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LAKOU

SEKRÉ

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SAKRE

A creative, methodology paper submitted to the faculty of Columbia University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts in Oral History

New York, New York

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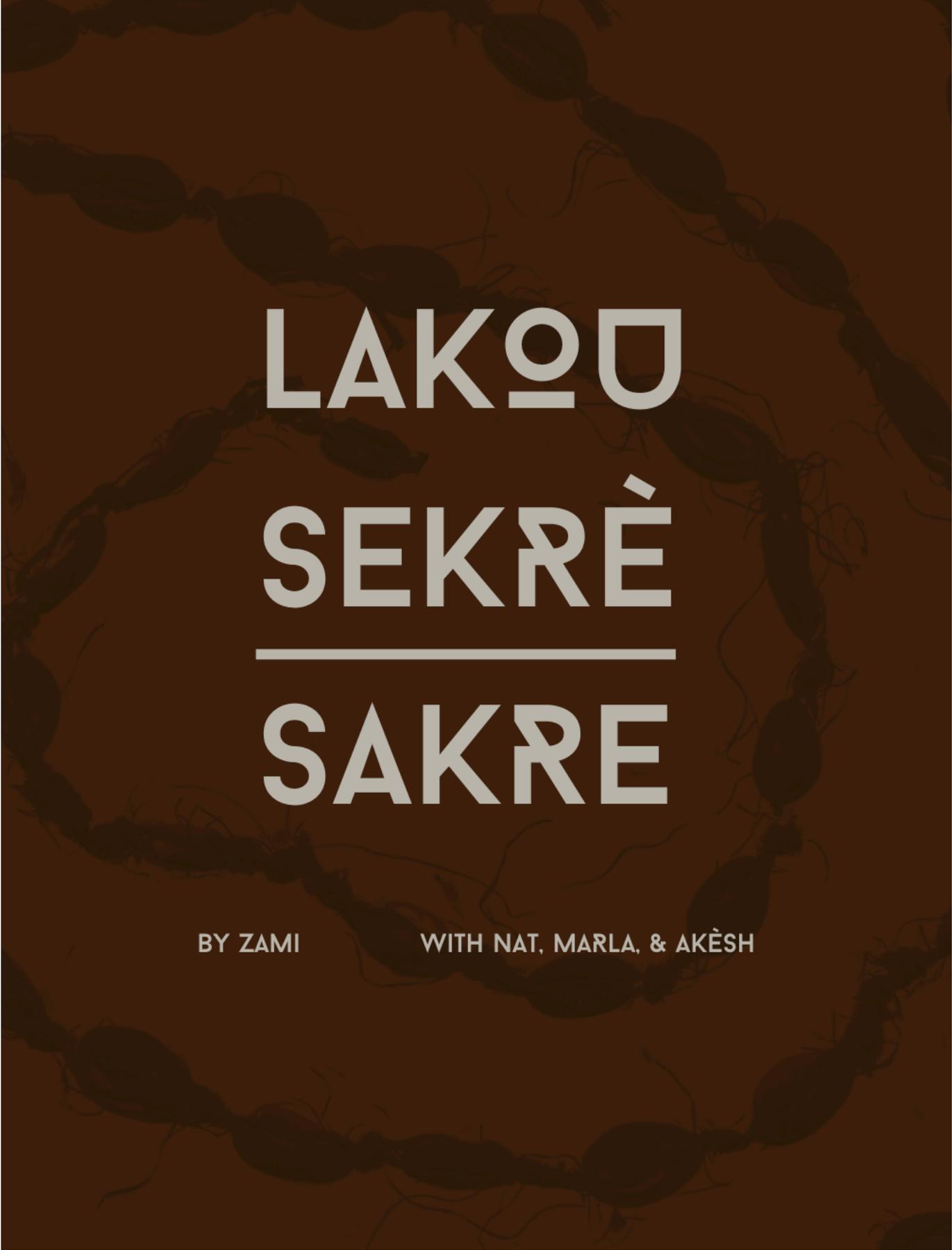
## INTRODUCTION // ABOUT

LAKOU SEKRÈ // SAKRE is a creative methodology paper detailing the social, emotional, and academic journey towards the LAKOU SEKRÈ // SAKRE Oral History installation, on view in the Spring of 2025.

As was the installation grounded in transgressive Haitian experiences, so is this paper informed by the transgressive Haitian literary genre, Spiralism. Founded by Haitian writers Frankétienne, René Philoctète, and Jean-Claude Fignolé in the 1960s to challenge linear thinking, Spiralism, “[re-creates] wholes from mere details and secondary materials. The practice of Spiralism reconciles Art and Life through literature [...]Spiralism uses the Complete Genre, in which novelistic description, poetic breath, theatrical effect, narratives, stories, autobiographical sketches, and fiction all coexist harmoniously.” (Stoffe). Merging both spiralism and the fractal nature of memory itself, I bring together reflective prose, archival scans, academic analysis, and interview transcripts to narrate a documentation of my journey towards the creation of the LAKOU SEKRÈ // SAKRE Oral History Installation.

Ultimately, this methodology paper documents the personal and collective journeys towards unraveling the experiences of queer Haitian identity in Brooklyn. Together we [ask] [answer] ~ how do second-generation, trans, and gender deviant (TGD) migrants of the African diaspora know and express ourselves while existing in the space between two (or more) cultures? How do we affirm/recognize our queerness within our ancestral cultural, spiritual, and familial spaces while contending with the silence of *the open secret*?

My intention is for the form of this paper to emphasize the ongoing and overlapping process of oral history as a practice inextricable from the experience of making art. I hope that the journey of reading this methodology paper feels like an oral history encounter in itself, through its invitation to slow down, enter story, and come to understanding through the tracing of memory. I insist that you listen as much as you read.



LAKOŪ  
SEKRÉ  

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SAKRÉ

BY ZAMI

WITH NAT, MARLA, & AKÈSH

*“What happens, for you, in the space where queerness and Haitianess meet?”*

Mmm. **Rebellion.**”

**Marla x Zamí**  
1:33:20 - 1:33:33



*In my parents' house, we have a tradition: every Christmas morning, before opening gifts, we prepare a big brunch together, sit around the table, and eat in our pajamas.*

*The meal always includes my mothers version of a Spanish omelet, Haitian hot chocolate, bacon, sausage, avocado, and toast. The things that have changed as my sister and I have grown up include who prepares what*

*mom on the hot chocolate  
Elodie on the bacon  
me and mom collab on the eggs  
Dad between setting the table and setting the music*

*No matter where we are in the world we gather  
and we eat.*

*In December 2021, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic when I was not able to fly down to Florida to be with them, we still facetimed over brunch, our meals mirrored across our iphone screens. That was the Christmas that I told them I was nonbinary, sharing my pronouns and that I didn't want to keep that part of myself from them anymore.*

*I remember crying.*

*I don't remember much else.*

*I do remember Christmas morning of 2023.  
We gathered per our annual ritual*

*mom made the hot chocolate  
Elodie prepped the protein while singing  
I made a spanish omelet  
Dad made sure the table was set*

*and ate.*

*Mouths full, the conversation moved to an upcoming holiday dinner my aunt was planning, and how she wanted to make a tradition out of it, strengthen our family networks as the reality of generational migration continued to pull us into different geographies.*

*"You know how people have a table for departed family members at like weddings?" I began casually, cautious of the idea I was about to propose in a room full of Christians and ... my dad. "What if we do something like that at these family gatherings? A little altar holding space for the family members who have passed as a way to keep bringing our family together across time and space"*

*My sister was silent in her hesitance  
my dad kept a smile tucked behind his closed mouth  
my mom finally said*

*“No, I'm uncomfortable with that. It's just not what we do. It's not what I believe.”*

*Despite their resistance, I saw this as a bridge to something that had been brimming in my chest since my last trip to Florida earlier in the year: I had noticed how close they all were, the intimacy with which they knew each other because they were within reach of each other's lives. I was not known by them because of how far away I lived in New York, and how much of my life I had to keep concealed in their homes. But I wanted to know my family too, and so I reached for them—*

*“Well, I also mention this because you guys know that I have an altar and practice ancestral veneration. As I've been building a relationship with my ancestors I've realized how important it is for me to also be building and in relationship with my living relatives. And so, I think while I'm here for the next month I want to let the taties know that I'm queer. Cause I want to know them, and I want them to know me, and I don't think they can know me without knowing that.”*

*Looking back, I can see what Cardinal Sin of Caribbean Culture I had committed—I spoke about that which shalt not be named: my queerness.*

*I won't take us too far back into what was, for me, a heartbreaking holiday season, but around lukewarm hot chocolate and untouched toast, the responses I received included:*

*“What does you being queer have to do with anything else about you?”*

*“Don't tell them directly, maybe share your podcast and let them figure it out”*

*“I'm not homophobic, I'm not scared of gay people. I just don't agree with it”*

*“Why upset them? Are you ready to receive their anger?”*

*I spent the rest of the trip as a shell of myself. I couldn't look my parents in the eye for longer than a second because all I saw was what lay behind the mask they had dropped. All I felt was the ache of realizing that my parents and sister would rather I play the version of me they actually wanted me to be rather than who I was. All I felt was the devastation of realizing that my parents and sister would rather I continue to lie to the rest of family by omission rather than build genuine relationships with them.*

*Christmas, 2024, was the first Christmas my sister spent as a wife.  
She didn't join us at the breakfast table that year.*

*A medium through which to write and remember the stories of gender dynamic/deviant  
2ndGen immigrants as we find each other in the spaces between cultures.*

## DEFINITIONS

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Generation**

to mean, A child of immigrants, you were either born in your parents' country of immigration or moved there at a young age. For example, someone may be a first generation American in their family, but they are a 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Jamaican in America.

### **Gender dynamic/deviant**

to mean, A trans (non-binary inclusive) person. a person who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, and/or does not conform to the cis-heterocentric roles of the gender they identify with. we say *deviant* to acknowledge that we find each other in the spaces that have cast us as other. we say *dynamic* to center the multiplicities of our gender through time, culture, and geography.

## PURPOSE // WORK

Living my gender deviance/variance has been a practice that has echoed my experience of migration in one way in particular—learning how to claim something that I wasn't always sure I fit in. The experience of a second generation immigrant often looks like an existence in someplace, no place, or every place. A home that sometimes moves, that sometimes disappears. In this world both migration and gender variance can feel similarly isolating, similarly alienating, similarly lonely.

This project is meant to build an archive and a community. It is a medium through which to see ourselves and to find joy in how our unique cultures, societies, and upbringings allow us to find familiarity in each other's stories. But more than that, it is meant to build a home for us to go to in our many *between* spaces.

My intention is the creation of a landing ground for our community, a space to un-obscure the blind spots that we sometimes find ourselves in. The blueprint to a place of belonging for people who exist as trans [ient] [cultural] [cendant] [gender]. In a continued existence at the edges of the world—we claim our centers, and we birth a universe through our stories.

## 2NDGENders

*A Podcast. A Celebration. A Homecoming.*

## Let me let you in on a well known secret

In immigrant families in the U.S, queerness and transness are often seen as experiences that exist only within the country of immigration. This cultural extraction distances the second-generation immigrant from their home culture, while placing them outside the bounds of “good citizen” in the country of immigration. Understanding that gender/gender systems are shaped largely by society and culture, my oral history practice centers around the questions: How do second-generation, trans, and gender deviant (TGD) migrants of the African diaspora experience and express gender while existing in the space between two (or more) cultures? How do we affirm/recognize our queerness within our ancestral cultural, spiritual, and familial spaces?

I began my journey at OHMA pursuing an earlier iteration of these questions I had begun to unravel under the project title 2NDGENders . While I know this work to inherently also be a study of self, what I did not know was that in the Fall of 2024, it would become even more personal than anticipated. In October 2024, I was accepted as a *Lakou Nou* Artist in Residence with Haiti Cultural Exchange to create a community based, artistic project in a historically Haitian neighborhood in Brooklyn: Crown Heights. As work seeded in the liminal space between migration, African diasporic cultures, and gender diversity, 2NDGENders has been a project with an estranged relationship to land. Accepting the residency, I looked forward to the challenge and invitation to co-articulate queer diasporic experiences within a neighborhood I lived in, and within a culture that had raised me. Hoping to feed two birds with one seed, I realigned my studies accordingly to more intentionally hold space for the experiences of queer and trans *Haitians*.

While the faculty at OHMA expanded my imagination around what oral histories could be and look like, I searched outside the program to support my knowledge production around diasporic genders and sexualities. It was by product of this intention that I had already enrolled in a class at Barnard called *Queer Caribbean Critique* that Fall. Despite it being an undergraduate class, I pursued the course because I wanted to spend time thinking about gender and sexuality within an academic setting that intentionally decentered the American cultural context, and this was the only space I could find across both universities.

As second generation Haitians, one of the primary points of resistance to our queerness within our families comes from the idea that queerness is western phenomenon and not a part of our ancestral cultures. In *Queer Caribbean Critique*, engaging with scholarship that defined queerness within our own cultural histories was an affirming act of resistance to that narrative: from decolonial analysis on the relationship between queerness and religion in the Caribbean (Carvahal), to our presence in music and pop culture (Hutchinson & Ellis), to the role of LGBT movement in the global economy and human rights (Durban), to language and terms that were new to me in grounding queerness within mother tongues and a Caribbean world sense (Tinsley). For me, the most lasting takeaway from this course was understanding *how* Caribbean deviance from European gender and sexual norms emerge and are formed by their own historical, social, and linguistic realities. Natasha Tinsley shares one of these linguistic lineages in her book *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature*:

“*Lesbian* markedly comes from a Mediterranean island, Lesbos; but east and south of there and sinking deeper, *mati* comes from the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Derived from the Dutch *maat* or mate, *mati* also means ‘mate’ as in ‘shipmate’: she who survived the Middle Passage with me. On these crossings captive African women created erotic bonds with other women in the sex-segregated holds, resisting the commodification of

their bought and sold bodies by *feeling* and *feeling for* their co-occupants on these ships. Once arrived in the New World, women in some parts of the Caribbean continued relationships with mati in female friendships and kinship networks.” (Tinsley, 7)

Enslaved women resisted commodification through practices of care with and for each other. These kinship networks, that originated out of survival need, sustained on the plantation and iterated beyond slavery's formal “end”, influencing a large array of women loving women dynamics that divert from a western understanding of queerness as a sexual identity and rather embody it as a social and relational practice (Germain, 3). Which is to say that Caribbean queerness prioritizes community in the same ways that Caribbean cultures practice it: with an orientation around family and survival informed by the importance of kinship in [enduring] [resisting] colonialism and its iterations.

The role of kinship and stable family networks was re-affirmed though an alternative lens in encountering the writings of Rosamond S. King, a professor at Brooklyn College whose work focuses on Caribbean and African literature, sexuality, and performance. In chapter two of her book *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination*, King introduces *el secreto abierto*, or, ‘the open secret’ as an articulation of how queerness moves in the Caribbean. She explains that, “it is a situation in which many people ‘know’ someone is a homosexual though the fact is not openly acknowledged. [...] *El secreto abierto* allows an understanding of Caribbean same-sex sexuality that is very different from the ‘closet’ metaphor and ‘coming out’ narrative that are dominant in Euro-America. Instead of a mandate of constant revelation, in Cariglobal communities there is a mandate of discretion, which is not (always) the same as hiding.” (King, 64). Oftentimes, a person is known to be queer and is allowed to participate within the community socially as long as they practice a type of discretion that allows them to uphold [heteronormative] responsibilities in their family and/or larger community. The open secret, then, is a tactic agreement around queerness within Caribbean cultures, migrant communities, and families. Which is to say that, “it requires the community’s complicity,” and creates a queerness informed by collective cooperation rather than individual agency (King, 64). With family and kinship networks being key to stability and survival under imperialism, the reality is that in the Caribbean, queerness navigates different social priorities and moves around different social centers.

The digital page 64 on my ipad was bright with highlights, underlines, and annotations in its margins when I encountered the open secret. The following conversation in class was as dynamic ~ rounds of student anecdotes about how our families *knew* but *never talked about it*. King’s was one of the texts that highlighted a primary color in the tapestry of being a queer, second generation Haitian. While it is true that queer and trans people have existed in the Caribbean since time, it is also true that I, like the majority of my classmates and narrators, came into my queerness first through the American culture that formed us outside of our familial homes. With the silence mandated by the secrecy in play at home, we often understand our gender and sexual deviance first through an American socialization of queerness and world sense created by the English language. Our queerness was not informed by the cultural mandate of discretion for the sake of community, instead we learned to take pride in our identity, to chant *we’re here, we’re queer*, and to demand that anyone uncomfortable with that reality better *get used to it*.

When this desire to be seen enters the Caribbean home, it collides with the cultural mandate to hide in plain sight. I credit Rosmand King for shifting my understanding about what happened at the breakfast table Christmas morning in 2023: I broke the Cardinal Rule of Caribbean Queerness by pushing back against a rule I never learned because of how well it remained unspoken.

*"I'm curious about how your family has or hasn't engaged with your queerness.*

Um, they haven't really, um,

*Do they know?*

Yeah, my umm

my mother has really struggled, um, with,  
with it.

Um, I, I came out to her first as someone who liked girls.

I never really labeled my sexuality and oh I said I'm gay for sure *[Nat laughs]*

Um, cause I am

um. But I, you know, I, I definitely am not a lesbian, unfortunately.

I wish I was.

I wish I was. Um, I have so much, so much reverence and respect for lesbianism. It's so important. but, but, um, I, I just never

Um, I, I think in, in some ways

because of my past, I don't want to pigeonhole myself in any way regardless of like,  
you know, where

you know, what I am drawn to, I think I just want to,

I want to be free of like any type of label

whatsoever. Non binary is really just a term, um, that I use to, to really just mean I  
don't identify as a woman and that's all.

You know, that's really as far as it goes.

Um, but I think like for my mom, like she really struggled, um, with the fact that I like  
women at all, like having to let go of the, you know, dream of having me, seeing me  
like with a husband,

with children,

like having to drop that.

Um, and also having to like, let go of her own security in that too, and what that  
meant for her, like, you know, being able to have like, uh, a son in law that she could  
like, that can lift heavy things for her, like, I

don't know, like,

like, uh,

shovel the snow in the winter, like, things like that.

I mean, I was doing all that regardless, but whatever. *[we laugh together]*

“And, um, you know, not having grandchildren,  
not having her, you know, opportunity to, to try again  
at having kids, you know, that kind of thing. Um, I think she really

that was like the first layer  
and then the gender stuff really messed with her.  
That was like me saying, I'm not your daughter anymore.

I'm, you know, I'm a stranger now, like all of that.  
And so, um, she's really struggled,  
and she continues to struggle.

Um, we I think we're in a good place though,  
like, despite all that. Um, we are kind of  
Oh, I'm in a place where I'm not really, um,  
really willing to, like, quietly, like, set aside my queerness anymore.

My partner and I have been together for almost four years. Um, and, like, we live  
together. Like, this isn't something we can ignore, you know, anymore. Um, and and I,  
I think that my mother,

my mother and I used to be very, very close.  
And I think that she wants that back.  
And, um, she just doesn't know how to get there.  
Um, and I know how to get there.  
And I'm willing to do the work to get back there.

Um, or, you know, close to there.  
Um, if she's willing to work with me. Um, so that's something that we're sort of trying  
to see if we're both open to right now. But that will mean, you know, her inevitable,  
like, acceptance, you know, of me and that is, that's on her, you know, that's, that ball  
is in her court. So, yeah, that's, we'll, we'll see how up, how willing she is to rise to  
that, uh challenge but

I'd rather be here than in a place where there  
was like no acknowledgement whatsoever, you know, um,  
I'd rather struggle than than just let it be, um,  
or like even part ways. so I think that that's very,

**I don't know, I don't feel like you can skip this part?**

like, and it feels human and like real, you know, to, to, to battle this way, um.

What else are we going to do, you know, if we're going to be in a relationship with  
each other?

So, um, I like that we're at least doing this.”

**Nat x Zamí**  
01:06:47 - 01:11:11

27 Sept 2024

I'm feeling nervous about this project and when to start. I'm grateful for the ways my classes are illuminating and supporting my path w/ this work, and one thing that they are shining a light on for me is *The Open Secret*. Not just as a theory to read and analyze stories through, but illuminating the praxis of it in my reality.

At the first residency meeting I noticed that no one had follow up questions for me around my work. Part of it felt like maybe they didn't understand, or I didn't give a strong description of my craft so they weren't sure how to talk about it, or ask about it. The other part definitely felt like it was so of the weight of the open secret - exact the whole thing I am talking about and exposing is the thing that there is a hush-hush, don't ask don't tell culture around in the Laker I am navigating. It makes me really nervous about my reception in this community, the reception of my work. If people will avoid it or not engage bc it makes them uncomfortable to be talking about this thing that they regard as private, or a tacit subject. I'm feeling very aware of navigating this landscape. I'm feeling very aware of the gazes of people who would rather this convo remain secret rather than open.

And I think this is the point where I remind myself who I do this work for and why I do it. To begin from the place of the conversations I love w/ my friends, my narrators. The desire to illuminate their experience of their neighborhoods. *The Open Secret* from the perspective of the secret.

I want to bring the culture we touch, transform, create to life. What it means to be queer and Black in Brooklyn today and how those worlds shape and make us.

HOW DO YOU BELONG TO THE MEMORY OF PLACE?

# Lakou Nou La: A Queer Haitian Memory Project

## Oral History Interview Call

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## Lakou Nou La : a Queer Haitian Memory Project Oral History Interview Call

LAKOU NOU LA IS A [GENDER] CREATIVE, HAITIAN MEMORY PROJECT DESIGNED TO FOSTER QUEER HAITIAN CONNECTION IN CROWN HEIGHTS

ONE ELEMENT OF THE PROJECT IS A SERIES OF RECORDED, ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WITH QUEER AND TRANS (HEAVY ON THE TRANS) 1ST/2ND GEN, HAITIAN MIGRANTS INTERESTED IN PUTTING OUR CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCES OF OUR FAMILIAL/ANCESTRAL CULTURES IN CONVERSATION.

I'D LOVE TO TALK TO YOU! PLEASE FILL OUT THE FORM AT THE LINK BELOW/IN BIO IF YOU'D LIKE TO SIT WITH ME TOO. IF YOU'RE CURIOUS BUT HAVE QUESTIONS, PLEASE DM OR EMAIL ME!

[BITY.LY/LAKOUNOULA](https://bit.ly/lakounoula)  
OR AT THE LINK IN BIO!

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## FAQ

### WHAT IS AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW?

INSTITUTIONALLY, ORAL HISTORY IS A LONG FORM INTERVIEWING AND DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE. SOCIALLY, ORAL HISTORY IS A CULTURAL, MEMORY KEEPING PRACTICE! THIS PROJECT AIMS TO BRIDGE THE TWO WITH INTENTION.

### WHEN/WHERE WOULD THE INTERVIEW TAKE PLACE? HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

INTERVIEWS WILL TAKE PLACE DEC THROUGH JANUARY. IDEALLY THEY WILL BE IN-PERSON AT A LOCATION WHERE YOU FEEL AT EASE, AND THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR AUDIO RECORDING. WE WILL LIKELY SPEND 2-3 HOURS TOGETHER.

### WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE AUDIO AND/OR VISUAL MATERIALS FROM THE INTERVIEW?

THEY BECOME A PART OF THE LAKOU NOU LA PROJECT, AND A PART OF THE 2NDGENDERS ARCHIVE UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LISENCE. YOU WILL ALSO RECEIVE THE RAW AUDIO AND TRANSCRIPT FOR YOUR PERSONAL ARCHIVE AND USE.

### I'M NOT OUT TO MY FAMILY/SOCIALLY, CAN I PARTICIPATE ANONYMOUSLY?

YES! WHILE THE INTAKE FORM ASKS FOR YOUR NAME, WE CAN NEGOTIATE HOW TO BEST PROTECT YOUR IDENTITY BEYOND THIS POINT.

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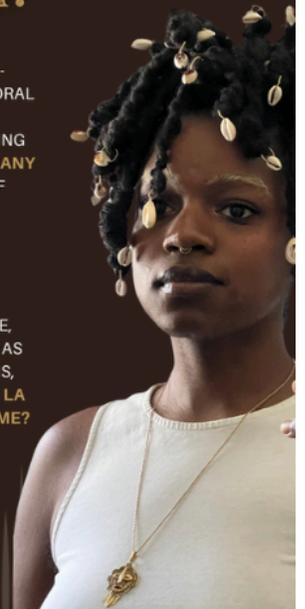
## hi, i'm zami!

I AM A HAITIAN-MADE, AFRICAN-GROWN, NON-BINARY, WRITER & MEMORY WORKER. IN MY ORAL HISTORY PRACTICE, I HOLD THE SPACE TO UNRAVEL THE PARTICULARITIES OF NAVIGATING IDENTITIES FROM MULTIPLE BORDERS AND MANY BETWEEN. HERE, I LEAN INTO THE ROLES OF DIASPORIC HISTORIAN, RECORD KEEPER OF DEATHS & REBIRTHS, PRESERVER OF QUEER GENELOGIES, AND WITNESS TO STORY.

THIS PROJECT IS PROMPTED BY MY ARTISTS RESIDENCY WITH HAITI CULTURAL EXCHANGE, AND, IS AN EXPRESSION OF MY OWN HEART. AS AN ARTIST, I KNOW MY MOST HONEST WORK IS, AT ITS CORE, A STUDY OF SELF - LAKOU NOU LA STEMS FROM MY CENTER. UNRAVEL IT WITH ME?

[BITY.LY/LAKOUNOULA](https://bit.ly/lakounoula)

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“I guess I was specifically referring to the community,  
the Haitian communities that avail themselves in, in  
Christianity.

*Gotcha*

Um, and the narrative of like,

heaven                      hell                      salvation,

and specifically shame and guilt being like operative, um, energies in those spaces.

And an over attachment to shame and guilt as a determinant of your spiritual path is something that can really cause um, a lot of like mental health and spiritual health issues that I do see in our communities.

so it's like the both, and I understand why those pathways were liberatory at one point when we were under a different system of oppression. But like now the oppressor is different. So the, you know, we can't

*the pathway is different.*

Yeah the pathway is different.

And I feel like as whatawhat, um, I'm forgetting the author who first coined this, but **'you cannot liberate yourself with the master's tools'** or something? It's, you know, it's that energy that I think brings a lot of, um, the health issues long term in our communities

of trying to achieve liberation with the tools that were designed for oppression.”

**Akèsh x Zamí**  
01:02:33 - 01:04:13

“First off,  
joining a Protestant church, um, the threat of hell was definitely like  
the, uh, thing that led me to quote unquote salvation, right?”

So I was told that whatever I had thought about God and about, you know, Jesus  
Christ and the Holy Spirit was, was wrong. And that Catholicism is not the true, is not  
the way to, to salvation

and it doesn't matter what good you do in the world. Um,  
you, you still need to be saved.

you, you need Jesus Christ to

the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ.

And the

I think the gospel of Catholicism is different than it is of Protestantism. Um,  
and so this, like, you're saved by grace, not by works, kind of like, um, thought  
process is what sort of, um, converted me.

I, I believed that I was not good

because I did good and

because I wanted to be good and, and things like that.

And, um,

I, you know, was told that I needed a savior and I was like, all right, well, I don't want  
to go to hell. So,

so I will do what I need to do.

Um, and it

it felt like a, a way to really

tap into my goodness. You know, um, I, as a child, I really wanted to please everyone. I  
wanted everybody to, to be, um

you know, really proud and like,

satisfied with whatever performance of whatever from me. And I was really desperate  
for, for approval from,

specifically from like, people that I, I found, um,

people that I cared about with people that I looked up to  
specifically as well. And so this felt like a way that I could really achieve goodness  
and,

and really achieve that as well. Yeah.

*Did it work?*

Absolutely not. **No it did not.** Not at all.”

**Nat x Zamí**  
13:20 - 15:11

## Colonialism's Misuse of the Erotic

The first time I read *Uses of the Erotic* by Audre Lorde was Fall 2018, I was a senior at NYU.

I've returned to that essay many times since, and the quote that I have carried with me through that time reads: "In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide the energy for change." (Lorde). In twenty nine words, Audre Lorde lays bare the not so secret strategy of colonialism and imperialism: take what is important to those whom you wish to oppress, and hold it out of their reach.

Fast forward 6 years later to the Fall I took *Queer Caribbean Critique*. In the memory of this particular week, we were reading chapter four of Federico Garza Carvajal's book, *Prosecuting Sodomites in Early Modern Spain and Mexico*. As I read the text, Lorde's words played on repeat in my body, "In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide the energy for change." (Lorde).

In chapter four, Carvajal explores how different figures, from religious clergy, to conquistadors and historiographers, wrote about the 'sin *contra natura*', or, 'the sin against nature' in order to manufacture a 'just cause' for the permanence of colonial rule in the 'Indias' (Carvajal, 132). Through Carvajal's explorations, it quickly becomes clear that, for both the indigenous peoples and Spanish colonists, sexuality and eroticism are great sources of power socially, economically, culturally, and spiritually. Throughout the text, there are references to men gathering in houses to engage sexually with one another with the assertion from the historiographers that "only the nobles and gentlemen exercised that sort of desire," illustrating both social and class power at play (Carvajal, 137) Later in the text, Carvajal details the ways that the indigenous people revered their sexual expressions through depicting it on their jewelry, their edifices, and even their shrines, illuminating the ways that eroticism held both cultural and spiritual power. He continues, "Whether men of letters sailed by sea or by quill, they reinforced historical and literary depictions of so-called sodomites –a xenophobic genre of writing privileged in early modern Spain, especially to buttress notions of empire and to concoct just causes of domination." (Carvajal, 137). Sexuality, then, was used as a power for colonizers to wield *over* the people they

were colonizing in order to manipulate the *empowerment* derived through indigenous relational practices of erotic reverence and embodied connection.

With this historical context in mind, we return to Lorde's quote with the ability to better understand the strategy of the Spanish colonists: disrupting and distorting the erotic power that the indigenous peoples were connected to by naming same-sex sexual practices sinful under abrahamic religion and their imperial world sense. Through the guise of the Catholic God, sin was defined to include 'sodomy' in order to impose power and maintain colonial rule under the will of the Spanish empire. In this way the Empire was able to colonize/exert power not only over the bodies of indigenous people through control over sex, but also over their minds and spirits through the colonisation of religion, art, and culture. Through such thorough colonization, the 'energy for change' was effectively suppressed.

Understanding the political context, it becomes clear that the notion in the contemporary Caribbean imagination that queerness is a western import is not grounded in truth, but is rather the legacy of colonialism at play. Historical texts reveal that sexual diversity, creativity, and celebration have long been a part of Caribbean cultures and ways of relating. Most importantly they have been ways of staying connected to each other, our own bodies, and the divine. Across time, culture, and geography, Audre Lorde points us back to the truth that, "the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. [...] For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence," (Lorde). The Imperial project is one that disempowers through disembodiment so that their desires become more real in our bodies than our own, and their gods become more true than our inherent divinity.

For many, queerness is a practice of deep knowing and embodiment of self, an insistent pursuit of the desires and joys that come from experiencing such fullness. It has, therefore, always been a threat to the imperial project, and a threat to the foundations of power that contemporary Caribbean cultures and social practices are built on. It will, therefore, always be a pathway towards decolonization, and a light that guides our way back home.

“But specifically getting in touch with desire, um, because

that is a path

like desire is a pathway. You know,

desire is a pathway to, and,

and even like being in the, the seat of like,

the seat of pursuit as a person who is black and femme, like, like the seat of pursuit in the spirit energy I think is like a big,

that is like the life force.

*Yeah.*

You know? That is life force.

And so much of what we encounter in our system asks us to be in the seat of defense

*disembodiment*

which asks for disembodiment

because **you cannot necessarily be in your body if your body is your shield.**

Like you have to, you know, recoil from that experience in order to survive.

But in the seat of pursuit, your spirit is at the front and leading your body forward.

And that is the path, like literally that is the path.”

**Akèsh x Zamí**

*01:55:23 - 01:56:34*

“There's this video that I share on Instagram a lot of me with my Haitian flag in preschool, like everybody had some kind of garb or clothing from wherever they were from. Um, so I, I know that it was very much part of my identity even before, um, becoming a witness where like patriotism is knocked on

Like we wouldn't be able to show

*[in a voice mimicking a Jehovah witness testimony]*

‘we are one people,  
we are one Jehovah's class of love’

I don't even know what they would say [...]

Um, but yeah, I would say the reclamation of it for sure in 2020 like a deep profound sense of Haitianness that I had lost because I'd left the Witnesses and it was mostly Haitian community. That was, that was genuinely my, my Haitian family beyond, um, blood fam, which makes sense.

So I'm like where in what sense? My Haitianess and my Um, to give you those pockets.

*yeah*

I think the one that grounds me the most is definitely 2020. I would say, like, deeper than just, like, I was born there,

deeper than I speak Creole,

deeper than, um, you know, eating Haitian food.

which is pretty deep. I will say!

Um, yeah, that, that reclamation came with living with my grandma in the pandemic. We were roomies,

best roomie ever, doesn't get better than grandma. Um, and she would just tell me stories about, about home! [...]

She's a portal to home.

Um, and she, she never got into like spiritual things beyond like, being christian or

catholic

baptist

all the different iterations she had gone through. But in seeing the insurrection or the uprisings for George Floyd happening while I couldn't go outside

because I was living with my grandma, I was like, even with a mask, like, I don't want to put her at risk

Um, the way that I was finding, power was in deepening my understanding of how we got free. Um, and the deeper I did, I was like:

**It was Vodun. It was our spirit.**

It was knowing hell or high water  
we know who we are.

**Marla x Zamí**

12:26 - 15:19



*I spent the first part of the academic year not knowing what would be created by the end of it. I imagined a participatory project through oral history sound installation, something that folks would need to walk into with their whole bodies to experience—but I did not know what form that would take. All there was to do was trust the process of connecting with my community, listening to their stories, and letting those experiences move what was sitting on my spirit.*

*It happened in January. My co-residents and I were talking around a foldable table in an empty Five Myles Gallery in Crown Heights, taking turns sharing what we envisioned the culmination of the work we were in the middle of doing would look like. I had already shared something about a sound installation, and sheer fabric draped into a maze, a dreamscape camouflaging an idea that felt equally as hazy.*

*With my arms wrapped in my oversized winter scarf, and my teeth wrapped around my bottom lip, I sat and listened to my co-residents' project ideas, observing the walls around us. I remember sighing, and looking up, and my gaze wrapping around the scaffolding suspended from the ceiling. In my mind's eye I saw an open circle drop from the scaffolding, constructed by the memories of my narrators and holding their stories inside it. I saw people stepping in and being seen in the arms of the secret that had been sworn to silence.*

*I inhaled a gasp and tucked it under the grin between my teeth, waiting for the right pause to come along.*

exhale

“guys. I have an idea.”

~~~

*Coming into the vision for LAKOUR SEKRÈ // SAKRE felt like sticking my hand up in the ether, swirling it around, and pulling a whole spirit down by my fingertips. I didn't expect starshine to feel so tangible, and I didn't expect for my friends to be able to see its light so clearly so quickly.*

*The first person I spoke my vision aloud to later that month was Malakai. We sat in Kingstown Cafe in Crown Heights co-working and catching up. Brimming with ideas, I poured them into Malakaai's ears and watched their eyes fill up as I described the halo suspended from the ceiling, the memories dripping down in the form of photographs, journal entries, mirrors, flowers, jewelry, ephemera from the activations I had been curating, sound pulsing from its center— at this stage the secret, sacred altar kept*

*shape shifting behind my eyelids, and Malakai was the first to take my notebook from my hand and sketch out what they saw in my eyes.*

*February came around shortly after and brought Solaris, home with it. A few nights post their return we were sitting at our dining table, catching up on all of the ways spirit had filled us in the season we spent apart. I once again poured my heart:*

*“It’s an altar by and for queer Haitians made up of our memories. It’s suspended from the ceiling in the shape of a circle and I want it to be big enough for two people to step into and listen to the audio from the headphones in the middle together, to share the experience of being in the open secret. I insist on that intimacy. And I want it to be kind of sheer, so people can see who is inside. And around them the circle is made up of my narrator’s memories. I’m mainly thinking photos and flowers right now, pages from books they love, although I think small mirrors could be cool. Maybe experimenting with some beading in a nod to Vodou flags...”*

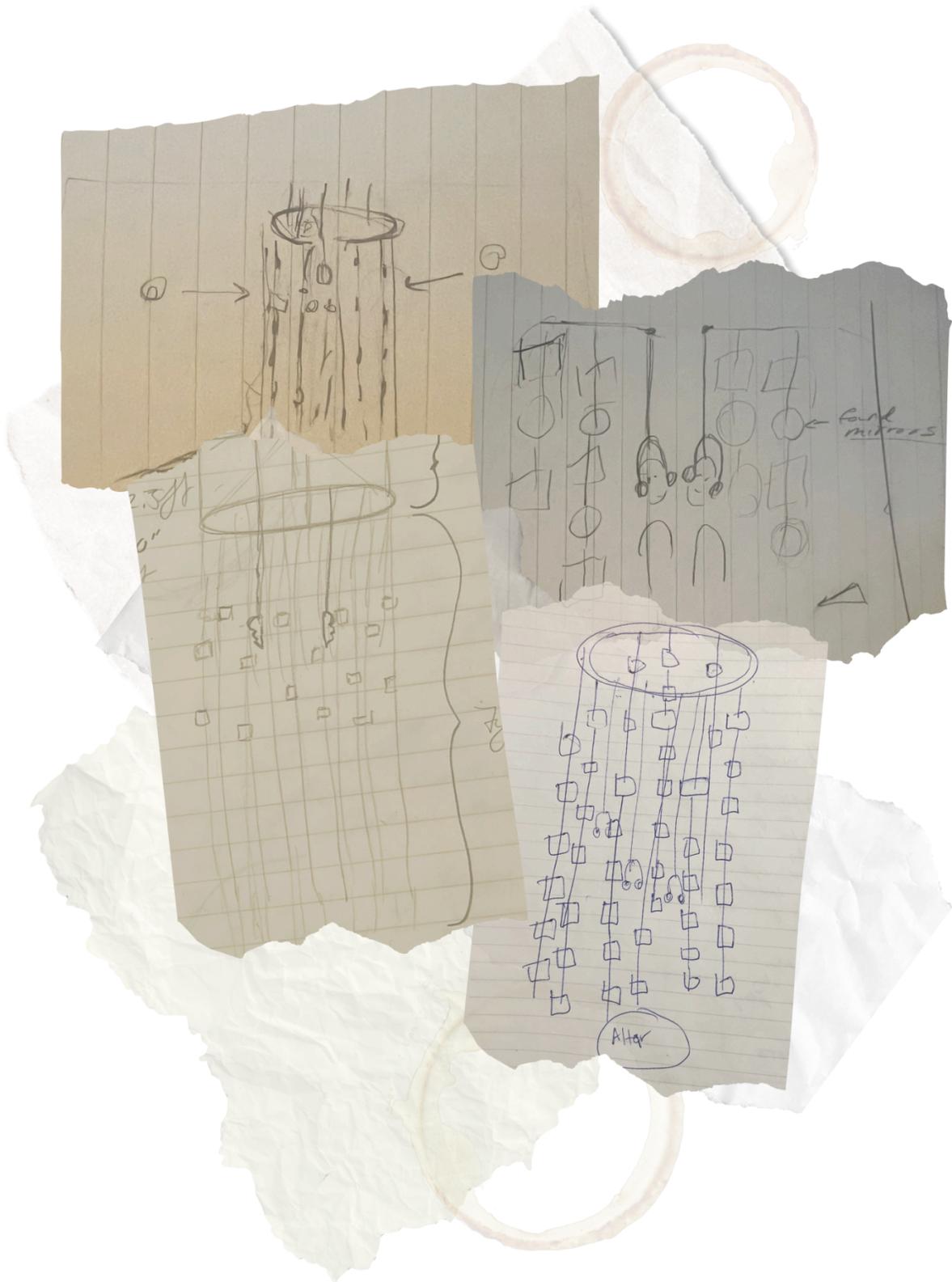
*Sol picked up one of the notebooks in front of us and in front of me, a friend again began to draw what they saw behind my eyes. What better affirmation but to have my vision so easefully rendered in my friends’ imaginations, under their hands. It was a confirmation that this creation was not only imaginable, but more than possible.*

*It was in my Curation class, under the feedback of my professor and peers at OHMA, that the installation began to feel tangible. I prepared a presentation introducing the open secret with an excerpt from Rosamond King, introducing my narrators with an excerpt from one of their interviews, and introducing my vision with digital boards evoking the likeness. My classmates’ brilliance and resourcefulness offered me ideas on materials to use to achieve suspension, where to source them, questions I hadn’t thought to ask. It was Nyssa Chow who invited me into an idea that feels so central to the project’s outcome. She said,*

*“from what you’re describing and showing us, it cannot, just be headphones hanging from the center. You can’t build this world around just a pair of headphones.*

*How will you home these stories?”*





## *Nostalgia in a ConchShell*

*This piece is about my nostalgia. This document is your translation.*

*Beloved Haiti, no other land is more beautiful than you. Ayiti cheri pi bon peyi pase ou nanpwen  
I had to leave you, in order to understand your value Fòk mwen te kite w pou mwen te kapab konprann valè w  
I had to leave you, in order to appreciate you Fòk mwen te lese w pou m te k ap apresye w  
So I could truly feel all that you were for me Pou m santi vrèman tout sa ou te ye pou mwen*

Haiti Cherie is one of the first melodies I grew up with, sprinkled in the handful of songs my dad would string for us on his guitar. Looking back I think he was trying to teach us how to love Haiti through his own memories, music as the medium. As I got older and actually listened to the words I realized it is a diasporic love song to Haiti. "The most beautiful land in the world" that continues to exist as such in our collective memories across the diaspora. It is a longing for a country that we always meant to return to, that most of us can't. Through this song, we are taught how to miss home.

*This piece is about the logistics of asking a conch shell to sing a song other than its own.*

As I continue to grow up this song now holds my own memories: of sitting in the living room watching my dad strum and my sister sing; of singing over my uncle at his funeral reminding him that the country he chose loves him too; of humming the melody under my breath as the plane touches down in port-au-prince; of my grandmothers kitchen; of my uncles jokes; of winds that carry the taste of sea and sound of laughter.

As I mature into my own self this longing for Haiti has begun to find its own meaning in *my* body. Next to my queerness, my Americanness, the web of feelings my work is a process of untangling, the echoes of [memory] [imagination] this work is my practice of listening [with] [for].

*This piece is really about longing for an [imagined] [remembered] version of home.*

The audio in the conch shell opens with the sounds of the waves from the last time I was in Haiti in 2023. In a crossfaded clip, I begin singing Haiti Cherie while walking along the seashore, the ocean reaching for my feet. Throughout the piece the waves repeat, alongside the sounds spliced from videos I took [with] [of] my family during the trip, the banter, the laughter, my accented kreyol; the speed boat taxi taking us [away] [towards]. The other voices that sing Haiti Cherie in this piece are Marla's and Cynthia's ~ two queer Haitians I live alongside in Brooklyn. When they agreed to offer their voices to this project I offered was, "to sing with whatever memory or emotion Haiti Cherie holds for you."

“you're having me think of like the song that does that for me too.

*Yeah.*

Um, I have to

because I'm like,

I always forget,

um, if it's

Tropicana that sings it,

*Play us a little! Play a little.*

You wanna play a little bit?

*Yeah!*

Okay. Wait, should I get my speaker so that it, you can hear?

*Oh we can hear it!,*

it's okay?Um, soo I'm,

I've always been really interested, like you named of the,

what I,

what I conceptualize as a genre of Haitian music, which is, um, like.

Um, I wouldn't say it's *patrimoine* exactly.

*Mm-hmm.*

But it's very much like about the teaching, like you said, the, the, the oral history of being connected to home in the imagination,

*Uhhuh.*

And this is like really also kind of like circumnavigating now your question about queerness and what that means. But I do see us as a people who have an imagination that's so powerful

that we're like living in Haiti collectively  
as a place that we're all imagining together.

Yeah.

You know?

And that in and of itself is like,

I think like the most beautiful thing, you know?

Yeah.

Um, so the song that I'm thinking of is 'Paradis de Noirs' by, uh, not septa-Tropicana.

Uh, okay. I'm going to play a little bit.

Mm-hmm.

Okay.

*[paradis de noirs plays, scratching the air between the phone speaker and the lav mic.*

*Akèsh hums the last few bars and joins in]*

Sais vraiment un paradis, un paradis de noirs!

Why, that line?

because it's a Black paradise!

*My imaginary Haiti is a black queer paradise as well, for sure.*

**But it is!**

It is! It is."

**Akèsh x Zamí**

35:12 - 38:39

2NDGENders emerged from what I call a *between space*. For me, that was the space between cis & trans; between Haitian & American; between native & foreigner; between the various African cultures that raised me & the mother tongues I hold no mastery of; between belonging and un-belonging. Gloria Anzaldua has named this liminal space *nepantla*, explaining that:

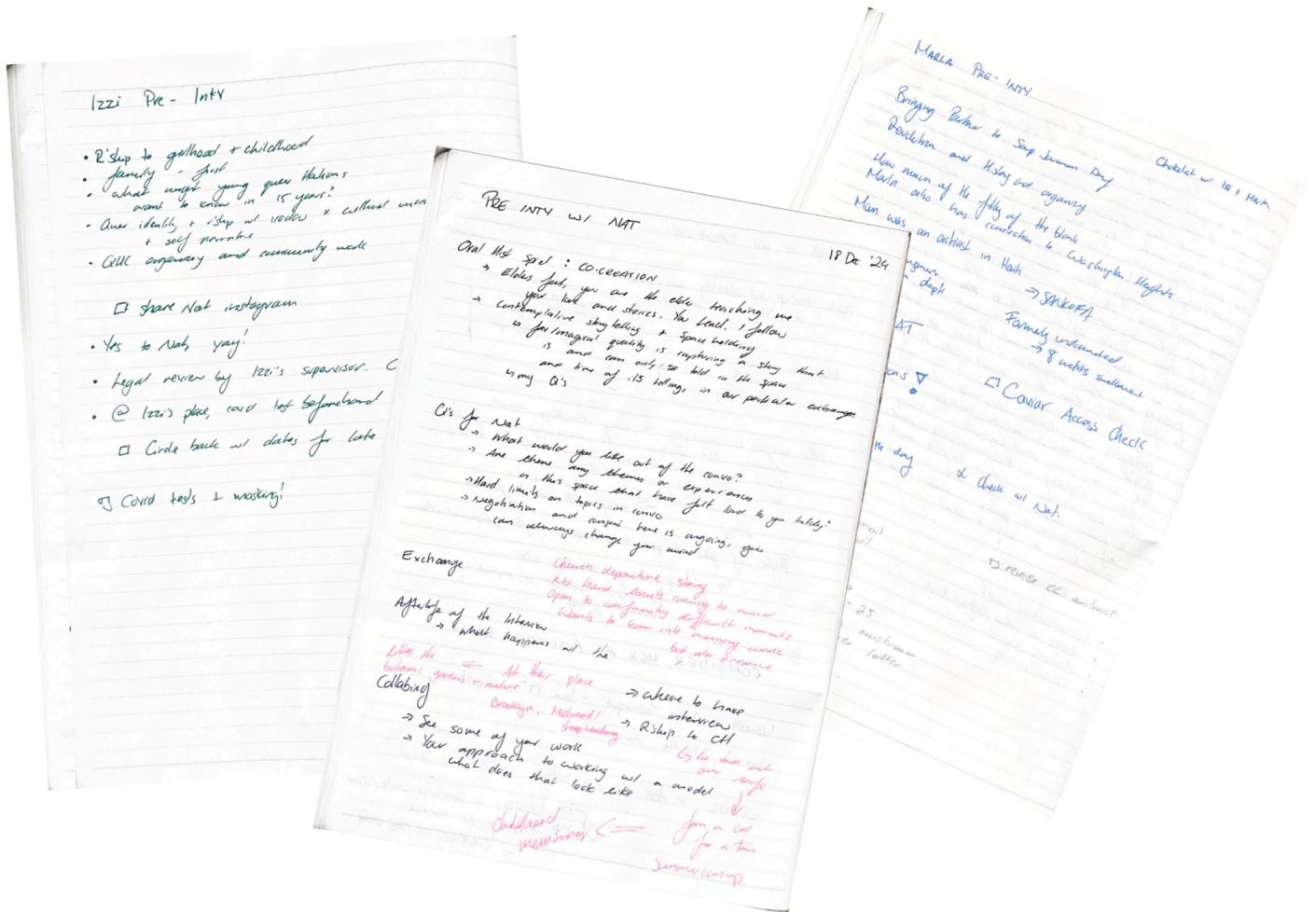
“*nepantla* is the space in-between, the locus and sign of transition. In *nepantla* we realize that realities clash, authority figures of the various groups demand contradictory commitments, and we and others have failed living up to idealized goals. We're caught in *remolinos* (vortexes), each with different, often contradictory, forms of cognition, perspectives, worldviews, belief systems all occupying the transitional *nepantla* space. Torn between ways, we seek to find some sort of harmony amidst the *remolinos* of multiple and conflictive worldviews; we must learn to integrate all these perspectives. [...] In *nepantla* we undergo the anguish of changing our perspectives and crossing a series of *cruces*, junctures, and thresholds, some leading to a different way of relating to people and surroundings and others to the creation of a new world.” (Anzaldua, 310).

As trans and gender diverse, second generation migrants, we are often pushed to the edges of worlds, and so we are constantly in *nepantla*, constantly in redefinition, constantly in a state of transformation and self-discovery. My intention is to offer support in articulating our between spaces so that we can make a home of these borders, claim them as central, and create a new world through our stories.

I am what Gloria Anzaldua would call a *nepantlera*, meaning, my assignment within *nepantla* is to aid others through it, to hold the space as they unravel the particularity of navigating identities from multiple borders and many between. My practice as an oral historian is grounded in this charge, and I am leaning into the role of *nepantlera* and griot for my community: the role of diasporic historian, record keeper of deaths and rebirths, preserver of queer genealogies, and witness to stories.

I find that my interview methodology also exists in a between-space, not quite the storytelling of cultural oral history traditions, but deviating from a traditional life history interview. In my own context as non-binary Haitian, I know that a queer life is often multiple lives moving parallel, sometimes operating on separate timelines, often transforming through ongoing deaths and rebirths of self as I make and remake myself in the spaces between gender, culture, sexuality, and heritage. This is my constant *nepantla*. In my practice as an oral historian documenting encounters with other queer and trans Haitians, this means I cannot assume which point of life my narrator marks as their beginning. I've found that chronologically is not always the most sensitive way to move through time, and that stories of childhood are most earnestly shared when trust has been earned by my ability to regard who they are in the present. So instead, I followed Nat, Marla, and Akèsh as they guided me through their own *nepantla*. The result is an oral history trio that is less formal documentation of life, and more about capturing who they had come to understand themselves to be at the moment of the encounter.

In my practice, I continue to queer institutional oral history practice by sharing story in the interview rather than holding as much silence as possible. Sitting with my peers, these interviews are inherently an exchange. A mirroring. In honoring oral history as a social practice it felt important to resist a one directional extraction of thought, story, and memory. My choice to allow my shared experiences to shape the encounter is an attempt to share in the vulnerability of having memory documented.



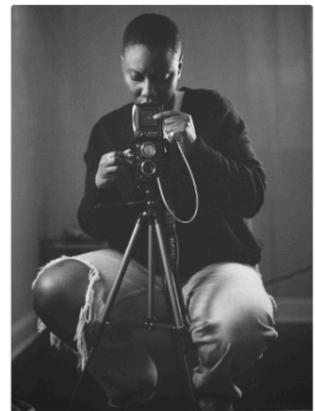
I cannot ask my narrators to go places where I am not also willing.

## Meet Cutes

*Akèsh and I connected in the moments between spring and summer 2024. It was Haitian Flag Day in Brooklyn, and we found ourselves dancing at the very first KONSA, a party for queer Haitians by queer Haitians, and the only Caribbean party in Brooklyn that primarily plays konpa. I remember how full my heart felt that night, to feel queer Haitian bodies moving in rhythms I previously only witnessed in my family's home. Each of us carried a piece of Haiti within us, expressed on the dance floor. Akèsh and I stayed in touch after that first night, having many long conversations about Haitianness and queerness and Vodou and spirit. When we finally sat down almost a year later, in their home, with the lav mics pinned to our chests, it felt both like a long time coming, and another day in the overlap of our lives.*

*Marla and I orbited without connecting for about a year. A year of following each other on social media, of friends talking about one to the other; a year of listening to their voice in song and their passion in protest, a year of just passing each other at gatherings ~ we even went with the same group to an action in Washington Square Park on a rainy day, but managed to once again miss the opportunity to connect. But when I put the call for narrators out, Marla answered, and we finally fell into each other's gravity under the sunlight streaming into their home in Flatbush.*

*Nat, I met in the winter of 2024 through the subletter-turned-friend who was staying in Solaris' room that season. I had shared about my project with Raelyn, the open call for queer, Haitian, narrators, and she had met Nat through a group meeting around her own work one evening and put us in touch. The first time Nat and I connected over the phone we quickly realized that our heartwork was aligned, both asking similar questions around gender, culture, and expression, but through different mediums. Nat not only ended up being one of my narrators, but joining the project through their craft as a photographer, sitting in on the interviews and capturing the portraits of Marla and Akèsh that became a part of the installation.*



“To table for a second the conversation about our relationship to Haiti as like the physical space and the people who are there,

I think for the people who are here in the US and in Brooklyn specifically, like I love that there is gonna be some evidence that

we were all alive at the same time and

that we all knew each other and

that we were all cheering each other on! you know? like

I think that this is such a beautiful moment, um, just to know like

'cause the queer Haitian scene has just ballooned

in the last two or three years—and not that we weren't here before, like of course queer Haitian people have existed since Ginen. *Mm-hmm.*

But to exist as an arts movement,

as a political movement, um,

as a human rights movement.

Um, and specifically as a queer movement, like

**all at once**

**all together**

**all of us doing our own thing** is just a beautiful, a beautiful moment in history!

I could not be more proud of the work that everyone's doing.”

**Akèsh x Zamí**

*42:40 - 43:56*



# LEKOL LEGLIZ LAKAY

A LISTENING & COLLAGE SESSION

*For queer haitians*

10 SPOTS | 6 - 9 PM

THURS, APRIL 3

\$10 | 10 spots

RSVP by 3/29



# BINGO

*Lakou Nou La*

|                                              |                                        |                                                                                                             |                                            |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| HAS NEVER BEEN TO HAITI                      | BELIEVES IN THE POWER OF LWIL MASKRETI | CAN NAME 5 INGREDIENTS IN EPIS                                                                              | HAS BEEN TO A KONSA PARTY                  |
| RESPONDS IN ENGLISH WHEN SPOKEN TO IN KREYOL | CAN DANCE KOMPA                        | GREW UP IN CROWN HEIGHTS, FLATBUSH, OR CANARSIE                                                             | HAS FAMILY IN FLORIDA                      |
| HAD A BOWL OF SOUP JOUMOU THIS YEAR          | SPEAKS KREYOL                          | "FIRST" IN THEIR FAMILY  | COMPLETE THE PHRASE: LEKOL, LEGLISE, _____ |
| IT'S THEIR FIRST TIME AT LAKOU CAFE          | HAS LIVED IN HAITI                     | CAN NAME ANOTHER HAITIAN CAFE OR BAKERY IN BROOKLYN                                                         | IS A LAWYER, DOCTOR, OR ENGINEER           |

@secondgenders x @haiticulturalx

LAKOU

THURS  
JAN  
9

PM

# LAKOU NOU LA!

THURS  
JAN  
9

6 PM

Join  
queer

Join us for a night of  
queer Haitian connection...



**RSVP  
LINK IN  
BIO**

...at Lakou Cafe in Crown Heights  
195 Utica Ave

BIO

...at Lakou Cafe in Crown Heights  
195 Utica Ave

## Lakou Nou La: A Social Practice Art Project Overview

*Excerpt from the Lakou Nou Residency Documentation*

I am a writer and a poet, but more recently my creative practice has been focused on oral history and memory work. I understand oral history to be, first and foremost, a cultural and social practice of memory, storytelling, and connection. It is a practice rooted in community because our stories are how we connect with each other, sustaining kinship through time, space, and geography. Haitians have always created community and remembered each other, and ourselves, through story.

Through my time as a Lakou Nou Artist in Residence, I've had the opportunity to use these practices of storytelling, conversation, and connection to activate the queer Haitian experience in Crown Heights. My project, designed in three parts, is titled *Lakou Nou La*.

The first part, *Lakou, nou la?* was a call out and call-in to the queer Haitian community in Brooklyn. It began with a call for oral history interview participants for a Queer Haitian Memory Project: an opportunity for queer Haitians to respond to the question, *nou la?* with the affirmation of their own stories.

The second part, *Lakou Nou La!* harnessed the energy of *we out here!* to create two opportunities for queer Haitian connection in Crown Heights. The first was a lightly structured gathering at the beloved Lakou Cafe where attendees were invited into conversation via prompt cards, and connection through a queer Haitian bingo game. The second was LEKOL LEGLIZ LAKAY, a listening and collage workshop co-facilitated by Zarita Zevallos, where we used interview selections from *Lakou, nou la?* as prompts for discussion and creative reflection.

The final part of my project culminates with the affirmation that *Lakou nou, LA* - our place is *here* – in Crown Heights and in the Haitian Community. The LAKOU SEKRÈ // SAKRE installation, complicates that place making through reference to the discretion asked of us in our homes. Nevertheless, it is an altar to the queer Haitian experience unveiled and activated in Crown Heights that creates a sacred space, a mini Lakou, to intimately connect the larger Haitian community with our stories. The narratives shared become a production of counter knowledge, allowing queer and trans, second Haitians to bend the ways we have been told to see ourselves in order to shift the ways we are seen in our Lakou's.

Through the Lakou Nou residency, I have been able to open up space for conversation and understanding while creating opportunities for queer and trans haitians to express ourselves on our terms, ultimately reclaiming space for our experiences within our cultural fabric.

“When we moved to Canarsie, my mom and I joined a church,  
a Baptist church.

I was raised Catholic, and I did all the, um, the sacraments.

I did my first communion and confirmation, all those things.  
I loved being Catholic. It was very fun to me.

*Really!? I haven't heard that before.*

It's very interesting.

I definitely had a different experience than most Catholics do for sure. But I mean, that's really just because I didn't take it very seriously.

I was not a very devout, um, Catholic at all. Um, I was a kid, you know, so.

I, I found it fun because I was with my friends constantly, going to choir practice gave me an excuse to see my friends on the weekend, you know, um, and we had a blast! Like, we were just kooky kids, just like always finding something to laugh about, and we were very ridiculous

but, um, I found it really fun just like hanging out with my friends and sort of like being in this community, so to speak and I also found the sacraments to be really fun to participate in, like,

**I liked the ritualistic sort of nature of Catholicism.**

I liked the, the rosary, like praying with the rosary.

I loved like taking the holy water and doing the sign of the cross like every time I entered for mass.

Like those little acts felt really significant.

I liked there being sort of a routine every time I like entered the space there wa-there were like a set of things that you did.

and it felt significant.

Like it felt like it meant something.

like I was a part of something that meant something

and as I learned more about the faith itself and like scripture and like how my life was to be influenced by scripture and things like that I, I didn't, I was,

I easily threw those things away. Like they didn't, I was kind of like, yeah, I don't agree with that. So, so I'm good

but that didn't necessarily mean that I couldn't engage in the routine of Catholicism, whatever that looked like for me. And I really appreciated that.”

**Nat x Zamí**

09:14 - 11:15

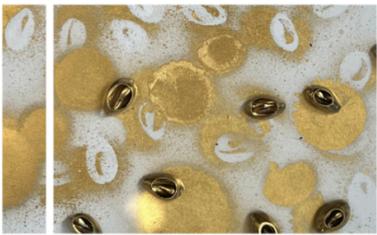
*The first time I stepped into the suspended altar I was overwhelmed with memories. They swelled in my chest, most of them hitched in my throat, but a few managed to sneak past the corner of my eye. I spun a slow 360, my gaze landing on each cowrie shell beaded, each rosary strung, and saw the work of not only my hands but the hands of everyone that loved me enough to follow through on their yes when I asked for help.*

*About a month before that moment I had begun the making in earnest: spray painting rings gold, braiding rope and wire into a halo, and stringing cowrie shells down twine. I took in the scope of the work I had imagined and quickly realized that my hands could not materialize it alone. So I flashed the Bat Signal on social media, luring my close friends into my home with a promise of food and good company in exchange for time spent together beading rosaries out of cowrie shells.*

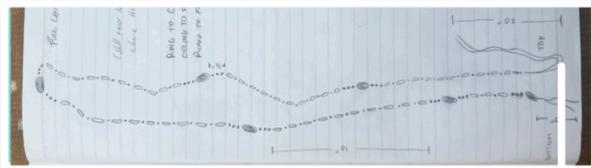
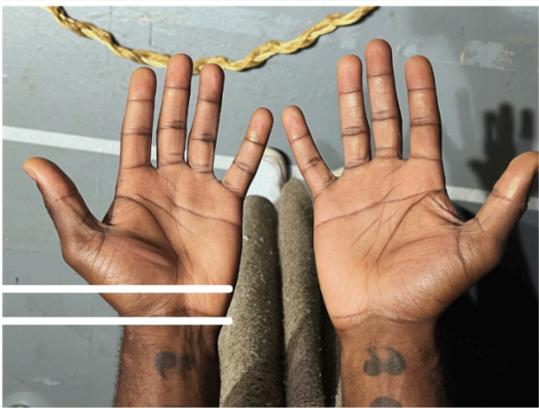
*Over multiple evenings in the early spring, they gathered around the dining table and across the living room floor. I copied and printed sketches of the rosary pattern and showed them my technique. One person taught the next, passing down the method with word and patience. I flitted between cooking and checking their work, watching each person find the beauty in their own method of threading and knotting the materials into rosaries. The apartment was full and warm with crafting and laughing and listening to music; eating, and weaving, and telling stories. As much as the outcome of this work was an oral history installation, the process of making felt like oral history practice through the rituals of gathering and exchange.*

*The late nights stretched from the dining table into the gallery as the exhibition date drew closer, and the help from friends extended with it. Nat joined me in the logistics of installing the portraits they had taken; Solaris worked with me in figuring out how to hang a halo from invisible strings. And soon enough the evenings dawned into early mornings. In the hours between today and tomorrow I leaned into my ritual of creation: arrive, layout the evenings materials, step outside for breath, pray, play music, and flow into the altar ~ adjust each strand ~ trim each of them individually ~ drip lace from the conch shells ~ fill vessels with shells, photos, beads ~ fasten flowers at the moment right before the rosary touches the ground.*

*When I stepped into the altar for the first time I felt the care of my friends quite literally surrounding me in every strand. Each knot tied by someone who loved me and said yes when I asked for help. This altar, an installation for queer and trans Haitians, was fortified by the love of queer and trans folks across the African diaspora. A tending to the spirit of Haiti as a catalyst for all of our revolutions. A reflection of the homes that have raised me on the continent, of the breadth of where my work with 2NDGENders began. A weaving of the stories and vulnerabilities of my narrators. A channel to the spirits of water and wealth who are the blueprint for our gender creativity. There's a story to tell in every angle of this encounter, in the lineage of every memory that led to its creation.*



thank you beloveds that came over this week to make cowrie rosaries 🍌



UPDATE: 36

that's over 2000 cowrie shells yall!!!



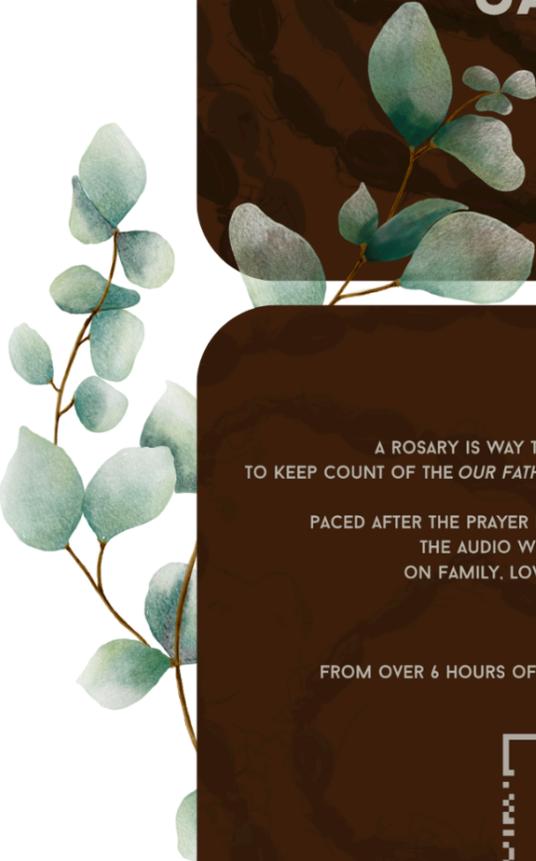
## LAKOU SEKRÈ // SAKRE Exhibition Description

LAKOU SEKRÈ // SAKRE is an altar to the queer Haitian experience in Brooklyn. The participatory, oral history installation is inspired by *el secreto abierto*, or *the open secret* ~ a phrase coined by Rosmand King to articulate the ways that queerness is the Caribbean moves as something seen but unsaid, resulting in a mandate of discretion around what is perceived as culturally transgressive approaches to love and sexuality.

The installation's hollow, circular shape mimics the experience of the open secret, while the materials it is made of are informed by oral history interviews had throughout the year, exploring themes of visibility/invisibility, religion/spirituality, home/belonging. The strung cowrie shells are interpretations of the rosaries Nat invited into the conversation while reflecting the rituals that grounded them in their Haitian church as a child. The religious reference also pays homage to Marla's background as a former Jehovah's Witness and evolving spiritual practice. The use of cowrie shells, an ancient symbol of wealth and contemporary reference to African Traditional Religions, such as Haitian Vodou, evokes the spirit of Ginen that Akèsh carries with them. In this way, the installation is an altar, not only to the Lakou Nou La narrators, but to the role of religion and spirituality as a portal for queerness in Haitian cultural fabric, and a reference to the indigeneity of gender and sexual creativity seen within Haitian traditional religion. The floating rosaries create a semi-transparent boundary between the inside and outside of the circle in order to invert the open secrets mandate of discretion by allowing those standing inside it to be seen within a queer experience. The photos pooled at the feet of the rosaries become material markers of memory, and the conch shells suspended in the center invite pairs to step in and listen with curiosity to the stories of Nat, Marla, and Akèsh in reflection of their own experiences as queer Haitians in our Lakou.

LAKOU SEKRÈ // SAKRE makes undeniable what hides in plain sight in terms of the queer diasporic Haitian experience: the laughter, the love, the invisibility, the tension, the tenderness, the care, the things that our Lakou's house but often refuse to home. The installation denies that refusal through an embodied encounter with the open secret, and the invitation to step into its embrace and listen to the life worlds alive within.





# LAKOŪ SEKRÈ SAKRE

A ROSARY IS WAY TO PRAY WITH YOUR EYES CLOSED  
TO KEEP COUNT OF THE *OUR FATHERS* AND *HAIL MARY'S* IN MEDITATION WITH GOD

PACED AFTER THE PRAYER BEADS SURROUNDING THE CONCH SHELLS  
THE AUDIO WITHIN OFFERS A MEDITATION  
ON FAMILY, LOVE, RELIGION, AND LIBERATION

FROM OVER 6 HOURS OF CONVERSATION, I OFFER YOU A PRAYER



BY ZAMI

WITH NAT, MARLA, & AKÈSH

“It felt really good to be accepted in that way and I think that it was like a little bit of testament that just like deciding to just be myself and be visible and like being open could be met with care and love and participation.

And also like trust that my parents were capable of growth and change as well, you know?

Before this I actually wrote like a, you reminded me by this little thread of a, of a journal entry that I wrote in preparation for this, which was I imagined, um, you asking me what, uh, like queer, Haitian, or parents of queer Haitians could be like to support, um, their children. And, um, the thing that came up for me was like really comes from the way that my dad has supported me um, which is like to be really, um, comfortable with the fact that your kids, like, just in general, like your kids living in a world that's different than the one that you're in or you grew up in, you know, your kids will be will have experiences that you don't know anything about.

It's really easy to be supportive when your kids are having experiences that you understand like, doing well in school.

Like that's very intelligible. Or like, um you know getting married, having babies, that's intelligible in your culture their culture as success. *Yeah.*

But there are experiences that when we encounter them, like queerness, that our parents may have never experienced before, at least not closely.

And so, you know, there's a power and intimacy that comes with like, deciding to be, in support of somebody's walk when you don't understand.

And you don't know what's next.

*That piece on participation really sticks out to me, 'cause I feel like my you know in my own experience with my family, like the care is still there the love is still there, but the participation is not there.*

Yeah!

*There's like a, 'you can do that over there in New York  
and then when you come here we're not really gonna  
talk  
or experience this part of your life with you.'  
And, and I'm like, but it's my whole life, y'all!  
Do you know what I do? for work! for fun!  
For like —this is my whole life.*

Mm-hmm.

And that like ask to compartmentalize, you know, is something that I feel like is one of the remnants of the way that colonial structures show up in our family systems

is that you can be a whole other person to the world

and a whole other person to your family,

which in some cases is all right, if that's your choice and that's your agency.

But when that isn't your choice and, and that's imposed on you as like an expectation, I feel like

that's literally what the structure of colonialism has asked of us, which is like to be different people to ourselves than to the world.

*which is why I feel again, like practicing  
Noticing  
extending  
queerness in Haitian culture is so important  
as a liberatory practice.*

Yes.”

**Akèsh x Zamí**

01:48:08 - 01:52:25

As a queer haitian, seeing this project and how it's come together to tell our stories... I am so so grateful for Zamí for bringing this to life. Everything from the photos to the circular installation the shells, gogás, all the details really brought this together. As an artist I feel so inspired as this work challenges the norm in every way and really forces you to step in. Everything was so well thought out and it's truly an installation that needs to be seen and felt. Zamí, keep going and keep sharing these stories. They deserve to be heard

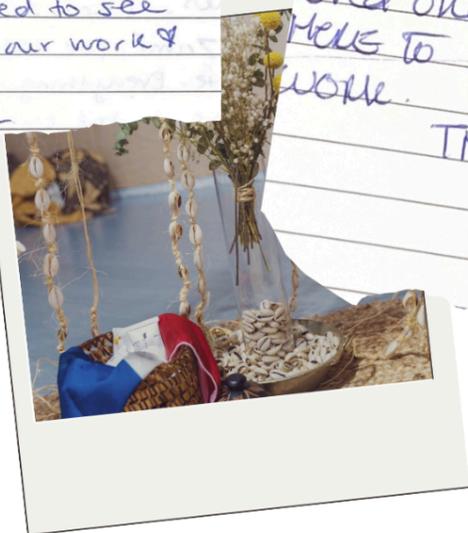


This work is embodiment. This work is alive. This work is fluid. It is an opening, a connection, a prayer. As a queer black person, as a black non-binary person, this work is... it's important. It's transcendental. I'm so thankful to be in this space, to be surrounded by other black queer people, to be sharing this beautiful piece with you and the other loved ones of you who are here to appreciate this powerful work.

Thank you!

and your perspective matters. Thank you for choosing to take up space! Excited to see more of your work &

- Marleen



*In my family we have a rule: we celebrate each other.*

*My parents flew from Florida to New York in the spring to support me and witness my installation. At the reception they were glowing with pride, taking in the incredible amount of work, listening to me talk about the secret, openly. They saw me in a community who knows me by my chosen name, who referred to me easily by my pronouns.*

*They took the time to remove their shoes, and step into the circle. Listened to the voices of my narrator's vulnerability and the prayers I whispered between their memories. They offered me flowers and the next day asked questions about the process over brunch.*

*And somehow still, in the space between all of that, the secret never fell from any of our lips.*

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