

Postcolonial Disablement and/as Transition

Trans Haitian Narratives of Breaking Open
and Stitching Together*

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Abstract This article brings together black transgender studies and postcolonial studies to consider the possibility for trans* narratives of Haiti, known as the “Black Republic.” Based on ethnographic research with *trani*, trans*, and transgender Haitians, this article focuses on how one woman—“Kelly”—has built a life between Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the United States. As the author argues, the 7.0 earthquake on January 12, 2010, is the most prominent transition in Haitian transgender lives because of the ways that it reorganized bodies and social relations. The author draws from black, queer, trans*, and crip theories to consider how Kelly’s life herstory creates possibilities for elaborating the effects of breaking open—the tectonic shifts in gender embodiment and social life that have taken place in Haiti alongside the earth’s movements. More specifically, the author illustrates that antiblack postcolonial disablement of the earthquake produced transing effects. Kelly’s remasculinization through sustaining injuries and receiving medical interventions resulted in the most profound dysphoria of Kelly’s life. The disaster also amplified the fractures in MSM organizations because of how they paid lip service to supporting transgender women. In exploring the question of what the forms of black trans* self-authorization look like in this context of antiblack postcolonial disablement, the author proposes stitching together as a strategy geared toward black trans* futures through (imperfect) reparation and survival.

Keywords black, Haiti, living archive, postcolonial disablement, trans* futures

In this piece, I draw from black transgender studies and postcolonial studies to consider the possibility for trans* narratives of Haiti, the Black Republic. Very little has been written about transgender embodiments and identities in Haiti, even in popular media. The only academic article to date is Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley’s “Songs for Ezili: Vodou Epistemologies of (Trans)gender” (2011), which centers on the category of *masisi*. In Tinsley’s close reading of the ethnographic film *Des hommes et dieux* (*Of Men and Gods*; Lescot and Magloire 2002), she

highlights that *masisi* is more than a referent to male same-sex sexuality; it also is a Haitian conceptualization of transgender embodiment connected to the Afro-syncretic religion of Vodou. Here, however, I am primarily concerned with those Haitians who understand and describe themselves in *Kreyòl* as “*trani*” or “*trans*,” or in English as “transgender.” These terms are often used interchangeably by *trani*, *trans**, and transgender Haitians, several of whom have asserted to me that they are “the same thing.”¹ These subjects sometimes have had a period of identifying with the term *masisi* or its female counterpart *madivin* (my divine), but even though *trani* Haitians might be practitioners of Vodou, the terms *masisi* and *madivin* no longer feel like the right fit to reference their sense of self.

This article is inspired by LaMonda H. Stallings’s discussion of black transgender narratives in *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* (2015). Stallings opens up a space to think about forms of transgender self-authorization and transition outside the privileged biomedical process of “medical transitions.” Here I expand on her insights to consider their implications for black *trans** life outside US contexts, specifically in postcolonial Haiti. Haitian artist and anthropologist Gina Athena Ulysse (2015) has written about why Haiti needs new narratives, now more than ever. She urges people beyond the pathologizing and dehumanizing accounts of “the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere,” a stream of poverty porn (laced with white missionary do-goodism), histories of “political corruption,” and black chaos and incompetence that creates a requirement for external supervision from the United States and United Nations. The antiblack racism of these imperialist narratives are rooted in fear of the promise that Haiti represents: black freedom.²

In putting the work of these scholars together to consider the possibilities for black *trans** narratives of Haiti, I intentionally move alongside and beyond the necropolitical to highlight *trani* Haitian lives and life-building strategies of survival. This is a turn away from the antiblack obsession with black death, ranging from accounts of murdered black transgender women to the circulation of photos of corpses in the ruins of postearthquake Haiti. This move is one that has optimistic investments in what Stallings refers to as “black transfutures beyond necropolitics” (2015: 224). One of my strategies to unsettle the proximity of *black* and *death* is to collaborate with a living archive, “Kelly,” to theorize (always already black) Haitian transgender subjectivity.³ I focus on the ways that Kelly has navigated the necropolitical scene of postcolonial Haiti as a transgender woman and document the ways that she has worked against annihilation by stitching together black *trans** futures through transnational forms of intimacy and caring.⁴

As I will argue here, the 7.0 earthquake on January 12, 2010, is the most prominent transition in Haitian transgender lives because of the ways that it reorganized bodies and social relations. I draw from black, queer, *trans**, and crip

theories to consider how Kelly's life herstory creates possibilities for understanding the implications of this transition. I first elaborate the effects of *breaking open*—the tectonic shifts in gender embodiment and social life that have taken place in Haiti alongside the earth's movements. In exploring the question of what the forms of black trans* self-authorization look like in this context of post-colonial disablement, I then propose stitching together as a transgender Haitian mode of (imperfect) reparation and survival.

Living Archive of Disaster

Kelly was born into a Christian middle-class family in the Bois Verna region of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Her mother died when Kelly was five, and her father—a medical doctor who was previously enlisted in the army—remarried and had seven more kids. As she said, her father cared for Kelly financially, but she grew up primarily with her grandmother. In school, her best friends were girls, and they called themselves “the incredible trio,” while outsiders called them “girls of the trio.” When people would ask if she was a girl or a boy, Kelly would say “Both!” because despite her feminine comportment, she kept her hair close cropped and wore the mandated clothing for boys. She ended up living abroad in Santo Domingo after her teenage years, where she let her hair grow, started wearing feminine clothing in public, and got her nails done. During this time, Kelly helped her best friend—another transgender Haitian woman—and her husband conceive a child with a surrogate by being their sperm donor. She lived with them until their departure to the United States.

When Kelly returned to Haiti, the person who looked at her passport thought that her sex designation had been a mistake, and she was reissued documents. In the next ten years, Kelly had a series of jobs as a receptionist at the cell-phone company Digicel and in a hotel, as a fashion designer, and as a homemaker. She had flings (*ti mennaj*) and longer-term serious relationships with men across the full range of Haiti's economic spectrum, most of whom Kelly described as heterosexual and some of whom were masisi and/or bisexual. For a while, she was even engaged to a prominent public figure who is significantly older and had been a friend of the family.

I met Kelly shortly after moving from Tucson, Arizona, to the southern coastal city of Jacmel in summer 2009 to conduct multisited ethnographic research about queer issues in Haiti. She had traveled four hours from Pétionville with friends to attend a Vodou ceremony, visit a lover (one of my key informants), and go to the beach. When I told Kelly about my research project, she invited me to check out the HIV-outreach organization in the capital city of Port-au-Prince where she worked (unpaid) to help coordinate a program for “minorities,” understood on the organization's terms as men who have sex with men (MSM).

Through this research project, I conducted several formal interviews with Kelly between 2009 and 2014. However, most of the insights that I provide here come from the transnational friendship that Kelly and I have developed over the last seven years. It is a friendship forged through being with each other in many ways through those years, and most especially through mutual loss.

Unlike many “living archives” whose age permits a longer look at historical events, Kelly—like me—is in her early thirties. As is true for the majority of the population in Haiti (more than 50 percent under twenty-five years old), Kelly did not live through the terror of the US-backed Duvalier dictatorship. She was a kid during the *dechoukaj* (uprooting) of Jean-Claude Duvalier and his supporters in 1986 and most major political events, including coups, US Marine invasions, the US-enforced embargo, and the US abduction of the Haitian president during the bicentennial events in 2004. These are faint memories compared to personal ones of childhood best friends, losing her virginity, entanglements with lovers, and performing at parties.

The structuring historical event for this generation of Haitians is the 2010 earthquake—known within the country as *trembleman te a* (the trembling earth) and *goudougoudou* (a Kreyòl word that emulates the sound of the quake). It is what marks a before and after, pre and post. The trust that people in Haiti had that, if nothing else, the land beneath their feet would hold them up was shaken. The earth and buildings and bodies and everyday life broke open. It is this event that forms the locus of transition in Kelly’s life narrative.

Breaking Open

Less than a month before the disaster, I was working as a production assistant on a “transnational tranny porn film” remaking Kathy Acker’s *Kathy Goes to Haiti* (1978). All the Americans involved in the project were white and transgender and/or genderqueer, and, for several of them, it was their first time in Haiti. The director was an expat who lived in Jamel and was good friends with Kelly and other trans, transgender, and other trans* Haitians (such as masisi) who came to visit before or after the filming. These erotic encounters included smoking, drinking, and long conversations that included details about fucking, loving, parties, traveling, hormones, and the dangers of silicone implants. There was all-night dancing at the weekly RAM concert at the Hotel Oloffson, which is the last time I spent with Kelly (and her much older foreign boyfriend) before the earthquake.

Memories of that particular night of fun hung over me like a vibrant vivid cloud after I received a text about the *trembleman te a*. I struggled to find a way to understand what was happening from my home in Arizona, where Anderson Cooper mediated my information about what was happening on the ground. So I prayed. I thought about my friends. I constructed an altar on my mantel and then

one at the main entrance to my university campus, where the new semester was about to begin. Then I waited for news, any kind of reply to my phone calls and e-mails. First I heard that my friend—the director of the film project—had died. Then I learned that one of my research sites—the organization where Kelly worked—had collapsed during a support meeting. Everyone, including Kelly, was assumed to be dead.

So it came as quite a shock then when I received a call from Kelly a few days later responding to my messages. She sounded far away. It was not just because she was in a hospital in the Dominican Republic, it was something else. When I asked how she was doing, all she said was “I’m fine, *bébé*.” Kelly asked, “Where is Flo? I need him. Where is he?” Until that moment, I had not even really processed the death of our mutual friend. It felt unreal. But the gut-wrenching pain of loss choked my words when I told her, “I’m so sorry. Flo is dead. I’m so sorry.” She wailed, “No, not Flo. Not Flo, too. Everyone is dead. Everyone is dead.” We cried together without talking for a long time.

In a few weeks, I was finally able to get a flight to Santo Domingo, where I could catch a bus to Pétienville. On my first night in the Dominican Republic, I was walking with my lover, Gayle, to find something to eat when I heard my name called out in Kreyòl. Kelly was sitting in a wheelchair with an escort not too far away. My initial excitement at seeing her turned into concern. Her head was bandaged, and it quickly became apparent that even though Kelly had recognized me, she was disoriented—from the severe concussion, drugs, or both. I made a date to meet her for coffee in the morning, but (uncharacteristically) she did not show up. I received an e-mail not too long afterward with no explanation, and for a period of time I only received brief updates about her health.

It was only when we reunited for a couple of weeks in 2013 that Kelly told me her version of the events. Kelly had been working when the walls and the ground looked like they turned into liquid. She was the only one to survive the building collapse; fourteen of her friends and close acquaintances died in her immediate vicinity. Her own body had been broken open by chunks of concrete and debris, and she was in need of immediate medical assistance. Her boyfriend arranged to take her by car to a hospital in the Dominican Republic and took a big gamble—it was a long journey, but there was a better chance of receiving medical treatment, even potentially from a doctor who would not be concerned about a woman with a penis (or possibly a man with breasts). It paid off, and Kelly stayed through many surgeries to reset her bones. She was eventually able to walk again, but with a lot of effort and a residual limp. She noted, gesturing to the scar on her face and her transformed lower body, “It only took thirty-four seconds to completely change my life.” As Kelly’s story illustrates, the tectonic shift broke open more than the earth. Beyond the lives lost under decimated buildings, hundreds

of thousands of people lost limbs and/or incurred injuries that impacted their long-term health and mobility.

While many have considered the implications of this massive disablement for Haitians, here I focus on its gendered effects. Not only were Kelly's bones crushed, but the experience of undergoing medical treatment for these wounds had a masculinizing effect. Her hair was cropped short because of the head trauma, and she had to discontinue feminizing hormone therapy while on medication. Because of the ways doctors set her bones, Kelly also had a newly masculine gait rather than a swish of the hips. Her friends were surprised by the transformation of a once high femme into someone whose body was too in between. They wanted to know, "What are you?" Kelly did not know the answer, and she experienced the most profound dysphoria of her life.

In other words, breaking open was a way of "becoming disabled, becoming trans*." This is a departure from US scholarship on the interconnections between transgender and disability that focus on the ways in which "transgender" gets coded as "disability" and the various political responses to this framework.⁵ Instead of thinking of transgender as always already disabled, I am asking what happens when trans* bodies become disabled. What are the effects of disabilities for those who have labored so attentively, in loving and painful ways, to shape their sex and gender embodiments?

Incurring a disability from life-threatening bodily injuries—for instance, as a result of antiblack racism—can have a transing effect for everyone, not just transgender people. This effect is related to Robert McRuer's (2006) theorization of the ways that queerness and disability are coconstitutive through compulsory able-bodiedness, wherein the disabled body is already marked as queer and the queer body is already disabled because neither can achieve normative heterosexuality. While McRuer does not explicitly consider the gendered dimensions of normative heterosexual achievement, it is not a stretch to say that the queerness of the disabled body is related to the ways that compulsory able-bodiedness produces normative masculine and feminine embodiments.

"Becoming disabled, becoming trans*" therefore requires us to think about medicalized transition expansively. This is both to draw on and complicate Stallings's claims about transition. Her concern with multiple forms of transition in (black) trans* lives makes it possible to understand the earthquake as transition. But while Stallings moves helpfully away from "the clinic" as the sole or primary site of transition, this distance does not help us to begin to understand the imbrications of black bodies with the medical-industrial complex as a result of antiblack violence. So rather than referring only to those forms of self-selected and often difficult-to-access technologies that alter sex and gender embodiments, here medicalized transition also includes unexpected forms of life-saving medical

interventions and therapies as a result of violence. There is an endless variety of the transing effects of these interventions that temporarily or permanently remove the ability to achieve normative, or at least desired, masculine and feminine embodiments.⁶

But of course before “becoming disabled, becoming trans*,” not all bodies intentionally worked to defy the violent constraints of cissexism and transphobia. For people with transsexual and transgender embodiments then, these medicalized transitions pose additional challenges to claiming one’s life. Kelly, who was assigned the gender of *ti gason* (boy) based on her male embodiment, had overcome incredible barriers to claim feminine embodiments as a *ti fi* (girl) and then as a *fanm* (woman). Her unwelcome gender transition from a woman to a “what are you?” (or sometimes a man) was devastating.

While these connections between trans* and disability are worth exploring more on their own, here I want to posit antiblack postcolonial disablement as key to understanding “becoming disabled, becoming trans*” in the context of Haiti. Since Haitian independence in 1804, European and US imperialists have worked methodically to undermine the success of the Black Republic as a way to punish Haitians and their enslaved ancestors who fought for and claimed their freedom from white colonial domination. These various imperialist campaigns—including the refusal to recognize the existence of Haiti, the implementing of trade embargos, the withholding of aid, and neoliberal restructurings—have cumulatively contributed to what some call Haiti’s chronic “underdevelopment.” International media attributed the destruction of the earthquake to this so-called underdevelopment, evidenced in things like poor construction materials and methods. An antiracist historic frame helps us to understand that it was these Euro-American imperialist legacies rather than “poverty” or “lack of building codes” that determined the extent of bodily damage in the earthquake.

I have already documented evidence for the first part of my argument: that the earthquake is the most prominent transition in Haitian transgender lives because of the ways that the unnatural disaster reorganized bodies. The antiblack postcolonial disablement of Haiti combined with seismic waves resulted in tremendous life loss and massive bodily damage. This violence and the subsequent medical interventions had transing effects. For Kelly, this process of “becoming disabled, becoming trans*” manifested in the masculinization of her body. However, more than Kelly’s sense of embodiment was broken open; the disaster also reorganized her social life. This forms the basis for the second part of my argument about the earthquake as transition. Elsewhere (Durban-Albrecht 2015), I document that the US LGBTQI organizations who conducted disaster relief efforts catalyzed new identitarian regimes in Haiti: the formation of “LGBT community” (now LGBTI) and “trans*”/“transgender” as correctives for “masisi”

and “trani.” These biopolitical shifts were the backdrop for the social isolation that Kelly experienced after the earthquake.

During her recovery period in the Dominican Republic, Kelly waited for her friends in Haiti to come visit. The roads were traversable, and many people were traveling back and forth between the two sides of the island by bus and car. However, these visits never materialized. Her friends rarely even called to check in and see how she was doing. The hope of waiting for these gestures of care gradually calcified into resentment. These feelings were exacerbated when Kelly learned that her “friends”—many of whom worked for HIV-outreach organizations for men who have sex with men (MSM)—had used her story to obtain emergency grants and other funding from American agencies after the earthquake. In these stories, the organizations’ leaders portray Kelly as an intimate and integral part of the “community,” whose misery and misfortunes are deeply felt by all. These men may have even believed it because when Kelly eventually confronted them for commodifying her trauma, they were surprised by her anger. They conjectured that the reason for her “madness” (meant as both intense anger and insanity) was that she had not received a payout from them. However, Kelly was not interested in this base reconciliatory gesture. Rather, her feelings stemmed from the ways that these events threw into relief something that Kelly had long suspected: these organizations trafficked in transgender but did not really hold up their commitments to trani or trans* women. Thus the earthquake broke open social fault lines as well.

Stitching Together

“Of all the people who survived, I was the one who was most broken.” Kelly has repeated this line to me on several different occasions. This is her story, in brief, of the transformative power of the earthquake. The disaster broke open her body and the social life that she had relied on to make a place in the world. But just as Dominican doctors had sewn together, reopened, and resewn her flesh to transform and heal Kelly’s broken body, she stitched together a new life—as a trans-migrant living between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

In the remainder of this article, I propose that we might read these moments as a “stitching together,” and, further, that this stitching together is a strategy crucial to trans* Haitian reparation and survival. This strategy is related to Micha Cárdenas’s (2014) concept of “the stitch,” a trans* feminist operation rooted in antiviolence work that describes many different creative practices geared toward the survival of trans* women of color. Cárdenas’s conceptualization of the stitch draws on histories of women’s (re)productive labor in the form of sewing, women-of-color feminisms’ political work across lines of racial difference, and transsexual body modification through surgery. As I noted

previously, Stallings (2015) is particularly focused on forms of black trans* self-authorization beyond transsexual body modification through surgery and, more generally, the privileged sites of biomedical contexts. Here I want to draw on these theorists' concern with black trans* and trans*-of-color survival and self-authorization, but specifically in relationship to the (broadly conceptualized) medicalized transitions resulting from antiblack violence and healing interventions. I offer the alteration of "stitching together" as different forms of constituting trans* selves in these contexts of antiblack (postcolonial) disablement.

Kelly performed the operation of stitching together by fashioning a self in several ways in the wake of a disaster that broke open her body. Even from the time she was in the hospital after the earthquake, Kelly had worked to counter the effects of masculinization. She adorned herself with makeup and beautiful head scarves as she lingered in hospital beds. But as she struggled with dysphoria, these practices became less consistent, and she would sometimes present with her given name. Eventually, Kelly decided that to get her life again she needed to be immersed in cultures of self-fashioning, and she enrolled in a beauty school in the Dominican Republic. The experiences of working as a black woman alongside other black women and engaging the pleasurable and painful tools to style feminine embodiments were ways of stitching together a self and healing after incredible trauma. Kelly even selected a new name that sounded like the one of the daughter she had helped create, and in this way, she was symbolically rebirthed.

Gradually, Kelly moved away from trying to counter her masculine embodiment with hyperfeminine stylings. She embraced aspects of her masculinity, switching out glamorous dresses and shoes for tank tops, jeans, hoodies, and pink Converse All Stars. Because these stylings and Kelly's swagger are unexpected among middle-class Haitian women, people on the street started calling her "madivin" (lesbian, or something more akin to dyke).⁷ She said, "I am not a lesbian, but people don't know. They are just ignorant. I used to care when they called me [madivin], but I don't care anymore. I just take care of my own business."

Stitching together is also about transnational sociality as a mode of Haitian transgender survival. Here stitching together works alongside and between "the stitch" and Jafari S. Allen's (2015) elaboration of "Stitching, Darling!" as the performance of a necessarily transgenerational black queer diaspora. The quote is from the notorious New York City queen Kevin Aviance at the closing of the Palladium nightclub. Allen notes that the phrase highlights Aviance's articulation of black queer sociality through generations (as a "queen who came from a queen who came from a queen . . .") and the embodiment of it in the gay scene of the long 1980s. "Stitching, Darling!" inspires Allen's mobile methods of black queer

diaspora: suturing (with a flourish) the past, present, and future as well as scenes “here and there” in disparate geographic locations.

For Kelly, this meant cultivating relationships with people “here and there” who wanted to imagine black trans* futures. She stitched together transnational friendships and romances that were enabled in large part by social media. Kelly is part of a generation of Haitians that can remember only ever being connected to the rest of the world through radio, television, computers, cell phones, tablets, and the systems that link these devices. She is usually hooked into at least two of them at any given time, which she uses to access accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Skype, and other social media platforms. Because Kelly speaks French and Spanish fluently and has an ever-expanding proficiency in English, she can communicate with people in many parts of the world.

After the painful dissolution of her longtime social networks in Haiti, Kelly made different friends that affirmed her (now masculine and less entertaining) femininity. This included those she interacted with on a day-to-day basis, such as nontransgender Dominican cosmetologists, as well as gay Haitians who were newly involved in what had become LGBT organizations in Haiti. But she also reached out of these circles to connect with trans* women and men around the world, and she would message people she found interesting to initiate a relationship.

Kelly was primarily, although not exclusively, interested in the lives of black transgender people. She watched the news on her feed for stories about black trans* activists in the Caribbean and in different parts of Africa. Kelly reveled in the popularity of Laverne Cox and Janet Mock in the United States, and she requested that I bring *Redefining Realness* (Mock 2014) to Haiti for her. Since I lived in Arizona, she also pressed me for details about Monica Jones’s case, one that encouraged her to rethink her negative perceptions of sex work, or what Stallings helpfully reframes as “antiwork sexual activity” (2015). Through the intimacies she cultivated on social media as well as her actions to claim an education about global issues, Kelly started to consider herself less of a health advocate and more of an activist. From this position, she dreams big dreams for her future: obtaining a degree in public health and beginning a transgender organization in Haiti.

With the daily material realities of trauma, chronic pain, and now working as a home health aide in the Southeast of the United States, Kelly struggles with caring for herself and others. The earthquake fundamentally transformed her life and relationship to the flesh. Here I have sketched out those creative practices of stitching together—through persistent self-fashioning and erotic transnational intimacies—for Kelly to survive as a black transgender woman in a world bent on her destruction. Who knows if she will go to college or initiate

new social movements within Haiti? But dreaming functions as yet another important form of antiviolence work, of reaching toward the queer horizons of black trans* futures.

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Notes

1. However, after the influx of US-based LGBTQI organizations in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, more Haitians use *trans* rather than *trani*. For more about these shifts, read Durban-Albrecht 2015.
2. As a brief history, the organized uprising against white settler colonialism in San Domingue (the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804) resulted in the creation of the first modern republic in the world where all people were free. Haiti is known as the “black republic” where constitutionally everyone—regardless of phenotype—is black (*noir*). Colloquially, Haitians are “*neg*” and foreigners are “white” (*blan*). In addition to serving as an inspiration for abolition elsewhere in the Americas, the newly created Haitian state supported Simón Bolívar to throw off the chains of Spanish colonialism. Two hundred years later, the decolonial project of the Haitian Revolution is ongoing. Haitian activists work tirelessly to challenge the remaining legacies of French colonialism.
 Since its inception, the postcolonial Caribbean nation has been punished for Haitians' ability to imagine and create the world otherwise. Overwhelming foreign debt as “reparations” to France for its colonial property, refusal to acknowledge Haiti's independence, boycotts on Haitian trade, and the recolonization of Haiti during the American occupation (1915–34) are just the beginning. Stories about Haiti's perversions, delusions, criminality, and inability to self-govern have emanated from Western Europe and the United States, creating a white imaginary of Haiti full of unbridled sexuality, demonic possession, greed, and malfeasance. There is a corresponding enforced amnesia about how the history of European colonialism and over a century of US imperialism have shaped contemporary conditions in the black republic.
3. This concept of a living archive comes from Stuart Hall (2001), who considers the constituting of an archive away from the “dead works” of museums. My use comes from Horacio N. Roque Ramírez's (2005) oral history work with QTPOC subjects in the United States as “living archives of desire.”

4. “Kelly” selected this pseudonym in 2009 and decided to keep it for this piece.
5. See, for instance, Clare 2013, Puar 2014, and Puar 2015. This is distinct from those who draw lines of commonality between disability and trans* studies, such as Ashley Mog and Amanda Lock Swarr (2008) and Alison Kafer (2003).
6. According to Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore, transing is a practice that takes place within, as well as across or between, gendered spaces. It is a practice that assembles gender into contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being and that allows for their reassembly. Transing can function as a disciplinary tool when the stigma associated with the lack or loss of gender status threatens social unintelligibility, coercive normalization, or even bodily extermination. It can also function as an escape vector, line of flight, or pathway toward liberation (2008: 4).
7. These shifting modes of embodiment are connected to the Vodou family of spirits, Erzulie or Ezili, with whom Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley has an intimate intellectual connection that she explores in scholarship. Here Kelly is moving from the feminine Ezili Freda to the more masculine Ezili Dantó, dark mother of Haiti. Thank you to Dasha Chapman and Mario LaMothe (my colleagues and copanelists at Trans*Studies: An International Transdisciplinary Conference on Gender, Embodiment, and Sexuality, University of Arizona, 2016) for helping me see these in relationship to their work on transnationality, transcorporeality, and transgender in Haitian contexts.

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