

## BECOMING A FORCE IN THE ZONE: Hedonopolitics, Masculinity, and the Quest for Respect on Haiti's Streets

CHELSEY L. KIVLAND  
Dartmouth College

The demagogue had sponsored several *koudyay* and popular feasts for the people and all the beggars came running. He had even gone in person to the lower class sections of town where the lumpen proletariat were cramped. He gave coins to kids and a few pats on the behind to women—and he had a drink with the men. “Papa Vincent is a good old boy!” sang the drunks.

—Jacques Stephen Alexis, *General Sun, My Brother*, 1955

The afternoon sun of August 7, 2010, scorched the hilltops of Bel Air, the impoverished neighborhood that overlooks downtown Port-au-Prince, Haiti. A candy vendor joked that today Bel Air was literally earning its reputation as a “hot,” or dangerous, zone. Six months had passed since the earthquake destroyed much of the neighborhood and surrounding city. Aside from rubble and curbside tents, the quake still made itself felt in the heightened activity among the male youth whose political aspirations and ventures I had been following for two years. Together these men represented the local base (*baz*) that held a degree of political authority over this zone. This base was called ZapZap, after the local *rara*, or mystical music band, that was its most public face.<sup>1</sup> I had planned to attend a meeting about Bel Air bases’ participation in a UN rubble removal campaign. When I arrived, however, the overheated residents were relishing other news. A

brightly painted poster announced the annual beach day of Martin Luther King, one of the area's male cliques (*staff*). Though standing where two friends had died under a collapsed house, the poster and its message eschewed grief. Chiding trash-talkers and the penniless, and welcoming the displaced, it read: "This year MLK brings the stuff. . . . Pay money so you can do it. We await all new, pretty ladies in the zone, all my new brothers. . . . We await all at Baz ZapZap. Those with big mouths, stay home!"



Figure 1. Bel Air streetscape. Photo by Chelsey Kivland.

I may have dismissed the beach day if its significance had not been immediately stressed. Echoing Jacques Stephen Alexis's fictionalization of President Vincent in the 1930s, Michel, a twenty-year-old MLK member, explained:<sup>2</sup> "The beach day is a little thing. . . . But it's a big little thing. We can't stay sitting every day . . . under tents, under misery, under insecurity. [It's] problems. We must organize a program, a big little *koudyay* (party). We'll make feeling for everyone, totally. That takes force, people must respect us . . . [but] like that, our force grows. . . . They'll say, 'Look, they're doing something!' Like that, a big little thing becomes a big, big force." His friend added, "We must find success in this! Each base does a beach day. Ours must be more beautiful. . . . All the men will find a little feeling in it, without disorder. *Koudyay pa blozay!* [Exuberance not explosion!] . . . We have a lot of sponsors, and we have made the state before. The nice beach day we did last year—you don't remember?—MLK became a force in the zone!"

The interplay of violent force and a form of social force manifested in collective enjoyment have long characterized power relations in Haiti. This tension between "necropolitics" (Mbembe 2003) and what I call "hedonopolitics" holds true in the Haitian state as well as in more localized domains of power. Political violence, service provision, and festivity are all said to *fè leta* (enact the state), whether performed by politicians or urban strongmen. As Michel asserted, the reference point for MLK's beach day was the *koudyay* (from the French *coup de jaille*, "jolt of force"), the age-old political festival in which leaders attempt to garner support by sponsoring "collective effervescence" (Durkheim 1995, 218). Likewise, at this beach day, male residents of an impoverished neighborhood could fashion themselves as leaders, as those with power and respect (*respè*), by showcasing and transducing good feeling. In this article, I argue that insofar as displays of good feeling embodied political power, the production of programs full of feeling—what Feld (1988) would call "feelingful" programs—represented efforts to perform sovereign agency and power. I use the language of sovereignty to highlight four aspects of this process: state mimicry, self-fashioning, territorialization, and performativity. Yet I focus on vernacular expressions of sovereignty. Local geographies of power have become particularly important under conditions of neoliberal democracy and globalization, flourishing alongside the collapse of state hegemony and the breakup of governance into targeted projects, as opposed to national policy (cf. Ferguson and Gupta 2002). In this milieu, of which Haiti is exemplary,<sup>3</sup> a networked model of sovereignty—a nodal rather than Leviathan

organization of power—offers a better way to understand how localized forms of control adopt statelike features.

This networked model structurally aligns itself with post-9/11 efforts to theorize sovereign power as located in bodies and, in turn, as “multiple, provisional, and always contested” (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 172). The workings of feeling and force, however, bring together the corporality of sovereignty, masculinity, and pleasure in ways that complicate the apocalyptic zeitgeist that resurrected Carl Schmitt’s oeuvre and located sovereignty in the embodiment of violence (Singh 2012). Most notably, anthropologists have focused on the way sovereign power is enacted through violence against those bodies caught in states of exception caused by war or other conflicts (Agamben 2005; Bogues 2006; Das and Poole 2004). The injured bodies of ordinary people have also been explored as mediums for enacting sovereign power. Scholars have argued that cases of self-immolation, hunger strikes, and suicide bombers articulate the strength of the personal body to become metonymic of broader political power (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). Still others have argued that individual big men or gangs harness violence to establish statelike control of territory and economies (Bogues 2006; Hoffman 2011; Jaffe 2012; Roitman 1998). What seems surprising about these accounts is that despite the range of actions and instances analyzed, death and injury remain the primary modes of performing sovereignty. Given the interplay of state terror and state carnivals in places like Haiti, this seems misguided. As Georges Bataille (1988) would remind us, sovereign power unfolds as a dialectic between death and vitality, such that the sovereign world involves the negation of death through spectacular displays of life force. The emphasis here is on excessive life, not death, which is why, for Bataille, killing constitutes one, but not the only, sovereign gesture. Focusing on power’s positive rather than negative aspects, on vitality and becoming rather than on death and finality, allows sovereignty to emerge as a project in flux and incomplete. This does not negate necropolitics but reveals how the loss and gain of life force interact in politics. Indeed, *feeling* in Haitian Creole is semantically opposed to both the deprived state of misery (*mizè*) and the anxious state of insecurity (*ensekerite*). Feeling is an affect that facilitates recognition of bodily force and, when shared across bodies, of social force.<sup>4</sup> Feelingful programs display this force as well as put it at risk; and they unfold under threat of attack from rival bases or by governmental or UN forces.

Of additional significance is that feeling, as both a political and gendered affect, raises the underanalyzed issue of masculinity in sovereign relations. Classic theorizations of sovereignty—from Thomas Hobbes to Hannah Arendt, from

Michel Foucault to Giorgio Agamben—presume a male sovereign but fail to account for manliness as a crucial aspect of sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> And while feminist social scientists have long situated women’s exclusion from political leadership at home and in the state in relation to their material and symbolic subordination to men (Di Leonardo 1991), fewer works have performed the countermove and looked at what Wendy Brown (1992, 26) called the “masculinism of state prerogative power” (see also Gutmann 1997).<sup>6</sup> Recently, Bonnie Mann (2014) addressed this issue by showing how displays of hyperbolic agency in the war on terror situate masculinity at the center of American imaginaries of sovereignty. In the Caribbean, scholars are reexamining this concern through the figures of the sex tourist (Gregory 2003) and the “Don” (Thomas 2013), showing how transnationally mobile, lower-class men use manliness to negotiate a sense of power and control in relation to racially marked women, as well as to other men.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this article takes as a core premise that *respect* constitutes a culturally and socially specific sovereign register expressed through gendered and racialized forms of bodily force and pleasure. As Achille Mbembe (2006, 162) suggests, properly treating the interplay of manhood and power would require a “genealogical analysis of the symbolic systems” that “have historically tied the social worlds of sexuality and of power to the phantasmal configurations of pleasure (*jouissance*) on the one hand and to structures of subjection on the other.”

I take up this provocation by using hedonopolitics as an analytic for exploring pleasure and power as mutually constituted vitalities. Hedonopolitics highlights both the pleasing sensations of power and the power that derives from pleasing others. I organize my discussion around three forms and sites of hedonopolitics in postdictatorial urban Haiti: the sensualization of power at the street party, the politicization of pleasure-makers at the soccer tournament, and the affectation of manliness at the beach day. I begin with some background.

### DEMOCRATIZING MILITARISM

An ethos of militarism has permeated Haitian politics since the first generation of Haitians built an army that abolished slavery and won independence from France in 1804. This event engendered a nationalist ideology centered on the army and its male soldiers (Laguerre 1993; Sheller 2012). The 1805 constitution went so far as to conceive of the nation as a fraternal army and the citizen as “a good father, a good son, a good husband, and above all, a good soldier.” In Haiti’s early years, building an army constituted a claim to sovereignty, and the country was divided through the power of provincial armies to repel larger forces.

Throughout the nineteenth century, local big men organized armed peasant bands that effectively controlled local territory and were regularly mobilized by regional or national politicians to overthrow state power (Trouillot 1990). These big men also organized, alone or with politicians, local *koudyay* to celebrate victories and rally popular support. Until the consolidation of the army during the U.S. occupation (1915–1934) and the militarization of the state during the Duvalier dictatorship (1957–1986), localized armies provided key checks on power and alternative sources of political leadership and community.

This history undergirds the formation of localized bases in the city, whose male members claim to defend (*defann*) their zones. Bases, like those regional armies, risk becoming engaged in battle against other bases or together against the political opposition. Yet the base also designates a contemporary construct, which reflects two faces of the postdictatorial democratic transition. The term *base* was first associated with the neighborhood organizations and ecclesial base communities (*ti kominote legliz*) that mobilized around the Catholic priest and liberation theologian Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and that elected him president in 1990. Shedding this grassroots association, today the term suggests *gang* (a word now used in Haiti). This second usage emerged when these factions protested the first coup against Aristide and the resulting *de facto* government (1991–1994). The association intensified during Aristide's second term, begun in 2000. Several bases were then organized into politicized militias supportive of the government. Following the second coup against Aristide in 2004, these militias waged violent protests for several months in hopes of restoring his leadership. As the fighting continued, some bases became involved in thievery and kidnapping, but the movement retained political intentions. Nevertheless, the political opposition and international community constructed base leaders, affiliates, and residents as criminal gangs. Targeting them as bandits rather than as militants, oppositional and intervening UN forces killed or imprisoned several base leaders and those associated with them (Kolbe and Hutson 2006).

Today's base formations are reducible neither to political resistance nor to criminal gangs. Most generally, the term *base* denotes moral and political communities at different scales, from a few friends to a network of cliques. Though usually oriented around an armed male *chèf* (chief), the networked base incorporates several youth involved in various activities simultaneously—including legal activities, such as political associations, music groups, business ventures, and development organizations, and illegal ones, such as engaging in protection rackets, secret political plots, petty and major crimes (e.g., robbery, kidnapping, or

assassination), and marketing arms, housing, or services (e.g., electricity, garbage collection, and food aid). Bases function, on the one hand, as communal spaces where one finds, or seeks to find, security, friendship, assistance, benefits, income, and enjoyment and on the other hand, as platforms for engaging more powerful people and groups. Forming a base marks a localized effort to fashion particular subjects as those with the power and respect to defend the community and its interests. This is accomplished through the public display of force and by contracting with multiple producers of “state effects” in globalized Haiti (Trouillot 2001). Base leaders manage the entrance of public servants, politicians, development agents, and, at times, police or peacekeepers into the neighborhood, profiting politically and financially from this brokerage. As both agents and brokers of governance, base leaders resist conflating the state with government and instead construct an idea of state power around those who govern. They “make the state” by performing its work and by creating interdependencies between those who govern and the governed (cf. Chatterjee 2004). Significantly, base leaders see themselves less as resisting state authority than as furnishing statelike community and connections by providing security against outside threats, brokering development projects, basic services, and employment, and by providing the material and social goods of a proper life. Spanning necropolitics and hedonopolitics, these activities provide the source for vernacular sovereigns as well as stratified citizenship in which subjects’ participation in the national legal public is mediated through their position in local insurgent publics (cf. Holston 2008; Jaffe 2012).

If represented schematically, the networked base would be shaped not like a web but like a bipolar network. Imagine a node from which broader political networks extend in one direction, and a set of localized cliques in the other (see figure 2). The namesake of the base introduced earlier was Zafè Pèp La, Zafè Peyi A (the Affairs of the People, the Affairs of the Country), also known as ZapZap, a highly politicized rara group founded in 1992 and supported by Aristide. One of the rara’s former members, Yves, served as the de facto leader of the base. He was a well-known militant—to his disparagers, a *chimè* (chimera, meaning illusive, enraged bandit)—who violently defended Aristide’s rule and went to prison during the 2004 coup. Adept at shifting alliances, he has acted under the current administration as a liaison for the postearthquake relocation committee and as the security guard at the local health clinic, with the authority to bear arms. He referred to himself as the zone’s chief, leader, or street director, all of which meant that he was the base’s principal promoter and benefactor. He also used connections with state and NGO actors to broker jobs, services, hand-



outs, and development projects for area residents and for the Youth Organization for the Renaissance of Bel Air (OJREB), for whom he served as publicist. Directed by Frantzy, the rara's vice president and Yves's right-hand man, OJREB brokered development projects such as paving dirt corridors, installing solar street lamps, or hosting seminars on HIV/AIDS. The MLK clique, which hosted the beach day, was tied to the rara ZapZap because they ran the Organization of Moral Youth for the Enrichment and Education of Bel Air (OJMOTEEB), which Yves also promoted. In addition, OJREB and OJMOTEEB shared a secretary, and they often co-organized events and projects. Other base activities included a secret spiritual society, or *chanpwèl*, called Blada (mimicking the word *brother* in Jamaican parlance), founded by core rara members, and also an armed clique called MOG (threatening a trip to the morgue [*mòg*]) and a rap group, Bèlè Masif, both recently begun by MLK/OJMOTEEB members.

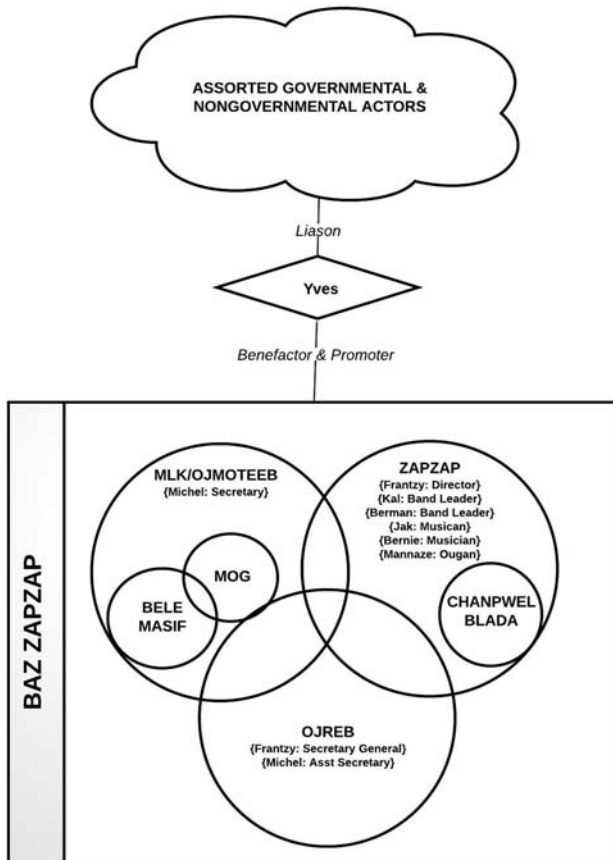


Figure 2. Diagram of base.



These domains were integrated through shared membership, black populist ideology, common geography, and an orientation to particular leaders and political contacts. Still, it is important not to consign the base to a distinct group with fixed membership. Base leaders and affiliates spoke of themselves as wearing multiple hats, and they proudly displayed their collection of plastic ID cards or badges (*badj*) identifying their roles in several organizations. The emergence of a unified base occurred when they were mobilized in neighborhood or national conflicts, employed in development projects, drawn together in political campaigns, or when they hosted and participated in koudyay-like programs. The consolidation of the base and its leadership formed part of what was at stake in such programs. As one of the key shifts in the postdictatorial production of programs, hosts, who used to be mostly state agents, must today work through local bases. And even when politicians, NGOs, and/or businesspeople sponsor the party, the local group receives recognition for it. The success of the programs attests to these men's bipolar power: both their political power and level of local influence. By way of programs, base leaders seek what Nancy Munn (1986) has called the spatiotemporal extension and value formation of the subject by embodying consequential nodes of a social network—or in popular parlance, respect.

### CARIBBEAN RESPECT AND HEDONOPOLITICS

Discourses of respect among base leaders echo the symbolic duality between respectability and reputation introduced in the 1970s to explain gender and class relations in the postcolonial Caribbean (Wilson 1973). Respectability, according to Peter Wilson, referred to the system of social distinction imposed by the old colonial order and exemplified by proper bourgeois women, whereas reputation designated the black, populist value system that found expression in men's quests to win peers' acclaim. The duality expressed the gendered ordering of space, with respectability pursued at home and in church, and reputation on the street and in watering holes. Mainly concerned with lower-class men,<sup>8</sup> Wilson showed that the pursuit of manly reputations was not just a response to the scarcity of respectability; it also mobilized seemingly deviant acts as mediums for resistance and agency. This becomes apparent in the politics of the base. As others have shown, we cannot reduce the appeal of gangs for poor black youth to economic necessity; instead, we must see the allure as tied to their role as alternative value systems that offer spaces of belonging and opportunities to attain status and influence (Bourgeois 1995; Venkatesh 2000). Wilson's framework, however, can obscure how base leaders have used the concept of respect in historically particular

ways. Indeed, their uses illuminate how this value system has both intensified and transformed alongside a Caribbean-wide structural adjustment, which, has simultaneously offered the urban poor new sources of social mobility and imposed increased unemployment, foreign dependency, and poverty since the 1980s (Freeman 2000; Thomas 2011). This shift has affected men and women differently. On the surface, the global economy favors the flexible labor and entrepreneurialism long prized by urban men who define success not by a stable job but by managing several activities. Yet Haiti's main urban economies, informal marketing and subcontracted assembly, along with the capital source of microcredit, favor female workforces. In this context, poor men (and some women) are prone to bypass respectable livelihoods and seek success through a transnational black cultural repertoire that includes music, street politics, and crime. Paradoxically, these pathways can provide not only racial and masculine respect but also the promise of using respect to meet the norms of respectable manhood.

The men I met in Bel Air sought social acclaim not only as respected comrades but also as respectable fathers. Yet these roles, though not mutually exclusive, were in tension. The respectable way to assert manhood was as a fruitful laborer and responsible father of as many children as possible. Yet without steady, formal employment, most men found themselves far removed from a productive and remunerative lifestyle. Not only could they not provide for their children or their children's mothers but they usually depended financially on entrepreneurial women. Men's unemployment also challenged women's respectability, since women often formed multiple sexual unions in search of a stable provider (Maternowska 2006). Whereas women complained of absent fathers and "vagabond" lovers, the complaints I heard most commonly from men were "no work," "no activity," or "nothing to do." Both of their complaints referenced critiques of unemployment under conditions of urbanization and neoliberal reform. Yet men's complaints also surfaced as the moral rejoinder to their engagement in illicit ventures and homosocial distractions (*distraksyon*), from playing dominos and "getting feeling" with a stiff drink and a laced cigarette to hosting a koudyay. In this more cunning usage, the grievances attested not to these activities' insignificance, but rather to a descent into manly play and the need to salvage respectable manhood (especially before my female gaze). Indeed, public displays of distraction not only passed idle time; they proved key mediums for cultivating respect in male circles.

Such workings of respect in Caribbean domains of play are well documented, yet play's connection to street life and politics remains relatively neglected. Eth-

nomusicologists have ranged among the few to note the semiotic entanglement of festivity and militancy in Haitian politics. In particular, studies of *rara*, the musical and spiritual tradition practiced by ZapZap, have explored how ritual work, play, and warfare intermingle in the competitive processions of musicians and dancers (Averill and Yih 2003; McAlister 2002). Extending this scholarship, my argument addresses not the simultaneity but the interdependency of masculinity, pleasure, and power. Consider the evolving idiom of respect. The Haitian idea of respect semantically entails political and spiritual power. Customarily, it has marked hierarchical though not exploitative relations, as that between god and servitor or a just leader and his subjects. The traditional Haitian greeting—in which the guest says “honor,” and the host responds “respect”—perhaps offers the best example. Men in urban Haiti today have replaced this greeting and now salute each other by simultaneously saying “respect” and bumping fists. This usage of *respect* invokes a particular racialized and gendered political subjectivity, located in the risky but also spirited space of the ghetto (*geto*). Further, the exchange of respect articulates not absolute hierarchies (like that of honor-respect), but rather egalitarian yet competitive relations. It thus sets the stage for the material, symbolic, and spiritual violence that will define the manliest and the most respected.

In urban Haiti, this battle plays out through the politics of the base. Becoming involved in a base, whether as a member of a clique, band, organization, or armed faction, offers a way to demonstrate manhood and emerge as a big man. This holds true in part because the base positions men in contests of leadership with each other and with other bases, often igniting lethal feuds over the distribution of monetary resources or social goods. Here I aim to show, however, how activities coded as playful are tied up in these power projects. Getting respect entails, as Michel’s friend put it, “becoming a force in the zone,” and this means exercising control over insecurity, often through its opposite of good feeling. Showing off one’s ability to throw a party makes for more than a distraction; it constitutes politicized adventure.

I now take a careful look at three feelingful events, asking how they participated in the construction of respected men, and what relationship between politics and pleasure they forged. As noted earlier, the erotic sensualization of power, the politicization of pleasure-makers, and the affectation of manliness figured prominently in expressions of what it meant to be a local leader. I begin with a street party, not least for reasons of its connection to the *koudyay* and the sexual politics of the vivacious spirit Gede.

## PERFORMING THE MAN

One October afternoon in 2008, ZapZap's core members and I were crammed into the ten-foot-wide gallery of a two-story building that served as "kay (house) ZapZap." Frantzy, a member of the rara and the director of OJREB, complained, "Ever since the foreigners killed the feeling and took our ancestors during the coup, the band has lost its force." He was referring to Aristide's exile and to the two-year imprisonment of Yves, whose apprehension by police and peacekeepers occurred shortly after the 2004 coup. Frantzy continued, "We need the force of the youth. We won't let them stay sitting. We have to put them on the concrete, make a big activity, give everyone feeling! The first of November we'll make a big koudyay." And then with a smirk, "Just like in the Duvalier epoch." After stressing the work it entailed, Berman, another core ZapZap member, added that on this day they would "*fè* [make] the man" for the zone. Women often used this expression to ask men to claim household responsibility. Here Berman had moved from household to polity, invoking a paternalistic political discourse, in which the group embodied the man for the zone. While this suggested providing a good time for the zone, it also affirmed the belief that acting like a man—active, authoritative, respected—provided its own pleasures. The street party in fact unfolded as the animation of power in terms of heterosexual relations.

ZapZap did not normally go out in early November, when crowds incarnating the spirit Gede fill city streets. The epoch, in fact, belongs to their rival rara and its base of power located at the neighboring intersection. Yet the spirit definitely fit the festival's competitive aim of appointing new "masters of the concrete," as the party's poster announced. Spanning the symbolism of life and death, sexuality and mourning, Gede's surrogates wear funerary colors, powder their faces, and enact mock funerals while soliciting change for their kisses, lustful dances, and lewd jokes. The ethos of erotic feeling as the antidotal energy to death and misery prevailed at ZapZap's street party. Even more explicitly, Gede's life force was invoked in the mission to reignite ZapZap's capacity to transduce feeling to others. As Mannaze, the vodou priest for ZapZap told me in the days before the event: "Everyone has a Gede for himself. He is the first spirit, the first *zozo* [slang for penis]. He's there to give you feeling. Gede, big *zozo*. For that reason Gede is the master of the party. Nice *zozo* makes feeling multiply." He then inserted a *betiz* [sexual pun] from a song ZapZap was known to perform:

The size of our wood/penis	<i>Mezi bwa nou</i>
They'll hate us	<i>Y ap rayi nou</i>

This lyric plays on multiple meanings. It suggests the double meaning of *bwa* as wood and penis, and in turn, that of hardness and pleasure. The lyric can be read as a threat of violence or rape. A more nuanced (and Freudian) meaning is that women or feminized others desire the “big penis,” but since they cannot claim it, detest these men out of jealousy (cf. [McAlister 2002](#)).

Hardness and pleasure became ritually entangled at the party, which unfolded like a typical *koudyay*. It got underway at 10 p.m. and petered out at dawn. Female vendors sold fried foods, alcohol, and cigarettes as young men and women listened to music that a DJ blared from a deafening sound system rigged to a generator. Rows of chairs were placed in front of the corner store Boutique *Mystère* facing a display of new murals in honor of ZapZap, MLK, OJMOTEEB, and OJREB. The chairs were for VIPs such as the presidents of other bands, local businessmen, and party sponsors, including Yves, whose white Jeep was parked in the intersection the entire evening. By midnight, the party roared and ZapZap could claim sonic and physical control of the zone.

This social domination of place entailed fabricating spiritual and ancestral force within and over the neighborhood crossroads. To ritually “heat up” the party, Mannaze buried two white doves alive before a black cross that stood in front of the house of ZapZap’s deceased founder. He then summoned the band’s core spirit, *Mèt Kalfou*, the “master of the crossroads,” and asked guests to pay a toll to him. He stressed how dropping change in the band’s *demanbre*, the hut where the spirits reside, would ensure the militant spirit’s protection. Next, he placed a drum and kerosene lamp before the cross, and then gathered some dirt and brought it into the hut with the secret society. When they emerged, Mannaze carried an old beer bottle tied in a red scarf, signaling his capture of the founding member’s soul (*zonbi*), which would now ceaselessly “work” for the band. He then lit a pile of wood on fire in the intersection. The band circled the fire, their shadows cast on Yves’s Jeep. Typically, this ritual consolidation of force ensured the band’s performative prowess and protection along long procession routes. Yet given that they only circled the block, it was more oriented toward facilitating good feeling for the street party by symbolizing the group’s territorial control and ability to secure the crowd.

It may appear surprising that this militant ritual could produce the communal feeling at the other end of the experiential spectrum. Though “getting feeling”

signals a pleasant, easeful mood, it presupposes and entails sensations of might and upheaval. The entanglement of feeling and force resonates with the way [Steven Feld \(1988, 89\)](#) theorizes the embodied process of “getting into the groove” as “hardness” in Papua New Guinea. He writes, “Hardness is force, the attainment of that evocative, charged, energized state (where to extend the notion into English one is ‘knocked out’ or ‘blown away’).” This force does not resemble violent domination, but it is nonetheless intensely powerful and persuasive. It aims to control others not through fear of death but by stimulating common structures of feeling. Here is where the notion of enacting the man begins to take on a specifically masculinist meaning. The production of feeling by the society members allowed them to imagine themselves as all-powerful male subjects capable of manipulating the physical world and the sensual experiences of feminized others. “In ZapZap, there was feeling flowing in the blood of all. When our army entered, we gave you feeling. [We] put pleasure in your *dada* (gut/ass)!” was how Yves summed up the party.

This sanguineous imaginary tweaked a conventional model of belonging. Here blood was not a marker of descent but an affect of moral and political community. Those with common feeling in the blood formed an agentive and righteous “army” of kin, neighbors, and acquaintances. The opposing force, in turn, had weak blood flow and also immoral lifeblood. People at Base ZapZap characterized other bases as overrun by *vagabon san sal*, dirty-blood vagabonds. Such accusations of illicit force valorized their control of the zone while undercutting others’ influence. The song ZapZap later composed for carnival that year articulated this sensual moralization of power, boasting about how the band’s magical, militant powers (*petwo*) enforced their party and destroyed their rival’s. The song also served as reportage, as police and peacekeepers had indeed disbanded the rival’s party, arresting a major base leader.

It’s ZapZap that passes here	<i>Se zapzap k ap pase la</i>
It gives me feeling	<i>Li ban m filing</i>
It moves in my blood	<i>Li mache nan san m</i>
Our <i>petwo</i> [sorcery <sup>9</sup> ] is our dangerous party/endangers your party	<i>Petwo nou se malè fèt nou menm</i>
It’s not just talk	<i>Se pa pale</i>

### CHIEF RIVALRIES

The sensualization of power thus existed alongside the politicization of those who organized the affective political economy. This becomes most evident at the street soccer tournaments that bases organize during summer weekends. While some women enjoy these tournaments, soccer (and sport in general) constitutes a male-centered cultural practice that invites masculine sociality. Because of the crowds they attract and the politicized patronage that make them possible, tournaments are prime targets for those seeking to disrupt the power of local organizers. In the summer of 2005, for example, when coup-era hostility was still active, armed actors supporting the interim regime violently disbanded several tournaments in Bel Air and other pro-Aristide neighborhoods. While this violence encouraged the wary to stay home, the association of the tournaments with danger and risk also added to their allure as charged events fit for men or those seeking respect as men. "There cannot *not* be shooting at this program!" was a phrase that would advertise a program's danger, but also its social value.

In June 2009, OJMOTEEB began planning its second annual tournament on the porch of kay ZapZap. With all seated around, Berman called an informal meeting. Michel, charged with typing documents for the youth organizations, was quickly roused from his nap on the concrete bench tagged MLK and called over to chat with the others. After announcing that this tournament must have "more feeling" than last year's, Frantzy gave Michel a one hundred goud note (\$2.50) to draft letters requesting support at a cybercafé. He paused before telling him whom to write to, complaining that since no one was in charge, "we'll have to write everyone." He decided on several powerful actors, the Brazilian NGO Viva Rio, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, USAID, the National Palace, President Prével, and a local politician. He also quickly dictated a six-hundred-dollar budget, which included T-shirts and decorations (\$150); a DJ or other entertainment (\$275); refreshments (\$125); and equipment (\$50). He wondered aloud if this would allow enough to give the base members something, and then added another hundred dollars for "mobilization." He ended the meeting by telling Michel to print out some extra letters without addressees. These would be for less official sponsors as well as important personages, including Yves and the leaders of rival bases. As funding requests, these letters signaled that the group was not profiting, but also that if it did, these actors would get their cut. The letters thus respectfully recognized and integrated powerful actors by requesting their permission and protection. Such gestures of respect proved critical to ensuring the success of a



program. In effect, obtaining permission from base leaders substituted for a city permit system.

Once the letters and budget were stamped with the organization's seal, Frantzy, sporting a button-down white shirt tucked into his pristinely ironed khakis, went with me to deliver them. Frantzy had insisted on my company. He hoped that my privileged status as a white foreigner would help him get by the front desk to a meeting. It did not. We received from each office a small paper affirming the reception of the letter, allowing Frantzy to follow up on the request. This ceaseless following up and meeting to deliver news accounted for much of the activity and enjoyment of the next two weeks. The hustle and bustle displayed the group's engagement in planning an important matter. While base members would regularly complain about being very busy in the run-up to events, I rarely heard them express fatigue, as they might when toiling away at "women's work." In fact, they often highlighted pleasure. Leading up to the street party, for example, a single, unemployed neighbor who ran errands in exchange for small change, exuberantly told me: "Me myself, I am doing a lot of activity today. Oh oh . . . a lot of work. Good feeling! *Travay se liberte* [work is liberty]!" This organizational activity, in other words, promised not just economic but also sensual liberation from misery.

Ultimately, the activity for the tournament resulted in a check from the Ministry of Youth and Sport and a cash payment from the politician, which I was told totaled a hundred dollars. The NGOs, as Frantzy complained, "don't like our match. They don't see 'serious things' in taking pleasure. They make the state in corridor-paving projects, violence projects only." In suggesting that hedonopolitics contrasted with NGOs' agendas, his comment extended the idea of the state and its duty beyond the "bare life" minimums of humanitarianism to the cultivation of a good life. It also conveyed frustration with this technology of governance and, in particular, with the need to shape local initiatives to fit highly specified NGO project agendas (e.g., water and paving corridors). Not surprisingly, Yves contributed the lion's share, another few hundred dollars. With a budget of only a few hundred dollars, the refreshments and T-shirts were foregone: the teams wore matching promotional shirts, and the decorations were downscaled to blue-and-white striped plastic bags tied to informal electricity lines. For entertainment, two large stereos were secured onto the gallery of a boutique that had a generator, and Frantzy acted as DJ. A small version of ZapZap—comprising mainly new, young members—was also paid to make a short ap-

pearance after the finale. Finally, the group hired an older friend and neighbor to referee the game.

The soccer game consisted of four five-member teams from the surrounding blocks that OJMOTEEB had invited to play. They had extended the written invitations to other youth organizations that also staged summer soccer tournaments. Each organization, including OJMOTEEB, then had to mobilize a team. Like other associations, these teams were connected to particular zones. Thus, the tournament, which brought together three different zones (two teams from the same one), also became integrated into the politics of the base. Yet it would be wrong to view the tournament as a competition between zones or organizations played out through the teams. The significant match rather took place at the organizational level.

Throughout the tournament, the main organizers, including five members of ZapZap and Michel, sat in plastic lawn chairs on a balcony even with midfield, where Frantzy was playing music from an amplified boom box. While Yves remained absent, his white Jeep was parked in the crossroads, behind one of the goals. The organizers wore their best hip-hop fashions, adding jewelry, new caps, and shiny sneakers to their standard attire. They usually had their arms around each others' shoulders, and they greeted spectators by "giving respect" with a fist bump and self-assured smirk. Several entrepreneurial women set up shop in spots OJMOTEEB had designated with white chalk, and for which the women had made a small contribution. The organizers purchased from them rounds of fried food, drinks, and cigarettes to share with friends and guests. The nearly all male spectators, crowded on sidewalks, balconies, and rooftops, affirmed the good feeling with their relaxed vibe. It helped that affiliations were shared across teams, with cheers erupting at goals on either side. But this does not mean to suggest a lack of competitive spirit. Before leaving, Kal, a key organizer, told me, "Look at how we make good feeling, give all the people feeling. No person has misery at this hour in our *lakou* [zone]. No insecurity. It's because it's us who do this, because it's us who represent the base now."

As Clifford Geertz (1973, 417) famously wrote of the Balinese cockfight, "It is only apparently cocks that are fighting. Actually, it is men." This maxim is easily interpreted as suggesting that men engage in power plays via the cockfight. But as Geertz's ethnography attests, the competition is not only between the men whose birds are fighting but also (and perhaps more so) between which village chief throws the better fight. The same holds true for these tournaments. The competitions waged *in* the match were, to borrow from Claude Lévi-Strauss

(1966), rituals serving a larger game waged between those who organized it. Just as with the street parties, the significant question was which group of men organized the better tournament. And this decision largely rested on which group orchestrated the best ambiance of male sociality. Hence, while some event funds entered the organizers' pocketbooks, profit was not the tournament's goal. Of greater importance was the way it allowed them to act as pleasure providers for the zone, and in turn, to make a show of political power.

This feat, however, depended on the principal patron Yves. Channeling an expansive political network, Yves stepped in and performed the role of the state in a way that the ministries and NGOs did not. The tournament enabled his own power play and positioned him against other local leaders. Beyond a display of might, however, it formed part of Yves's larger quest to become a respected authority following the coup-era violence. Here, as at the party, he engaged in the kind of extra-economic gift exchange that presumed debt forgiveness. It was key that such gifts did not just revolve around cash handouts, but rather around the production of communal good feeling. When successful, these events helped transform his reputation from that of a bandit to that of a militant defender of the zone.

### MANLY AFFECTATIONS

Another focal point of summer sees busloads of residents travel an hour or so outside the city for a beach day. These days, even more than street parties or soccer games, revolve around the display of manly power. In the imaginary of Bel Air residents, the beach is a space reserved for rich Haitians, peacekeeping troops, and development workers. This association with elite leisure makes beach days an exercise in class mobility. The beach is also associated with flirtation and sex, and beach days likewise involve the display of masculine sexuality. New or secretive couples seek out the beach to engage in sex acts beyond the view of neighbors. The sea can provide a degree of privacy, as it is impossible to see what takes place underwater. Yet despite this sexually charged atmosphere, actual sex acts occupied a small portion of social interactions during the beach days I attended. The mainly male beachgoers spent most of their time advertising to other men their *potential* for engagement in this erotic adventure.

By the time preparations for the 2009 beach day ignited, I had already heard a lot about the outing. For several months OJMOTEEB had been inviting me to its annual beach day. In mid-July, the youth organization displayed an elaborately painted placard on the corner and circulated to friends and neighbors a grainy

flyer designed by Michel (see figure 3). It pictured a young, attractive girl in a white bikini, jumping enthusiastically, her long locks bouncing around a caramel-colored face. “*Chacha* [dance] your body, romp your body, good thing!” Around this image radiated the architecture of the base; the titles of the various groups appeared in graphic displays, with the names of the sponsors, Yves and Mystère Boutique, in finer print. The Ministry of Sport and Youth, as well as the NGO Viva Rio, were also solicited in writing, and the former was added to the placard after issuing a check for about fifty dollars. Both the flyer and the placard advertised the ticket price (about \$5) that would be printed on raffle tickets and distributed to attendees. This proved a prohibitive cost for most. In fact, it was largely an empty performance of economic agency, since the organizers gave most attendees complimentary tickets. Nonetheless, the performance delivered a real social good, constructing the organizers and beachgoers as possessing the economic and social capital of bona fide men. The placard even announced, “You must work hard for the ticket, or else you’ll be ashamed!”



Figure 3. Beach day flyer, 2009. Photo by Chelsey Kivland.

When I arrived at the base at 6 a.m., as the flyer had announced I should do, I found the street bustling with the ambiance of a street party. A yellow school bus, for which OJMOTEEB would pay \$75, was already parked before kay ZapZap, next to Yves's Jeep. The group members were casually chatting on the gallery, as two women finished cooking a huge pot of rice and beans and saucy chicken. We appeared ready to go, but the hours kept passing. This delay went beyond the lax concern for punctuality to which I had grown accustomed. The organizers kept retreating to private meetings on the roof. I suspected a problem with the finances, but when I went upstairs, I found them sharing a joint and surveying the crowd gathered on the street. After assuring me of our "big adventure," Berman told Michel to go and check if the bus of the Family—another base that was also doing a beach day—had left, and to assess their crowd. This ritualized display of going to the beach made clear that the day's success depended not only on the orchestration of the outing but also on the measure of attention it garnered in the neighborhood.

The interactions at the beach unfolded as a montage of attempts by the attendees to display sexualized attractiveness and erotic prowess. There were about three times as many men as women, though all the core base members brought along dates. These dates ranged from longtime partners to extramarital partnerships to prostitute-like arrangements, where the women received compensation for their time. Yves had, for example, financed the dates for Jak and Bernie, core yet less powerful base affiliates. Along with these distinctions, the activities of the attendees varied. Young men, like Jak and Bernie, spent the day taking photos with their bikini-clad ladies or flirting with them before their friends. Berman used the beach day to socially consummate his relationship with his girlfriend Nerlande. Having left his wife at home with five kids, he disappeared with his lover into the water and engaged in underwater intimacies. Those without dates busied themselves with taking cell-phone pictures. They posed for the camera in an assortment of hip-hop tableaux, with low-slung shorts, crossed arms, and gang gestures of respect. Few such men entered the water, spending most of their time engaged in the kind of activities that dominate their days in Bel Air: socializing, playing dominoes, and trying to get a buzz sipping strong liquor. A dance party in which an amateur DJ, hired by the beach managers, played popular songs and local hits, stimulated a few of the fun flings publicized in the poster. After the beats of the local rap group caused a frenzy, a loop of slower tunes brought couples together in tight embraces.

The most exaggerated display of masculine prowess came with the arrival of Yves. He drove in his own Jeep, accompanied by a friend. Their dates, attractive teenagers, were Bel Air residents but not affiliates of the base, and they approached the organizers with obvious discomfort. They excused themselves, then quickly changed into new florescent bikinis, took a quick swim, and retreated to the Jeep, where they spent the rest of the day by themselves. In the meantime, Yves openly joked with Frantzy, Jak, and another friend, as Nadine, the singer of ZapZap, and I chatted nearby. Yves, never one to shy away from sexualized boasting, affirmed that he had already “tasted the sweetness” of his date. “Her pussy gives me too much feeling, oh, oh, all that [pubic] hair. Now I have to pound her ass,” he said with a guffaw, which the other men met with laughter. Yves held court for a while, telling us how his sexual feats cost him dearly. He concluded by sexualizing my presence, joking that his new girl was driving him crazy, just like the “one who doesn’t know what the other is doing.” This reference to me, a lyrical nickname that poked fun at my long-distance relationship, was well played, and we all fell into laughter.

The girls’ seeming irrelevance in this scene provides an example of how the masculinity of respect relies on performances of manliness that happen between and are primarily addressed to other men (Gregory 2003; Sedgwick 1985). Yves’s homosocial performance did not exhibit sexuality itself, but was rather, following Wilson (1973), a gesture aimed at giving the impression of sexual prowess without actually achieving anything other than men’s emotional excitement. This was not the last laugh, however. Having long since found a way of asserting female sexuality in this male group, Nadine countered with another joke in my defense. “You too ugly, Yves,” she said, grabbing her crotch. “This beautiful, pink clitoris, if you don’t have a beautiful penis, it’ll cost your car.” The joke played on the assumption that desirability and economic agency are two powers women have over men. In this way, Nadine used female sexuality to undermine Yves’s claim to manhood as a source of pleasure and provision.

In another way, the beach day provided an opportunity for organizers to embody manhood not only erotically but also as a provider. The key organizer Kal, for example, spent much of the day sitting at the water’s edge with his wife Sophie nestled between his legs, as she supervised their adolescent daughter playing in the ocean. Unable to afford a new bikini, Sophie wore a blue Obama tank, boxer briefs, and a hair cap, which Kal realigned with each splash. When I approached them, Kal told me in an elated tone: “I’ve had time to forget the city, the ghetto, totally. They call it Bel Air, but it’s here I get the feeling of *bèl air*,

itself, together with my wife [squeezing Sophie]. OJMOTEEB, a lot of respect! We organized ourselves well. We're mobilizing a lot of men with all this feeling. Good thing!"

This was the happiest I ever saw Kal, who struggled with depression and anger, and the most relaxed and joyful I found him and Sophie together—their relationship was often troubled by bouts of domestic violence triggered by Kal's demands for some of Sophie's meager earnings as a hairstylist. His comment thus left me wondering about the personal and social significance of the moment. In conveying respect for OJMOTEEB, of which he was a member, he attributed his good feeling to his organizational achievement, suggesting his joy was political. This event allowed him and the other organizers to momentarily transcend their everyday lives in their socially marginalized neighborhood. This *bèl air* was, however, no less enmeshed in the portrayal of family life, in the fondness with which he and his partner looked after their child. As I watched this wholesome intimacy, I felt sure the day provided Kal with an arena to ask forgiveness for past transgressions. It enabled him to show the kind of man he might be under different circumstances. As much as feeling was realized in his abilities to act as a respected leader in the zone, it also found expression in him personifying the role that eluded him on most days: that of a respectable man. That this public display of domesticity—of home, marriage, children—enabled a performance of respectable manliness exemplifies how both respect and respectability work on and through women as much as men, and through performed heterosexuality in the context of homosociality. Moreover, it shows how the search for respect is at once a struggle to moralize street cred and to mobilize it to meet the norms of manliness unattainable in the formal economy.

*After the dance, the drum is heavy* says a Haitian proverb that captures how worldly pressures always return once festivities have passed. While providing an escape from daily life in the ghetto, these programs also highlighted participants' poverty and marginalization. Anxieties about exercising mobility in the city marred trips to the beach. Beach days often had unsuccessful aspects, with buses breaking down, gas money running out, or rival bases attacking. Peacekeepers or policemen, with suspicions of kidnapping, theft, or political conspiracy, might also stop buses at checkpoints surrounding Bel Air and routes exiting the city. Those who stayed home could also undermine organizers' efforts to feel like big men. As we disembarked the bus that day, celebratory gunshots sounded in the background. But the owner of Boutique Mystère soon disturbed the vibe, chiding sarcastically, "Today they acted like *leaders*." His wife and shopkeeper then joked,



“What’ll they do tomorrow? Nothing at all!” While offering an intense display of hierarchical community, the beach day, like other feelingful events, by definition constituted an ephemeral and contested consolidation of political power and masculine pleasure.

### CONCLUSION

The emergence of the base as a key player in Haitian politics affirms the scholarly trend to view the workings of state sovereignty as not only *not* distinct from but as also connected to localized and personalized arenas of rule and order. Yet base leaders’ attention to feeling and to its entanglement with force suggests we rethink the way this vernacularization of sovereignty has been conceptualized through the embodied power to take life or, for Agamben, to flout it. Theoretically, the entanglement of feeling and force in the construction of bases in urban Haiti can enable us to reformulate ideas about sovereign self-fashioning beyond the standard actions of death and injury. This does not mean dismissing these actions, but rather incorporating the dialectical play of the negation and intensification of life force at work in the sovereign gesture. Feelingful programs, by virtue of being bound up with symbolic and material contestations of space and power, constitute hedonopolitics, or critical expressions of pleasure and political power. These programs articulate several aspects of this intersection: the street party as a mode of sensualizing power as good feeling, the organization of neighborhoodly sporting events as a medium for displaying benevolent power, and the affectation of manliness at the beach as the performative script for embodying respect. In this way, feeling not only proves integral to the construction of localized rule and order in urban Haiti; it also constitutes the affective repertoire through which men fashion themselves as consequential in relation to their peers and their localized social milieu. This occurs because manifesting feeling necessitates an artful ability to mobilize resources by activating contacts in particular networks, organizing friends and neighbors, and, not least, conjuring power and stimulating others to imagine it as well. The affective intensity generated at programs can then be channeled in all sorts of productive ways—to incite pleasure, articulate manhood, promote reputations, and fortify political standing. Amid a disordered and uncertain political world, feelingful programs provide a stage on which young men can momentarily perform the contours of sovereign power and become a force in the zone.

## ABSTRACT

*This article explores neighborhood organizing among young men in urban Haiti as a vernacular enactment of sovereignty that involves both a hedonistic and a gendered logic. Under conditions of democratization and global governance, the urban block, or base, has become a key site for building political community and creating connections to those in power. Central to base politics are public outings that engender power and respect for the organizers by demonstrating their force not through violence but through masculine social pleasures. This article elaborates three key outings—a street party, a soccer tournament, and a beach day—organized by neighbors and supported by state, NGO, and criminal actors. By focusing on hedonopolitics, rather than on the common tropes of violence and death, this article extends recent work on the embodiment of sovereign power, while also showing that masculine pleasure represents an underanalyzed yet important dimension of sovereignty. [sovereignty; pleasure; respect; black masculinity; gangs; Haiti]*

## NOTES

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1. Rara is a performance genre, a vodou ritual, and an annual Lenten festival in which roaming bands traverse city streets and rural villages playing music, singing, dancing, and serving the spirits.
2. All personal names are pseudonyms, except for Berman and Nerlande, who died in the earthquake.
3. Haiti's dependence on modern foreign aid and development predates and also outpaces the rate in the region and for comparable countries globally.
4. See [Gregg and Seigworth 2010](#) for a discussion of affect as force.
5. For a recent study of the masculinities at stake in political theories of sovereignty, see [Di Stefano 1991](#). On Foucault's omission, see [Diamond and Quimby 1988](#).
6. Exceptions include [Luhmann 1996](#) and [Cohn 1987](#). More attention has been paid to the masculine foundations of private property and the capitalistic state (see [Di Leonardo 1991](#); [Leacock 1981](#)).
7. A related project has analyzed the way the black male body has historically been bound to local, national, and transnational aspirations for black sovereignty ([Stephens 2005](#)).
8. For criticism of Wilson's treatment of women's social life, see, for example, [Sutton 1974](#).
9. *Petwo* designates the militant branch of vodou cosmology; it is tied to practices of sorcery and witchcraft.

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