

Contested Brass: Tradition and Innovation in Haitian Rara

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Brass instruments are integral to music-making in Haiti, a small country that shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, its neighbor to the east. Horns are used in a wide variety of activities, from the popular music ensembles that play social dance music called *konpa*, to the marching bands associated with the Haitian military, to the funeral processions that take to the streets most afternoons. In addition, trumpets and trombones feature prominently in the pre-Lenten Carnival band tradition. After Carnival musicians put away their instruments for the forty days of the Lenten season, however, musicians play a different form of music on the byways and alleys of Haitian towns. Bands take to the streets to celebrate Rara, a Lenten processional music central to the Vodou religious tradition that is also used by political candidates and protesters alike to make their cases to the voting public.

In Léogâne, a small city about nineteen miles west of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, large Rara bands fill the air with the sounds of their unique instruments—the bamboo trumpet called *vaksin*, the horn made of pressed tin called *konè*, and the scraper known as *graj*—as well as the goatskin-covered, single-headed drums called *tanbou*. In most parts of Haiti, this musical ensemble, along with an assortment of shakers, gongs, bottles, and other hand-held percussion instruments, provides the musical energy for the Rara procession. In Léogâne, brass instruments such as trumpets, trombones, baritone horns, and sousaphones augment the *vaksin*, *konè*, and *graj* to produce a boisterous, brassy sound.

Rara is practiced all over Haiti, from the most remote mountain villages to the densely populated urban neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince. Although the size of bands varies widely, most communities have Rara bands with committed participants who fulfill religious obligations during their nightly sojourns in the streets. Rara bands typically follow a processional route that includes several religious gathering places—a sacred tree or an important bridge, for example—where initiated Vodou priests conduct abbreviated religious rites to salute the local spirits.

Since Rara is associated with Vodou activity and falls during the Lenten season, it is seen by Catholic officials as antithetical to church teachings and as a rival procession to the annual *Chemèn Kwa* or Stations of the Cross, on Good Friday. In addition, for many evangelical Protestants, Rara is believed to be synonymous with Satanism; the mere sound of the procession is considered to be a threat to worshippers' moral and spiritual fiber. One Haitian I interviewed told me that in the Lenten seasons during his childhood, his devout Methodist parents gathered the family at home with doors and windows shut, reciting verses from the Bible as Rara bands circulated in their neighborhoods.¹

Despite its strong negative associations for the Roman Catholic hierarchy and most Haitian Protestants, Rara enjoys widespread popularity in the area surrounding Léogâne. During Holy Week, dozens of bands converge on Place Anacaona, the entryway to the

city, to compete with rival bands and to show their talents as performers. The procession of bands into the center of the city features dancers, singers, and instrumentalists who are led by a *kolonèl* or colonel, who wields a whip and a whistle. Figure 1 shows a *kolonèl* interacting with several *renn* or Rara queens, whose job includes singing and dancing to the music. As the *kolonèl* and *renn* make their way in the street procession, they encourage participation from the surrounding crowd by dancing with onlookers. As more people join the dancing procession, the size of the band swells, forcing motorists to wait until the throng has passed them by.



Figure 1: Rara *kolonèl* with four *renn*. Léogâne, Haiti (2005).

Photo by Michael Largey.

As a serious spiritual practice in which participants can sing and dance as they honor their religious commitments, Rara is popular among the Haitian working classes and is often the focus of their local identity. Participants call themselves *moun Rara* (Rara people) and often associate themselves with a particular band, in much the same way soccer or baseball fans align their identities with their favorite teams. For example, members of Rara Ti Malis Kache (or *Ti Malis*) often identify themselves as *Moun Ti Malis* or “Ti Malis people” as a way to show solidarity with their fellow fans. I have been called *Blan Ti Malis* or “Foreigner Ti Malis” by individuals I had not met previously; my reputation as a fan of the band is widely known in the community.

In addition, Rara is seen by these fans as being a “traditional” musical and religious practice since it emphasizes community values and local ways of music-making. Elsewhere, I have argued that tradition is more than just a palpable connection to the past through shared practices and customs; it is formed in the present from the evidence, perceptions, and impressions of the past. Tradition also uses images that imbue history with power, bringing the past into a relationship with the present.² In a process that I and others have termed “traditionalization,”³ contemporary subjects may selectively engage the past to establish and negotiate authority over their history. By using ideas from the past, people in the present engage in debates about what is important for their communities.

The addition of brass instruments to Rara in Léogâne, including trumpets, trombones, baritone horns, and tubas, has led to a debate about what constitutes a “traditional” performance of the genre. For Haitians outside Léogâne, using brass instruments is often interpreted as an abandonment of tradition, while Haitians within Léogâne see brass instruments as integral to their celebration of Rara. In this article, I will examine how Haitian Rara musicians in Léogâne use brass instruments to reinforce notions of traditional musical performance while innovating the practice of Rara for contemporary audiences. A close inspection of the debates about Léogâne Rara’s status as a so-called “traditional” musical practice reveals that brass instruments are used to assert how a community can represent itself in sound. Specifically, Rara enthusiasts embrace brass instruments as an integral part of their celebration despite the fact that many Haitians outside Léogâne view the use of brass as an untraditional practice.

Rara’s status as a traditional Haitian practice is best understood if we consider authenticity as a strategy that people use in an effort to emphasize those qualities that support a particular rhetorical position. As a processional genre that mobilizes large numbers of people to take to the streets in order to sing, dance, and protest, Rara is given a special place among Haitians eager to evoke the country’s resistive past. During the colonial period, slave resistance was most often expressed through the process of running away from sugar plantations to the mountains, known in Haitian Kreyòl as *mawonaj*. Runaway slaves or maroons built self-sufficient communities in Haiti’s steep mountains and engaged the French colonists in a guerrilla war that eroded slaveholding society and bolstered slave confidence. Religious studies specialist Elizabeth McAlister reports that the use of bamboo trumpets is “thought to have originated as the *corps de musique* of the Maroon armies that fought and defeated the white colonists in the Haitian Revolution.”⁴ In much the same way that the *lanbi* or conch shell is used to symbolize the individual runaway slave in Haiti, the bamboo trumpet evokes the power of the slave collective that defied the plantation system and ultimately contributed to Haitians’ successful bid for freedom.

Another reason that Rara instruments evoke impressions of authenticity for Haitian audiences is that they are the same instruments used in the cooperative labor teams known as *konbit*. Used since the early days of the Haitian republic, the *konbit* is made up of farmers who provide music for neighbors who need help bringing in a crop. The music of the *konbit* is said to alleviate fatigue by inspiring those who toil in the fields to focus on the

musical rather than physical demands of the moment. Music is believed to have a power to infuse *konbit* workers with energy when their bodies are beyond the breaking point. Even for those who do not perform field labor, the *konbit* serves as a symbol of what can be accomplished when people put aside their differences and work toward a common goal. In Gérard Valcin's 1971 painting of a *konbit* in Figure 2, workers bring in the harvest from the fields while musicians play the *vaksin*, *kès* (snare drum), and a hoe-blade. For many Haitians, the sound of the *vaksin* evokes an association with cooperation, neighborliness, and rural life.



Figure 2: Gérard Valcin (1927–88), *Communal Workers [Konbit]* (1971).
 Courtesy of the Milwaukee Museum of Art, www.mam.org.

Vaksin are end-blown aerophones made from bamboo that are blown with an embouchure that is similar to that used by trombonists. Bamboo tubes are hollow and grow in segments; their nodes, which mark the segments of the bamboo stalk, form a

natural mouthpiece that can produce a single resonant tone when blown.⁵ *Vaksin* are often played in groups of three or more in order to produce hocketed patterns of notes. When played in large groups of six or more, *vaksin* ensembles can perform melodies by taking turns playing different notes in a scale. Since the bamboo tubes are not tuned to a tempered scale, they may sound “out of tune” to a Western-trained brass player. Yet it is this distinctive sound that makes the *vaksin* instantly recognizable in a musical ensemble. In Figure 3, three *vaksin* perform with a baritone horn, snare drum, and *tanbou*. Notice that the *vaksin* in the photograph are made from PVC tubes instead of bamboo. Although bamboo is valued as a material for making musical instruments, the plastic tubes are much lighter to carry and resist splintering. This accommodation to practicality is one example of the ongoing traditionalization of Rara.



Figure 3: Three *vaksin*, baritone horn, *kès* (snare drum), and *tanbou*. Rara Ti Malis Kache, Léogâne, Haiti (2005). Photo by Michael Largey.

Another unique instrument in the Rara ensemble is the *konè*, an end-blown metal instrument. *Konè* are usually hand-made, using pressed sheets of tin and a soldering iron heated in a charcoal fire. The instrument is entirely in one piece, including the mouthpiece, which is bent by hand to provide adequate cushioning for the player’s lips. Despite this effort on the part of the *konè* maker, the instrument often cuts players’ lips and needs to be filed and padded by musicians, especially for a long evening’s worth of music-making.

Like the *vaksin*, *konè* play a single note, so they are most often performed in groups of two or more. *Vaksin* and *konè* are usually played both as end-blown aerophones and as struck idiophones; the player blows a single note on the instrument while tapping the side of the horn with a wooden or metal stick. In Léogâne, *konè* are often manufactured with sharp bends in the body of the instrument, making them acoustically problematic, but easy to hold during the long marches of the Rara band (see Figure 4). Although the *konè* is a relatively recent addition to the traditional Rara ensemble, it is still accorded a place as a core Rara instrument; most bands in the Léogâne area do not parade without them. In most parts of Haiti, *vaksin* and *konè* are the only end-blown instruments in the Rara musical ensemble.



Figure 4: Two *konè* players perform with a shaker and *tanbou*. Rara Ti Malis Kache, Léogâne, Haiti (2005). Photo by Michael Largey.

What distinguishes Rara bands in Léogâne from other Rara traditions in Haiti is their use of brass instruments in addition to the core Rara instruments of *vaksin*, *konè*, *kès*, and *graj*. According to Cébien Briochet, the *doktè fèy* or “leaf doctor” of the Rara band called Rara Ti Malis Kache (or “Ti Malis”), the band was founded in 1916 as a *charyio-pye* or “foot band” that sang songs and provided percussive accompaniment by stomping their feet. Eventually, the band added *vaksin* and *konè*; in the early 1960s they included brass instruments. Briochet says that today, “san piston yo, moun yo pa okipe l” (“without brass

instruments, people don't pay attention to Rara") in Léogâne.⁶ Indeed, Rara in Léogâne has become famous throughout Haiti and the diaspora for its brass sections. Tourists from Port-au-Prince as well as the United States and Canada visit Léogâne during Holy Week to see and hear the bands perform.

What brings crowds to Léogâne is the combination of traditional Rara instruments with brass instruments. The sonic result of this mixture is an exuberant and extremely loud music that draws in crowds by virtue of its sheer force. Like the mobile sound systems of Jamaica that provide a chest-thumping experience of Jamaican dancehall music, Léogâne Rara bands entice listeners with catchy brass melodies delivered at ear-splitting volume. At the same time, observers are invited to join the band, either to sing along with the Rara songs or to play rhythms on whatever materials are at hand: beer bottles and pieces of metal serve as impromptu bells, for example. Bands routinely march ten or twelve miles during their long nightly journeys, blasting their instruments as loudly as possible for six or seven hours, with frequent breaks for drinks, food, and cigarettes.⁷

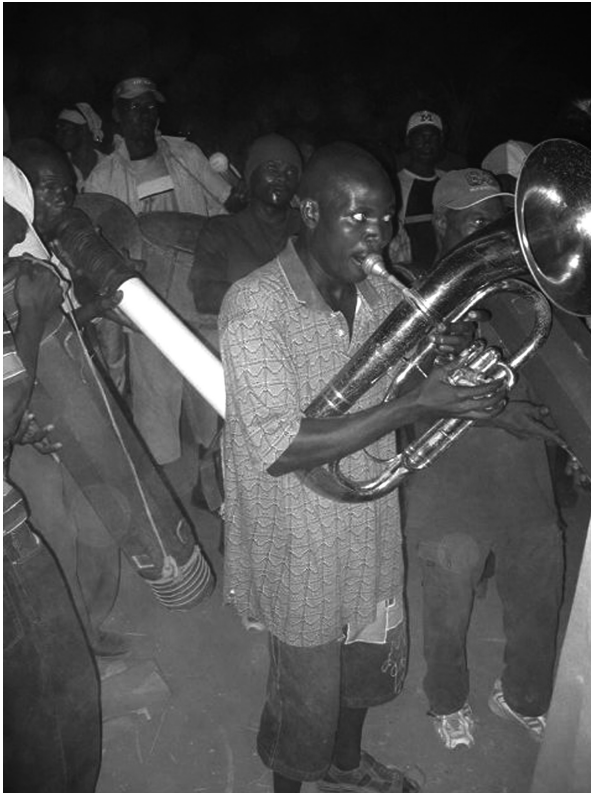


Figure 5: Ti Gangan plays the baritone horn.
Rara Ti Malis Kache, Léogâne, Haiti (2005). Photo by Michael Largey.

I have been working with Rara Ti Malis Kache (The Rara of the Clever Little Children in Hiding) since 1995 and have witnessed the band's consistent use of brass instruments. Most years, Ti Malis fields a brass section of three or four trumpets, the same number of trombones, a baritone horn, and, if possible, a sousaphone. The baritone horn player usually acts as band leader and provides the melody for the chorus that marches behind the brass section. In Figure 5, Ti Gangan (Little Vodou Priest) plays baritone horn as he leads the rest of the band in a song.

Trombones and trumpets usually alternate between supporting the baritone horn on the melody and providing a hocketed accompaniment for the melodic line. The musical function of the trumpet and trombone sections is similar to that of the single-note *vaksin*; musicians punctuate the melody with short melodic fragments that are intended to add excitement to the event. In Figure 6, a line of four trombonists process behind a *graj* player.



Figure 6: Four trombonists.
Rara Ti Malis Kache, Léogâne, Haiti (2005). Photo by Michael Largey.

The demand for large numbers of brass players in Rara has meant that many bands rely on out-of-town performers to fill their ranks. Grand Goâve, a small city twelve miles to the west of Léogâne, is well known as a source for competent brass players, so many bands travel there to recruit performers for upcoming Rara seasons. Rara bands in Léogâne

have to pay large sums of money to secure a performer's services. For example, in 1995, Rara Ti Malis Kache paid 5000 Haitian gourdes (about \$1000 US) per musician for the Lenten season.⁸

The use of out-of-town musicians to fill the ranks of Léogâne Rara bands with brass players is in sharp contrast to the ways in which other instrumentalists are chosen for the band. Drum and *vaksin* players are most often drawn from the ranks of the band's members. Although there is no formal instruction on the *vaksin*, *graj*, *kès*, and *tanbou*, interested members learn these skills by observing other performers or by organizing their own "children's Rara." Rara Ti Malis, for example, has a youth Rara band called Love Malis that features young people playing *tanbou* and homemade kazoos as a replacement for the brass. Children can learn band repertoire either through joining children's groups like Love Malis or by simply following the adult band and absorbing the music through observation and imitation. Through their use of oral tradition to teach the Rara repertoire to young people, Léogâne Rara bands pass along their traditions to new generations.

In order to raise the large sums of money necessary to pay brass-playing professionals, most Rara bands in Léogâne turn to Haitians living abroad for financial support. Most bands are run by *komite* or committees that have members living in the United States and Canada. Committee members contribute cash for bands' operating expenses, but they also provide brass instruments for local Rara participants. It was one such Ti Malis member from the diaspora who provided the first sousaphone for the band in 1986.⁹ I participated in this informal economy myself when I was asked by Ti Malis committee members to help the band secure brass instruments. As a music faculty member and a brass player myself, I had relatively easy access to second-hand instruments and could transport them to Haiti during my yearly visits. Between 1995 and 2005 I brought several trumpets, trombones, baritone horns, as well as a sousaphone to Haiti.

The presence of so many brass instruments in Léogâne Rara has prompted many Haitians who do not participate in Rara to compare it to Carnival, the pre-Lenten celebration that ends on Ash Wednesday. Indeed, to the casual observer, Rara and Carnival appear to be similar musical genres, sharing a taste for ribald lyrics, large crowds of followers, and a link to the liturgical calendar. Rara and Carnival share a political significance in that both are used by Haitians to negotiate authority in a public, celebratory context. According to Gage Averill, "In Haiti, as in many countries that celebrate carnival, there has been a stark division between official, elite-sponsored activities and those of a mass or popular nature."¹⁰ Carnival has the potential, according to Averill, to serve as a "springboard for lower class rebellion" but it is constrained by those in political and economic power who wish "to limit [its] symbolic expression and contain popular discontent."¹¹ Carnival often features two types of celebration: the official, state-sponsored version that extols the virtues of the current regime and the unofficial, popular celebration that often has political overtones.

Rara, too, experiences a tension between the "official" and "oppositional" ways it is put to use. For example, while Rara is understood in Léogâne to be a vehicle for the expression of political dissent, it has also been used by the Haitian government to give the appearance of popular support. Government forces often organize events that resemble

Rara called *koudyay* (Haitian *Kreyòl* for “a gushing, surging event”) in which participants are paid a small fee or given food and alcohol to carry signs supporting the latest government policy while dancing and playing bamboo trumpets. Although few Léogâne residents I interviewed believed that such *koudyay* reflected any real support for the government, the ubiquitous presence of *koudyay* on Haitian national television during election campaigns indicates that politicians believe Rara has a persuasive power that can be harnessed to promote their specific agendas. Most recently in the 2011 Haitian presidential elections, candidate Michel Martelly, known to Haitian audiences as the singer Sweet Micky, used *koudyay* featuring multiple Rara bands at campaign stops to generate excitement for his candidacy.¹²

In the minds of Rara participants, however, Rara and Carnival occupy very different roles in Haiti’s musical hierarchy. They also differ objectively in a few important respects. Carnival is associated with pre-Lenten celebration on *madigra* (Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday) and is officially over at midnight on Tuesday. With the beginning of Ash Wednesday, Carnival instruments are either ritually put to sleep or destroyed so that participants cannot play them during the Lenten season. In contrast, Rara begins on Ash Wednesday and continues through Lent until Easter Sunday (or Monday). Since each Sunday during Lent is considered to be a “little Easter” by many Catholics, Rara participants take to the streets most Sundays to rehearse their repertoire and garner support from their fans and other onlookers.

Most importantly, unlike Carnival, Rara has strong ties to the Haitian religious tradition known as Vodou. Blending Roman Catholicism with the spiritual practices of several different West and Central African cultures, Vodou is a religious practice that emphasizes healing and protection; worshippers call upon the intermediary spirits known as *lwa* to help them with their earthly concerns. Vodou religious ceremonies use music and dance to help worshippers achieve spirit possession so that spirits may enter their bodies and express the spirits’ will. Vodou practitioners may sponsor a *bann dangajman* (or Rara band under contract with the *lwa*) as a religious obligation to the spirits. Individuals may pledge several seasons of Rara sponsorship as part of their spiritual practice.¹³

Rara is also more closely associated with lower-class Haitian concerns than is Carnival. Although there have been many attempts to co-opt Rara to serve the needs to elite Haitian audiences—most notably in the form of commercially sponsored Rara events—most Haitians think of Rara as reflecting so-called traditional Haitian practices, especially those connected to Vodou. As Elizabeth McAlister’s research has shown, Rara’s association with lower-class Haitians has resulted in elite disdain for Rara practice. I experienced this elite Haitian prejudice when I told middle-class acquaintances in Port-au-Prince that I intended to do research on Rara in Léogâne. Several friends warned me not to drink *klerin* (moonshine) out of the same jug as Rara participants for fear of catching tuberculosis or AIDS from them. Others warned that I risked being shot or stabbed if I stayed out too late with a Rara band.

Finally, Rara differs from Carnival in that it does not rely on the massive *cha madigra* (Mardi Gras floats) that are featured in Port-au-Prince’s Carnival celebrations. Carnival

floats most often feature brass sections and amplified electronic instruments, usually transported on the back of a large flatbed truck. Although Rara and Carnival both have *bann a pye* (bands on foot), Rara's road march is always on foot. Marching an entire parade route can be an exhausting experience, since most bands play from shortly after sundown to sometime before sunrise the following morning.

The differences between Rara and Carnival become politically charged when the authenticity of one region's style of Rara is questioned by outsiders. Since Rara is, at its heart, a competitive practice in which bands distinguish themselves through performance, participants use authenticity-charged rhetoric to put down rivals and to extol the virtues of their own style. In particular, Rara bands are very sensitive to the charge that they are imitating Carnival bands. This sensitivity becomes clear in the following example. Some Léogâne residents who do not participate in Rara have publicly questioned the use of brass instruments as moving Rara away from its roots in the *konbit*. For example, on 27 March 1997, Max Vaillant, a legislator from the Léogâne district, said in a radio interview on Léogâne's Radio Anacaona that "Rara pèdi rasin ni" ("Rara has lost its roots") by sounding too much like the Haitian Carnival bands whose recordings dominate local radio broadcasts before Lent.¹⁴ In the same radio interview, Vaillant said, "mizik rasin chache Rara, poukisa rara chache kanaval?" ("Haitian 'roots music' follows Rara; why does Rara follow Carnival?"), noting that many *mizik rasin* or Haitian "roots music" groups have drawn inspiration from Léogâne Rara and that Rara should not change its sound to be more like Carnival.

Vaillant's remarks sparked heated debate on Léogâne radio call-in programs in 1997. Callers were furious that a representative from the Léogâne district would dare compare Rara with Carnival. In 2002, however, another politician started an even more politically charged exchange that ignited the Léogâne Rara community's ire. On 23 March 2002, a legislative candidate from the Department of the West claimed in a radio interview that Léogâne did not have "real" Rara because of its use of brass instruments and that the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Bel Air was more "authentic" since it relied on *vaksin* and *tanbou* for its musical accompaniment. The radio announcer who interviewed the candidate was audibly upset; he shouted that the people of Léogâne would defend Rara "to the death" if necessary.¹⁵

Léogâne Rara members continued their vociferous objections to the characterization of their music as inauthentic. On 29 March 2002, officials from all of the Rara bands convened a meeting at the office of Léogâne's mayor and blamed Mme. Marie Antoinette Gauthier, a member of Jean-Bertrand Aristide's cultural ministry, for endorsing the idea in a radio interview that Léogâne Rara was not "real." Band members protested and ultimately decided not to participate in the *defile* or procession past the government reviewing stand downtown. Bands paraded through the streets of Léogâne for Easter in 2002, but they scrupulously avoided passing in front of the reviewing stand for the mayor of the city. Visiting dignitaries from Port-au-Prince looked out on an empty parade route as they heard the Rara bands playing in the distance on the side streets of Léogâne.

Radio is not only the prime forum for authenticity debates about Rara, but also one of the most important venues for the dissemination of Rara music in Léogâne. Since 1995 Rara bands have been bringing their music to local radio stations during the Rara season in an effort to get their musical messages to the radio audience. At first, bands provided radio stations with “souvenir” recordings, usually made by a boom-box-carrying band member and featuring all of the ambient noise of the festival. As radio stations demanded higher-quality sound recordings that did not include the sounds of the street, Rara bands invested money in commercially recorded compact discs of their songs. By 2005 most Léogâne Rara bands had CDs of their most popular songs that were played by local commercial radio stations.

Recordings provide an important venue for the expression of community through their consistent use of brass. Trumpets, trombones, baritone horns, and sousaphones have been a regular feature on Rara recordings since the 1990s. For example, on Rara Modèl d’Haïti’s 2002 CD *Rasin’n San Bou’t* (“Haitian Roots”), trumpets, baritone horns, and trombones are all prominently featured and provide a continuous sonic backdrop to the vocals on the recording.¹⁶ Through the production process in a recording studio, the engineers were able to boost the sound of the voices over the brass, something that is difficult to do during an actual Rara procession. It is the presence of the brass instruments on Léogâne recordings that indicates their importance to local audiences in spite of accusations of inauthenticity and the expectations of diaspora Haitians as they consume recorded versions of Rara on CD.

Rara’s authority as a voice for popular expression lies not only in its use of the *vaksin* and *tanbou*, but also in its connection to other traditional Haitian cultural activities. Specifically, Rara bands in Léogâne sponsor *kav* or feast days in which bands demonstrate their alliances with each other. Each Sunday during Lent, different Rara bands celebrate their own feast day; for example, Ti Malis and their rivals La Fleur de Rose and Modèl d’Haïti always have their *kav* on Palm Sunday. Bands typically visit each other on feast days and engage in praise rituals known as *ochan*. The word *ochan* is from the French phrase *aux champs*, which served as a battle cry for French troops during the war for Haitian independence. As religious studies scholar Elizabeth McAlister points out, “*ochan* are ritualized moments of political patronage whereby Rara groups align themselves with local notables through a performance of loyalty and homage at the same time they make a monetary demand, asserting the ideal of responsibility on the part of the more powerful.”¹⁷

Outside Léogâne, Rara bands usually perform *ochan* on *vaksin*, *tanbou*, *kès*, and *konè* for wealthy patrons or for influential individuals in the community who may provide some monetary support for visiting bands. Most encounters between band members and patrons occur along their parade route; band members offer a quick *ochan* to their sponsor out of gratitude for their patron’s generosity. In Léogâne, however, *ochan* are also used in *kav* to signal respect and cooperation between bands; although Léogâne Rara bands use the traditional *vaksin* and *tanbou*, just like bands in other parts of Haiti, they also use large groups of brass instruments in the performance of *ochan*. Upon arriving at a *kav*, a visiting band offers a brief *ochan*. Since the host band is always busy feeding visitors to their *kav*,

hosts frequently play a pre-recorded cassette tape of their band's *ochan* as a return sign of respect. Since the 1990s, Rara bands have fortified their *kav* celebrations with large sound-reinforcement equipment so that hosts can project their thanks and praise over the loud sounds of visiting bands.

By using brass instruments in their processions and especially in their feasts, Rara participants harness the power of an ensemble that also connects them to the Haitian military. As I have argued elsewhere, Haiti has had a long tradition of militarism; most Haitian presidents served previously as officers in the Haitian army and many Haitian generals led insurrectionary armies in coups d'état.¹⁸ All Rara bands—whether or not they use brass—refer to themselves as a *lame* or army and are led by a *kolonèl* or colonel. By adding trumpets and trombones to their processions, Léogâne Rara participants even more closely resemble the revolutionary armies that toppled Haitian presidencies during the nineteenth century.

Feasts are not only opportunities for friendly bands to demonstrate their mutual respect. Visiting bands show their respect for the Vodou spirits of the *demanbre* or ancestral dwelling of the host band during *kav* celebrations. According to Ti Malis member Cébien Briochet, *kav* started during the period of Louis Borno's presidency from 1922 to 1930.¹⁹ During this time, the Haitian government sponsored what they termed "anti-superstition" campaigns, during which they raided Vodou houses of worship, confiscated or burned religious objects, and imprisoned Vodou priests. At the time, *kav* were a community response to the hostile attitude of the government toward Rara celebrations. Today, visiting bands send their brass instrumentalists to the *demanbre* to offer a special *ochan* to the spirits of the host band. Once the ritual salute is finished, visiting band members move quickly to a feast of meat served with rice and beans.

Since the 1920s, Léogâne Rara has derived its authenticity from its connection to Vodou as well as its roots in the *konbit*. Ti Malis committee member Cébien Briochet said it best when he claimed that "Rara se youn zafè rasyal" ("Rara is a hereditary business"), meaning that Rara is passed down from generation to generation, bringing new traditions like the inclusion of brass instruments, as well as old traditions from Vodou and the Haitian military. Rara "armies" draw on the traditions of *ochan* and *kav* to reinforce their authority and to connect themselves to their political allies. By traditionalizing their celebration with old and new cultural practices, Léogâne Rara practitioners connect themselves to their past and shape their celebration anew.

Celebrations such as Rara have been radically affected since 12 January 2010, when an earthquake that had its epicenter just outside Léogâne hit Haiti with devastating force. With an estimated 200,000 people dead and over a million people made homeless, the earthquake destroyed most of the buildings in Léogâne and along with them, many of the instruments of the Rara procession. Rara Ti Malis did not perform during the 2010 Rara season, but they did manage to put a band on the road for the 2011 season, although it was considerably smaller than it had been before the earthquake. By the 2012 Rara season, however, Rara Ti Malis and many other Léogâne Rara bands were back, replenished with

brass instruments sent by diaspora Haitians and fans of the band from the United States and Canada.²⁰

The persistence of Rara in the face of massive physical, social, and economic upheaval demonstrates its continued importance to the people of Haiti. It also helps inspire collective rebuilding efforts, evoking the cooperative power of the *konbit*. Perhaps that is why Haitian singer Wyclef Jean utilized the sounds of Rara in the Hope for Haiti Telethon in his efforts to raise money for earthquake relief in late January 2010. Exhorting the television audience by saying “enough of the moping, let’s rebuild Haiti, let’s show them how we do it where we come from,” Jean led a group of Rara musicians playing *vaksin*, *tanbou*, and *kès* while chanting “Earthquake, we feel the earth shake, but the soul of the Haitian people will never break.” Léogâne Rara bands, too, turn to the power of Rara—and to the power of their brass sections—to express their hope that once again, Haitians will emerge from this tragedy with their culture and spirit intact.

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NOTES

¹ Ciceron Desmangles, interview with the author, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 1 August 1988.

² Michael Largey, “Politics on the Pavement: Haitian Rara as a Traditionalizing Process,” *Journal of American Folklore* 113, no. 449 (2000): 241.

³ Richard Bauman, “Contextualization, Tradition, and the Dialogue of Genres: Icelandic Legends of the Kraftaskláld,” in *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, ed. Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 125–45; George H. Schoemaker, “Mai ’68 and the Traditionalization of French Shadow Theater,” *Journal of American Folklore* 107, no. 425 (1994): 364–77.

⁴ Elizabeth McAlister, “The Bad Boy Makes Good: What Michel ‘Sweet Micky’ Martelly, Haiti’s Pop Star Turned President, Learned from a Lifetime in Music,” *Foreign Policy* (8 April 2011). http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/08/the_bad_boy_makes_good

⁵ In Haitian Rara, bamboo instruments are usually blown and struck on the side with a stick. In tamboo-bamboo ensembles in Trinidad and Tobago, however, bamboo instruments are pounded on the ground to produce a resonant, single note.

⁶ Cébien Briochet, interview with the author, Léogâne, Haiti, 6 December 1995.

⁷ Although there are few well-recorded examples of Léogâne Rara bands currently available on the internet, listeners interested in hearing the sounds of non-brass-based Rara bands can visit <http://rara.wesleyan.edu> for an excellent collection of Rara music, dances, and ritual clothing.

⁸ Cébien Briochet, interview with the author, Léogâne, Haiti, 31 March 1996.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Gage Averill, "Anraje to Angaje: Carnival Politics and Music in Haiti," *Ethnomusicology* 38, no. 2 (1994): 219.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹² Elizabeth McAlister, "The Bad Boy Makes Good," online edition.

¹³ Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 36.

¹⁴ Radio broadcast on Radio Anacaona, Léogâne, Haiti, 27 March 1997.

¹⁵ Radio broadcast on Radio Anacaona, Léogâne, Haiti, 23 March 2002.

¹⁶ Rara Modèl d'Haïti, *Rasin'n San Bou't* ("Haitian Roots"). HRR001. Brooklyn, NY: Haitian Roots Records (2002).

¹⁷ McAlister, *Rara!*, 52.

¹⁸ Largey, "Politics on the Pavement," 244.

¹⁹ Cèbien Briochet, interview with the author, Léogâne, Haiti, 23 March 1997.

²⁰ My colleague Mary Procopio contributed a sousaphone to Rara Ti Malis for the 2012 season; I shipped the instrument to Québec to the band's president who, in turn, transported it to Haiti.

