, in that 'wives and daughters were seldom in evidence to visitors, remaining inside, from where they peeked through wooden shutters at husbands and sons entertaining' (23). She cites numerous examples (the Bellegardes, the Rousseaus, the Chauvets) but notes the wife of prestigious doctor and intellectual Jean Price-Mars as 'an exception':

An ardent feminist, involved in women's suffrage, newspaper publication, and any measures likely to liberate Haitian women from the secondary role they had occupied since colonial times, she frequently ... joined in when Price-Mars and I discussed politics, vaudun, methods of research in ethnology, and world politics. She was also at table with us at every occasion for lunch, and represented for me the Haitian woman in full process of evolution. (23)

Further, Dunham urges that 'Mrs. Price-Mars was not satisfied with this evolution for herself alone' but sought 'the liberation of all Haitian women of all classes' (23). Yet in Dunham's own account, 'Mrs Price-Mars' is identified only by her husband's name, and no details of her liberation efforts are provided, whereas Dunham's exchanges with Jean Price-Mars himself receive fuller elaboration, so that Dunham's prose participates in the very paternalism it critiques (recalling Hurston's incongruous silence as to how Caribbean women were tackling the silences her work highlights).⁶

⁶ As the radicalisation of Haitian culture in response to the US occupation created an atmosphere more favourable to feminist causes, there were significant developments Dunham and Hurston might have addressed in the mid-1930s: see Chancy 40-2; N'Zengou-Tayo 130-3 and Latorture 82-5. Notably, Haiti's 'first woman anthropologist' Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain contributed to the Haitian feminist movement: see Johnson 124-5, 129-31.

In calling the social subordination of women in elite Haitian society ‘more French than American’, Dunham does not go so far as Hurston in declaring the American ‘the world’s champion of woman’, but she clearly implies that the United States is more advanced in terms of women’s liberation. It is striking, however, that Haitian inferiority is cast in terms of European influence, not in terms of primitive ‘backwardness’. Moreover, the idea of American superiority on sex matters is shaken when Dunham alludes to the widespread sexual abuse and exploitation of Haitian women by US marines during the occupation, which had been documented and publicised by the NAACP and others (Renda 163, 190). This occurs in her account of a visit with Doc Reser, whom Dunham describes commanding his Haitian wife to entertain their American guest by reciting ‘the list of endearing obscenities which constituted her English instructions from the marines who had solicited her favours’, such as ‘come here you f[uckin]g black bitch’ (95).

Possessions

Hurston’s and Dunham’s shared emphasis on the central role of women in *vodou* offsets their impressions of women’s disempowerment in other areas of Haitian life.⁷ For instance, Hurston claims that the ‘highest honour’ for male *vodou* initiates is to kiss a *mambo*’s ‘organ of creation’, which is equated with divine ‘truth’ (*TMH*, 113-4), although this may be an instance of creative license verging on primitivist stereotype, since it recalls sensationalist depictions of Haitian and New Orleans ‘voodoo’ which associated women’s private parts with primal forces and mysteries.⁸ When Hurston introduces the ‘boisterous god, Guedé’, who enables Haitian peasants to speak truth to power, women’s empowerment comes specifically into focus. After explaining how Guedé takes possession of his human ‘mounts’ and through them ‘does and says the things that the peasants would like to do and say’ against their superiors, Hurston elaborates in a way which suggests such possession may also facilitate assaults on gender hierarchies:

You can see him [Guedé] in *the market women*, in the domestic servant who now and then appears before *her* employer ... to say many stinging things to the boss. You can see him in ... the *group of women* about a public well ... dragging out the shortcomings of *their employers* and the people like *him*. (219, my emphases)

⁷ In contrast, Haitian woman writer Virgile Valcin reacted so far against US writers’ primitivist stereotypes of Haitian *vodou* as to deny its continued existence in her 1934 novel *La Blanche Nègresse*, thus dismissing cultural practices which had furnished ‘unique form[s] of resistance’: see Chancy 61.

⁸ William Seabrook, for instance, described a ‘mystical’ sense that he had ‘suckled in infancy at [the] dark breasts’ of the priestess Maman Célie in *The Magic Island* (32).

At the same time, the gender assignments reflect the reality of women's subordination in the Haitian workforce (on which see N'Zengou-Tayo 123, 127). An upper-class example of women's empowerment through *vodou* in Hurston's account is Celestina Simon, nicknamed the 'black Joan of Arc', whom Hurston depicts as a *mambo* leading troops in defence of her father President Simon's regime. The story is seriocomic, however, with Hurston noting the 'laughter behind hands' at Celestina's close relationship with her beloved goat, Simalo (95-9).

In *Island Possessed*, women's empowerment through *vodou* is on display in Dunham's depictions of numerous ceremonies, and especially in descriptions of her instructor Téoline, a strong woman who was 'mother to us all as well as *mambo*' (99). Dunham's Chicago University thesis 'Dances of Haiti' defines a *mambo* as a '*vodun* priestess equal in power to the *houngan* [male priest]' (73), and the complementarity of male and female forces in *vodou* is apparent throughout *Island Possessed*, as in the following passage:

My particular god ... was Damballa ...; his wife is Aïda Ouedo, the virgin mother; his mistress, Erzulie. *Together* they inhabit the sky and *do more to determine the destiny of man*, particularly Dahomean, Aradan, and Haitian, than any of the many other gods of this possessed and obsessed island. (61, my emphasis)

No hierarchical distinctions are drawn between the male and female *loa*, who operate 'together'.

But the empowerment of women through *vodou* has limitations in each author's account, for it seems to depend on gender stereotypes.⁹ In discussing the different faces of Erzulie as 'female counterpart of Damballah', Hurston describes Erzulie Frieda as a 'goddess of love' who makes husbands of 'all the men of Haiti ... that she *chooses for herself*' and who 'must be loved *and obeyed*' (121, my emphases). Erzulie's power to choose inverts Hurston's account of Haitian women at the mercy of fickle lovers. Yet this is a power dependent on exaggerated femininity, since Erzulie Frieda is a beautiful (and light-skinned) young woman 'worshipped for her perfection in giving herself to mortal man' (121). Moreover, Hurston's Erzulie will 'tolerate no female rival' but seeks to 'frustrate all the plans and hopes' of young women (121-2). Dunham presents a contrasting version of the *loa*, Maitresse Erzulie, loosely syncretised with the Virgin Mary, who has female devotees, with special women-only rituals and dances. But again, great power depends on highly defined, traditional gender roles (mother, virgin), reflected in

⁹ On gender essentialism in *vodou*, see Dayan, 'Erzulie' 6.

what Dunham calls the ‘feminine grace’ and ‘extreme femininity’ of the dances themselves (102).

The two authors’ treatments of Guedé reinforce the impression that *vodou* may oppress as well as empower women. Hurston relates the ‘tragic case’ of a ‘woman known to be a Lesbian’:

[Guedé] announced through her mouth, ‘Tell my horse I have told this woman repeatedly to stop making love to women. ... Tell my horse to tell that woman I am going to kill her today ...’ The woman pranced and galloped like a horse to a great mango tree, climbed it far up among the top limbs and dived off and broke her neck. (222)

Instead of permitting the utterance of subversive messages, apparent ‘possession’ by Guedé here becomes the medium for self-directed violence, enforcing an internalised, heteronormative social code. In *Island Possessed*, Dunham recalls an occasion when the *mambo* Téoline became sexually aggressive because ‘Guedé was in her head’, and subjected Dunham to a humiliating assault involving ‘obscenities and vulgar hip-grinding movements’ followed by an effort to tear off Dunham’s clothes, spitting, and blowing smoke in her face (99). Here, the female ‘horse’ is the vehicle for masculine aggression, such that the transgression of gender norms comes at the expense of a female target, albeit only performatively and in ritual context.¹⁰

Hurston’s and Dunham’s emphasis on gender in conveying more negative impressions of *vodou* is also apparent in their treatment of zombies. William Seabrook’s 1929 bestseller *The Magic Island* is credited with introducing the Haitian folkloric figure of the zombie to U.S. audiences as a ‘soulless human corpse’, raised from the dead or deadened in life by a *bokor* (sorcerer) to mindlessly serve its master (Seabrook 93-6; Bishop 13-21). But where Dayan and other scholars historicise the zombie as the ultimate cultural expression of the dehumanising effects of enslavement, (Bishop 12-3; Dayan, *Haiti* 37-8) Hurston and Dunham associate zombies more specifically with women’s oppression. At the same time, they subvert popular demand for sensationalised accounts of this supernatural figure, presenting supposed female victims of zombification in ways which suggest they might simply be victims of everyday forms of gendered violence.

Like Seabrook, Hurston introduces zombies as ‘bodies without souls’—corpses ‘resurrected’ without the capacity for ‘thought or recognition’ (179, 181).

¹⁰ Contending that possession by male *loa* enabled women to borrow masculine authority while leaving gender norms intact, see Sheller 174.

Significantly, her principle examples are female, such as 'the little girl Zombies' sent out to sell coffee at dawn, or the story of two female zombies employed to assist a woman in marrying off her daughters 'quickly', since '[g]irls are perishable goods' (181, 197). Hurston's central example is an 'authentic case' she claims to have witnessed, a hospitalised woman named Felicia Felix-Mentor. Hurston introduces this figure with the imperialist language of an explorer, boasting that she 'had the rare opportunity to see and touch' a specimen 'vouched for by the highest authority' (182). But her subsequent account decidedly undermines any such 'authority', for the figure—while certainly terrible—bears very little resemblance to the supernatural zombie just described. The zombie should be an 'unthinking, unknowing beast' (181), but Felix-Mentor shows fear and defensiveness. The 'it' subtly shifts into a 'her', and the dehumanised 'case' becomes recognisable as a female trauma victim:

They had just set her dinner before her but she was not eating ... She hovered against the fence in a sort of defensive position ... show[ing] every sign of fear and expectation of abuse and violence. ... Just kept on trying to hide herself. The doctor uncovered her head for a moment but she promptly clapped her arms and hands over it to shut out the things she dreaded. (195)

So much for the mindless corpse 'without consciousness' that 'can move and act but cannot formulate thought' (183). As a supposed instance of living death, the 'broken remnant, relic, or refuse of Felicia Felix-Mentor' as 'detained by the Service d'Hygeine' becomes all-too-mundane a figure, still more so when we read that her husband was 'embarrassed' to identify her since 'he was now a minor official' (196).

Mythology and mundane horror likewise fuse in Dunham's account of a 'bush priest' named 'ti Couzin, whose seven wives had supposedly been 'converted into the zombie state' (186-8). Dunham's hotel maid, Titine, expresses 'genuine alarm' at Dunham proposing to visit 'ti Couzin's complex, as '[s]tories were told of young girls who had ... never come out' (187). Dunham admits she was 'skeptical of zombies' and surmised that 'ti Couzin could 'have secured his several wives by personal charm' rather than sorcery (188). But on her visit, she found an unsettling scene:

several women ... could be seen walking slowly about the back yard or squatted in front of their huts. ... None of the women looked up or seemed by the slightest sign to be aware of the presence of strangers. (190)

This was especially odd, Dunham points out, as at other compounds ‘dogs, pigs, goats and at least the [chief] wife would have been falling all over themselves welcoming us’ (190), a comment which itself encodes a critique of Haitian gender relations by aligning women with domestic animals. Dunham and her male companion were received cordially by ‘ti Couzin, but the eerily silent women remained on the margins, and Dunham began to sense that ‘ti Couzin was remotely controlling their actions. As he ‘stopped smoking, and to all appearances breathing’, she looked out and saw that ‘all the women had stopped whatever they had been doing’ and ‘come within range of the open window’. Seeming to await instruction, they were ‘absolutely motionless, with faces turned in our direction, faces with absolutely no expression ... [like] the faces of the blind or deaf’ (199). Intriguingly, Dunham seems to be employing creative license, for this departs significantly from the earlier account in her Chicago dissertation, which merely states that she had ‘only fleeting glimpses of [‘ti Couzin’s] shy wives’ who ‘stayed much in the background in true Haitian fashion’ (Dunham 1983, 14). As in Hurston, the zombie affords an emblem of gendered violence, but where Hurston unmasks a supposed instance of living death as an everyday trauma victim, Dunham gives a mundane story of domestic oppression the patina of zombie legend—achieving the same ends by inverse strategies.

Even as they document these examples of oppression, Hurston and Dunham effect their own symbolic violation of these women by subjecting them to the invasive lens of the camera. In her account of Felix-Mentor, Hurston asserts in the imperialist language of ‘firsts’: ‘I listened to the broken noises in its throat, and then, I did what no one else had ever done, I photographed it’ (182). Hurston makes no attempt to conceal the violence of this act:

I took her first ... cringing against the wall with the cloth hiding her face and head. Then in other positions. Finally the doctor *forcibly uncovered* her and held her so that I could *take her face*. (195-6, my emphases)

Hurston notes she ‘had permission of Dr. Léon to take some pictures’, but Felix-Mentor herself could not and clearly did not consent. It seems the crime contains its own punishment, however, for the ‘dreadful’ revelation ‘was too much to endure for long’ (195-6). Still, it did not stop her from publishing the now-famous ‘zombie’ snapshot in *Tell My Horse* for her north American audience to gape at.

In *Island Possessed*, Dunham likewise describes photographing her female ‘zombies’ without consent. Although aware her camera could be obtrusive (see Dunham 210, 218) she planned ahead to ‘take a photograph or two if I were clever’ on visiting ‘ti Couzin’s compound, asking her companion Fred Alsop to ‘cover for me if I could find an occasion to photograph the wives’. She was successful in obtaining this surreptitious souvenir of domestic oppression, she reports, ‘and

somewhere in my archives is a photograph of a lone woman with others behind her in ghostly attendance' (201). The 'aggression implicit in every use of the camera' noted by Susan Sontag (7) is only heightened where the camera serves as a tool of imperialist power-knowledge (see Henninger 116), but the desire for what Sontag terms 'symbolic possession' (14) outweighs the researcher's sense of boundaries, so that on one level Hurston and Dunham can be seen to participate in, even as they document, gendered violence in disadvantaged spaces further south.

It is similarly ironic that, as privileged outsiders, Hurston and Dunham gained access to opportunities which they suggest were not open to Jamaican and Haitian women themselves. Dunham, for instance, notes that on her first visit to Haiti she was allowed to handle 'sacred instruments' she claims not even high priestesses could touch (124), while Hurston attends a traditional curry goat feed in Accompong, Jamaica, which she claims would normally be restricted to men only (11).¹¹ While each might be seen as striking a blow for gender inclusion by participating in male-only activities, their doing so effects an imperialist imposition of their research demands which deranges those activities. Considering how each was doubly marginalised within the northern academe by her race and gender, this affords a useful reminder for researchers based in today's 'Global North' that one's dominant or subordinate position may change according to setting. A still further irony arises in that, notwithstanding their concern with women's oppression in their fieldwork, these rival female anthropologists would subject *each other* to a kind of symbolic violence in their competition for Caribbean research space.

Erzulie v Erzulie?

Before Hurston and Dunham witnessed the slow violence of patriarchal order in their Caribbean fieldwork, they experienced its effects first-hand (albeit in milder forms) in their male-dominated academic world. As pioneering African American female anthropologists, Hurston and Dunham were vying for the attention of a small number of sympathetic mentors (largely white men) in competing for the same funding opportunities, at a time when—even without racial difference as a complicating factor—women were subject to an extra level of scrutiny, often on grounds irrelevant to academic success.¹² '[P]eople reacted [negatively] to women doing field research', Howard University historian John Henry Clarke recalled in 1985, noting that Hurston's personal flamboyance 'scandalized' colleagues (cited in Mikell 65). Witness the patronizing terms in which Rosenwald fund

11 The claim itself affects erasure, for Hurston notes in passing that among the thirty-or-so guests were 'some very pretty half-Chinese girls', whose experience she inexplicably discounts (13).

12 See Cole, 197-8 on the example of Ruth Landes; more broadly, see Bennett 896.

administrator Edward Embree wrote about Hurston to Franz Boas in 1935, urging that Boas should 'assume direction of her work', that she 'badly' needed more 'discipline', and that colleagues were 'distressed at the over-zealousness in her own behalf of this young woman, and at her lack of tendency to serious quiet scholarship' (cited in Kaplan 166; Boyd 270).

Dunham clearly felt marginalised by her gender in course of her studies: in *Island Possessed*, she describes one of her lecturers, Australian anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, 'dropping verbal bombs on tender blossoms—I being one of them' (66). She continually foregrounds her self-consciousness in conducting her fieldwork as 'a lone young woman' (4), a 'young lady anthropologist' (22), and so on. Meanwhile, she expresses deference for her white male mentors, presenting herself as the product of 'flawless training' by Chicago University professors 'polished off by Melville Herskovits', and hailing Franz Boas as 'the father of them all' with reference to Margaret Mead, herself, and other Boas mentees (4, 6). Hurston likewise courted the approval of male mentors, though she was prone to make light of her dependent position through exaggerated deference: in her letters, Boas becomes 'Papa Franz' or 'Papa Boas' (see Kaplan 49), and she playfully flatters Moe as 'bossman' and 'Busha', as noted above (Kaplan 385-6, 404). *Tell My Horse* itself is dedicated to the white Harlem Renaissance patron, Carl Van Vechten.

The language of Hurston's letters documenting her rivalry with Dunham indicates how far she had internalised gender biases. In 1934, with Boas's support and in consultation with Herskovits, Hurston had received a Rosenwald Fund fellowship of \$5000 to conduct two years' research in Jamaica and Haiti, only to have it withdrawn (with Boas's remonstrance, a one-term grant of \$700 was restored to support research in the Bahamas). Hurston subsequently obtained a Guggenheim fellowship to pursue her Jamaican-Haitian project, but found on arrival in Accompong, Jamaica that Dunham had been there just ahead of her on a Rosenwald grant, and wrote to Herskovits on 30 July 1936 complaining that Dunham had been 'carrying out the program that I had mapped out for the Rosenwald gang ... [T]heir littleness is astounding'. She questioned her rival's performance, expressing surprise that 'Miss Dunham did not stay' for a major ritual she herself was to witness, claiming 'you have not seen Maroon ceremony unless you see that' (Kaplan 384). On reaching Haiti, Hurston wrote to Moe on September 24, now accusing Herskovits himself of 'sen[ding] a Miss Catherine [sic] Dunham, a petty dancer of Chicago' to collect data for him. 'Miss' and 'petty dancer' diminish Dunham in gendered terms, and again Hurston asserts seniority: Dunham had '*infinitely* less preparation than I have', Hurston charged, and had 'done nothing that anyone could take account of', but her supporters had 'persuaded her that they can make a great woman of her by suppressing me' (Kaplan 385, original emphasis). True to her description of the jealous Erzulie who

'will tolerate no female rival', Hurston was unable to see herself and Dunham as victims of the same system.

Dunham was more restrained, but no less anxious. Recalling her rivalry with Hurston in an interview given in 2000, Dunham remarked, 'I don't know who gave me the idea that I was going to be the only little black girl in anthropology', noting how she had 'wondered if I'd be safe in Herskovits's hands or he'd always keep [Hurston] on a pedestal' (cited in Boyd 261). Again, man is the measure, with female competition shaped by the dependency on white male patronage, favour and approval. It seems Dunham liked to keep friends close and rivals closer: in 1934, as she prepared for her Caribbean fieldwork, Dunham threw a tea party, ostensibly in Hurston's honour, but found herself intimidated by Hurston's charisma, experience, and easy rapport with the senior white anthropologists on whom each depended (Boyd 261-2; see also Aschenbrenner 54). Dunham even envied Hurston's good looks: 'I guess I hadn't seen a good photo of her; I didn't think she was very pretty. I thought at least I had that on her' (cited in Boyd 261). That said, Dunham remained ready to loan Hurston studio space to rehearse a Chicago dance revue based on her Southern and Bahamian research that same year, which Hurston acknowledged was 'very kind' (cited in Boyd 261-2).

Where Hurston belittled her rival with colourful language in private letters, Dunham was to bide her time and undermine Hurston through strategic silences—a different kind of symbolic violence. In *Island Possessed*, published nearly ten years after Hurston's death, Dunham effectively erases Hurston from the record of Caribbean research, making no mention of the latter's work in Haiti or Jamaica. Promoting a view of herself as 'first lady' of Caribbean anthropology, she writes:

Harold Courlander had been [to Haiti] and Melville Herskovits had just published the first serious and sympathetic study of the people and their social structure. They were white and male, these writers. Of my kind I was a first. (4)

Further on, Dunham styles herself as 'the first lady anthropologist to camp out with the Maroon people of Jamaica' (22). Dunham may have landed first, thanks to the (possibly misogynist) withdrawal of Hurston's funding, but Hurston's plans preceded Dunham's, and she had long since published *Tell My Horse* by the time *Island Possessed* emerged.¹³ Dunham also conspicuously omits Hurston from her list of anthropologists 'father[ed]' by Franz Boas (76). Like the black mothers in Hurston's account of 'the land where the rooster lays eggs', it is as if Hurston 'had never existed at all'.

¹³ Dunham's Chicago University thesis 'Dances of Haiti' (1947) remained unpublished.

It would be perverse to adjudicate the Hurston-Dunham rivalry, as what matters is not who was 'first' or 'best' but how this anxiety to assert one's priority indexes feminine rivalry in a male-dominated field, even as it ironically reflects an imperialist logic of 'discovery' and territorial possession—a logic which *Tell My Horse* and *Island Possessed* inconsistently evoke and call into question. The competitive imperative may seem all too familiar to members of today's academic 'precarariat' vying for limited employment and funding opportunities—a precarity which, studies suggest, disproportionately affects women of colour (see, for instance, Gutiérrez y Muhs et al.; Walkington; Turner). We should not overestimate the negative impact of academic paternalism on the careers of these resilient and confident women, however. If each was nurtured by the so-called 'father of American anthropology', Boas, and his 'next-in-line' Herskovits, each attained prowess in her own right. Henry Louis Gates nominates Hurston as 'the dominant black woman writer in the United States' in the 1930s, while Dunham has been called the 'queen' or 'matriarch' of black dance (Gates 289-99; Aschenbrenner 155).

Perhaps the most incongruous aspect of the Hurston-Dunham rivalry is that their efforts to erase each other from the research record occurred in the course of their *combating* women's neglect in much available commentary. However unreliable, their work is perhaps still more valuable for hinting at the presence on home soil of problems it associates (on a surface reading) with 'othered' southern zones, inviting US readers to question their assumptions of difference from peoples and conditions 'down there'. Twenty-first-century scholarship continues to recognise such continuities. In describing the Global South as a 'condition' more than a location, López extends the term to 'those "Souths" within a larger perceived North, such as the U.S. South' and to 'women of color' within the United States (vi). Haitian-born scholar Myriam Chancy likewise numbers 'African-American women' among 'Third World women in and outside of the West' in a pioneering study of Haitian women's writing (27-8). Whereas López refers to the Global South as naming 'the mutual recognition among the world's subalterns of their shared condition at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization' (1), taking a longer perspective reveals that such mutual recognitions were already possible at an earlier period—as with Hurston and Dunham in 1930s Haiti—and reminds us that the US South 'has always been globalized' through its multiple connections to the wider geographies of 'plantation America' and the 'Black Atlantic' (Bone 211; Handley 25-51; Gilroy).

Haitian-born author Edwidge Danticat has expressed her sense of affinity with Hurston, affirming Hurston's emphasis on the overlap between Haitian and US Southern folkways (Danticat ix-xviii), and Danticat, Marie Vieux-Chauvet and other Haitian woman writers have explored some of the themes of Hurston's and Dunham's work from a place of greater knowledge and investment. Indeed,

Hurston's and Dunham's use of the zombie to explore specifically gendered oppression in Haiti anticipates strategies employed by some of these writers, notably Barbara Sanon, who uses the zombie as a figure for the routinised sexual abuse of young girls and its cover-up within the family (46). In a spirit at odds with their personal rivalry, Dunham and Hurston produced rich, idiosyncratic accounts of Caribbean women's experience which maintain their relevance and which increasingly are finding appreciative readers, for all their flaws and limitations.

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