African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, it crossed, survived, and creatively adapted itself to its new environment. Caribbean culture was therefore not "pure"African, but an adaptation carried out mainly in terms of African tradition. This we can determine by looking at what anthropologists have called its culture-focus. . . . And everyone agrees that the focus of African culture in the Caribbean was religious.

--Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Roots* 192

Nothing is more real than the image considered as an image.

--René Ménil, "Evidence Concerning the Mind and Its Speed" 152

1. Ysamur Flores-Peña,--a *santero*[1] currently working on his doctoral degree--calls his computer *Eshu*, referring to the tricky Afro-Caribbean god of openings and communication. ("Repossessions," *Africa's Ogun* 292 ). Donald Cosentino uses this casual comment as part of a larger argument about the nomadic adaptibility of African Gods, the argument motivating the new and augmented edition of *Africa's Ogun* in which Cosentino's article appears. This article, along with the chapters Cosentino contributed to *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* and his recent book on Pierrot Barra, present a dazzlingly postmodern *Vodou-Santería* aesthetic.

2. As they have moved from West Africa to the Caribbean to North America and Europe, ancient spirits respond to new politics, new social organizations, new needs, new technologies. Western scholarship has analyzed these responses almost exclusively in terms of religious syncretism, specifically the complex transformations and accommodations exacted by Roman Catholicism.[2] Recently, however, researchers have developed more nuanced ideas of syncretism, ideas that position religion not only between history and philosophy but also between global capital and local economies. Representing the orishas and *lwas* through received imagery of Catholic saints may not be simply reactions to oppression. Repeating parts of the dominant material culture with "a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 86) may also be a way of appropriating [neo-]colonial power, creating a 'transitive resistance' to that power, and strengthening group identity.
3. For scholars like Cosentino, serving the dispersed African Gods today involves a new stylishness, an accumulative self-referential chic appropriate to the late capitalist consumer culture permeating even the poorest sections of the Americas. Flores's Eshu-computer affiliates with Marta Maria Perez's photographs of her own body as an Afro-Cuban shrine (Mosquera, *Santería* 252-54), with the Darth Vader figurine lurking among the powerful objects crowding a *Bizango* altar ( *Sacred Arts* 302), with Brazilian *orixá* dolls redesigned to meet tourists' expectations of authenticity (Drewal, "Signifying Saints," *Santería* 270-72), and with representations of Haitian revolutionaries as Iwa (Dayan, *Haiti* 29-39). These objects and artifacts visually exemplify postcolonial crélit[4]--the ability to reassemble and re-empower images and bodies, histories and philosophies fragmented by slavery, poverty, underdevelopment, and cultural imperialism.

4. This collection of books suggests that Caribbean and Brazilian religious studies have shifted from anthropological investigations (e.g. Hurston, Herskovitz, Métraux, Bastide) to aesthetic ones. Religious art objects no longer merely illustrate belief and ritual; they constitute their core and map their future. In one sense, this trend in scholarship mimics the earlier twentieth-century "rediscovery" of the Caribbean by European artists and intellectuals such as André Breton and Roger Leiris. But its contemporary manifestation was initiated by the work of Robert Farris Thompson, who emphasized the dynamism and cultural centrality of African and Afro-Caribbean religious art in the groundbreaking works *Flash of the Spiritand* (with Joseph Cornet) The *Four Moments of the Sun*. The spectacular museum exhibits Thompson curated and their accompanying catalogues, such as *African Art in Motion* and *Face of the Gods*, brought this art to a wide U.S. audience; at the same time, interest in "outsider art" and new-age desire for spiritually empowered tchotchkes created a mainstream consumer market for religious exota. And during the 1980s and 1990s, new waves of Cuban and Haitian immigrants, exiles, and refugees increased the visibility of Afro-Caribbean religious practices in the United States. Elsewhere, serious religio-political challenges to secular states, along with the collapse of world Communism, prompted reconsideration of how religion effects historical change.

5. Now, in the late 90s, scholars are attempting to reinterpret and recontextualize the sacred arts of the African Diaspora, both in terms of their complex local habitations and of their place in the global economies in which they circulate. Just as today's museums often supplement displays of glass-imprisoned artifacts with videotapes of artists at work and objects in use, and frequently interrogate the political implications of their own activities, these books--in varying degrees--negotiate the dangers of deracinating, commodifying, and reconlizing the art they study. Strategies for doing so tend to fall into two camps, particularly when authors are EuroAmericans: personal identification with the religio-cultural group under scrutiny, and employment of poststructural and New Historist analytical techniques. Savvy writers like Cosentino are aware that potentially deforming cultural pressures issue not just from metropolitan universities, galleries, and museums to "peripheral" sites; religious artist-practitioners throughout the Black Atlantic use and transform First-World products and technologies in acts of divine transposition that are anything but naïve.

6. Flores's god of the electronic crossroads may simply be a joking reference to Eshu's mischievous trickery, an effort to placate the orisha of deleted files and fatal errors, or a gesture toward the contemporary inclusiveness of Orisha worship. Yet connecting Eshu to communications technology makes sense both according to his own polythetic domain and to the community "history" of African-origined New World gods. A common project of the books I discuss here is to explain a mobile, creolizing theology through its ritual material--its religious art objects in particular, but also its performances, its songs, its physical embodiments. Indeed, these books suggest that theology understood as language-centered explication, a notion drawn from world religions dependent on written texts, cannot account for African and African-based religious knowledge. Mayo Okejiji has offered the term "semiotics" to name an ontology of vision shaping *Yoruba* art and philosophy (Drewal and Mason, "Ogun and Body/Mind Potentiality," *Africa's Ogun* 333); might the wandering New World orishas be seen in terms of "tele-vision," or far-ranging sight? Or more accurately, given the fact that service to the gods often includes ecstatic possession, music, food offerings, and blood sacrifice, in terms of a "tele-sensorium"?[4] And might the capricious, fluid virtual realities made possible by computer technology be analogous to the ways in which African belief systems challenge the dualistic tenets of Western metaphysics? Eshu, like his folkloric avatar Anansi the spider, can dwell in the World Wide Web. [5]

7. It can and should be argued that the Iwa-in-the-computer equation is irrelevant to the lifeworlds of most people who practice Santería, Vodou, or *Candomblé*. Yet technology in its broadest sense--knowledge of, and through, making--is absolutely central. Flores, for instance, also designs and constructs initiation garments and ceremonial altars. These activities, he believes, "are as much a sign of devotion as the ceremonies themselves" (Flores-Peña and Evanchuk 17). Similar perceptions are explored in David H. Brown's splendidly exhaustive study of two New York devotional artists, who make the elaborate beaded necklaces and embroidered panels that "dress" the orishas ("Ethnoaesthetics," *Santería* ). Using the experience-near approach that also informs much of *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* Brown locates religious and aesthetic meaning in the process of making rather than in the finished object. Calculating finances, envisioning the design, shopping for materials, sewing, and installation constitute a complex religious practice. The gift of beautiful garments instantiates the gods, strengthens the devotional life of the artist, and reforges relationships. Not only are bonds and obligations strengthened between orisha and devotee; the artist also renegotiates her connections to the dominant consumer culture and to her own community through interchanges of aesthetic evaluation and iconographic interpretation.

8. Brown's article functions as the hinge between the two parts of *Santería Aesthetics*. The first section addresses theology, aesthetics, and history: notable is Babatunde Lawal's discussion of the ethics of art in Yoruba religious culture. Although this group...
Santería Ritual Objects
left to right: bead for Orisha Babalú Ayé, a Bead for the Orisha Obatalá, an African castle, and Kins (4) in the Yoruban River

of articles includes the apparently obligatory 'profiles' of major orishas and their attributes—and revisits the site of syncretism without adding significantly new insights—it elides distinctions between Santería on the one hand and Palo Mayombe, a Cuban belief system with roots in Kongo rather than in Yoruba practice, or Abakúa, stemming from the Cross River area of West Africa, on the other.[7] The consequences of this elision show up in the book's second section, which explores "Santería Aesthetics" in the [Contemporary] Visual Arts." Julia Hertzberg's article on Wilfredo Lam, for instance, refers to "the Afro-Cuban world view" ("Rereading Lam," Santería 151, my italics) and in so doing tends to obscure the specifically Palo aspects of Lam's painting. Other artists, such as Jose Bedia and to some extent, Juan Boza, clearly employ the Palo tradition and Abakúa scriptive techniques. [8] As used in Santería Aesthetics, "Santería" is a portmanteau word that can homogenize distinct histories, practices, and philosophies. [9] Yet it can also be justified by the book's overall project, which is to define a broad artistic domain that includes overtly religious art and secular works drawing on African-based images and iconology. This the book does very well, although one wishes it had had the benefit of better photo reproduction and the budget for more color illustrations, considering that color is a primary semantic ingredient in Santería visual representation.

9. Many scholars and adherents avoid the term Santería altogether, preferring Lucumi, Orisha worship, or La Regla de Ocha. Decisions about nomenclature, however, can map out much broader ideological terrain. John Mason's contributions to Beads, Body, and Soul, for example, present New World Orisha worship, and its ritual beadwork, as transposed African tradition largely unmediated by Roman Catholic theology and iconology. Indeed, he seems to think that the Christian saints "twinned" with Yoruba deities are a disposable "ruse" (Beads 91) irrelevant to contemporary American (particularly United States) religious practice. Mason's militantly Africanist approach is rooted in the 1970s, the time when Orisha worship grew among non-Latin African Americans in part as a religious expression of Black identity (the "New World Yoruba" Community of Oyotunji Village in South Carolina being perhaps the best-known manifestation). In broader terms, Mason opts for an essentialist understanding of race and ethnic culture, thus making his position in the pandemic debates about origins, authenticity, and identity unmistakable.

10. The social utility of such a stance notwithstanding, it does present some problems in discussing sacred art. Commenting on a Cuban shrine to the Thunder and Lightning God Shango (Beads 116), for instance, Mason stresses the Yoruba-origined double axe and beaded necklace while ignoring the castle tower on which Shango stands. The castle is a specific attribute of Santa Barbara, the saint with whom Shango was paired in Cuba, because her representations include the castle tower in which she was imprisoned and the destruction by lightning of her tormenter. That a tower now "belongs" to Shango--reinforcing his rank in the Orisha pantheon and, through iconographic "back-formation," suggesting African encounters with European power (including slave trading fortresses erected along the West African Coast)--demonstrates how an oscillating syncretism can enrich theogony. Certainly, part of the creative glory of New World Africanist religion lies precisely in its ability to incorporate and transform various devotional discourses. If there is a prevailing Santería-Vodou aesthetic, as this collection of books suggests there is, it seems to lie in an accumulative, creolizing vision that encompasses the gods themselves, the migrating services in their honor, and the ritual arts beautifying and embodying them.

11. Paradoxically, working with beads is by its nature an accumulative activity, the gathering together of small mute objects into a richly voiced ensemble. As Beads, Body and Soul continually attests, Yoruban-inspired beadwork is never merely decorative, and its meaning is never confined to the intrinsic value or history of individual beads. Color, pattern, and size create a sacred language. One reads a god's lineage, history, personality and power domain in the carefully threaded and gathered swirl of beads composing his or her ceremonial necklace (e.g. the white beads interspersed with the dominant red belonging to Shango record Obatalá's effort to cool the Shango's explosive passion and to remind him of his mother, see Beads 114); one knows the particular road a devotee has embarked upon by reading the beaded elements on initiation garments, crowns, and jewelry (e.g., the substitution of black beads for the more common green beads punctuating Oshun's dominant yellow and amber colors signifies Oshun Ikole, an Oshun related to the more somber, dangerous spirits of sickness and death, see Beads 112). Further, beadwork from Nigeria demonstrates its own capacity for creolization, as the stunning sequence of beaded crowns from the city of Abeokuta demonstrates—some shaped like a bishop's miter, some like a British coronet, some like a Scottish military cap (Beads 70-77). To minimize beadwork's ability to encode secular colonial and diasporic history diminishes its hermeneutic power. And perhaps its sacred power as well: the orishas would not have survived in the New World if they could not provide explanations, comfort, and agency to devotees stranded in a brutally oppressive alien culture. Beadwork is a prescription against the anomic of exile.

12. Beads, Body, and Soul is nevertheless an indispensable book. Companion to a recent exhibition at UCLA's Fowler Museum of Cultural Arts, it is a lavish, full-color production containing over three hundred illustrations of Yoruban beadwork from Africa and the Americas. Mason wrote most of the chapters on New World Yoruban art and practice. Henry John Drewal contributed the catalogue raisonnée and the chapters on Nigerian objects as well as one on Brazilian beaded arts. This subject is supplemented by Pravina Shukla's essay "Beads of Identity in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil"—an essay that moves comfortably between consecrated and non-consecrated artifacts, emphasizing the importance of beads in affordingly signifying affiliation with blocos Afros connected with the Movimiento Negro as well as with more strictly religious Candomblé afõxés.

13. As I have suggested above, the textual commentary does not always live up to the magnificent illustrations. The authors favor expository descriptions rather than exploring questions about religious art as cultural praxis. One is left wondering about gendered divisions of labor, about the economic pressures shaping sacred beadwork, and about the religious experiences beading provides to the craftsperson, as well as about the extent of transcultural influences upon Yoruban artistic tradition. The celebratory tone...
mitigates possible critique: did the demand for beaded art materials cooperate with European trade exploitation in West Africa? Do the costs of producing sacred beadwork, and the religious observations it enhances, keep diasporic Orisha followers mired in poverty? Conversely, might the dazzling artistic displays accompanying these observations provide a critique of Western notions of wealth, its distribution, and its consumption?

14. The text moves peripatetically among subjects (and subheadings do not always announce accurately the text that follows); on occasion, captions are transposed and textual references to illustrations are incorrect. Whereas Drewal's sections contain clear and useful information about Nigerian history, culture, religion, and aesthetic philosophy, Mason's often are freighted with divine and human genealogies, color formulae, and untranslated Yoruban words (missing from the glossary) that are neither clearly keyed to illustrations nor fully contextualized in terms of artistic practice. Although the entire book uses a huge repertoire of diacritical marks, making the rather small body type hard to read, there is no introductory discussion of orthographic decisions. Marks used in transcribing an African language may not be necessary when words have become creolized, in the process having lost their original intonations, or when they have become recognizable loan words in Spanish, English, or Portuguese vocabularies.

15. Vodou studies have a long tradition of orthographic and terminological disputes centering on the fact that, until recently, Haitian Creole was an oral language (it still has no comprehensive, definitive dictionary covering the Vodou lexicon) with varying pronunciations and transcription histories. Most scholars preface their works with a note on orthography; Henrietta Cosentino's comments in Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou reflect the political-cultural complexities of orthographic choices:

In the rendering of a given word, which history is empowered, and which obscured? Whose pronunciation is privileged? What are the politics of nasalization? Of the vestigial 'h' (houngan, etc.) which so eases pronunciation for English speakers? Just as phonetic spelling veils connections with French, it can also obscure African roots, and confuse Fon with Kongo ones. . . . In the end we made many arbitrary choices. (xiv)

16. The range of issues alluded to here (and expanded in the eight-paragraph note) suggests the exemplary cultural-historical sensitivity, theoretical rigor, and reader awareness that elevates Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou from the coffee table onto the shelf housing one's most treasured and well-thumbed scholarly books. Also based on an exhibit at UCLA's Fowler museum (which has traveled to museums throughout the United States), Sacred Arts contains over 400 pages filled with beautifully laid out color and black-and-white illustrations. The book profits from its multiple contributorship, which includes many of the most prominent names in Afro-Caribbean art and religious studies (e.g. Robert Farris Thompson, Karen McCarthy Brown, Laënnec Hurbon, Sidney Mintz, and Marilyn Houlberg). Not only do these scholars bring different cultural locations and theoretical methods to the book, they address a wide spectrum of devotional art objects and practices (Marasa twin rituals, sequined flag-making, sacred ironwork, sorcerers' bottles, adaptation of Masonic imagery, drum traditions, pakêts kongo, to name a few). Not all sections, in my opinion, are equally successful. Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique's "Underground Realms of Being: Vodoun Magic," for example, can be maddeningly cryptic (not surprising, perhaps, given her subject); Laënnec Hurbon's essay on First-World 'Voodoo' stereotypes repeats the customary bashing of William Seabrook's The Magic Island (1929), ignoring its comparatively sympathetic treatment of Vodou and reducing its mannered, Art-Deco woodcuts to racist caricatures[10]; Donald Cosentino's lively but leveling excursions into transnational Vodou-pop can appear sacrilegious (see, for instance, the invocations of Mick Jagger, Bobby Brown, and Wes Craven on p. 401). Yet even when the text borders on the excessive, it complements the shimmering, creolizing vitality of the arts it celebrates.

17. One of the book's many strengths is its presentation of altars constructed for the Rada and Petwo families of lwas and for Bizango rites. [11] These altars militate against looking at sacred art objects in isolation (an effect produced equally by a coffee table art book and an old-fashioned museum exhibit); they also guard against too-easy characterizations of Afro-Caribbean religious art as a primitivist version of postmodern pastiche. The portion of the Petwo altar shown below, for example, may at first look like an inchoate jumble of objects. Yet a closer examination reveals a kinetic harmony based both on religious theatics and on aesthetic arrangement, as well as a visual semantic density grounded in techniques of juxtaposition and amplification. The altar's reduplicative composition resembles Creole syntax; its use of Roman Catholic elements, translating from sound to sight the sliding linguistics of the Creole continuum (Lalla and D'Costa 89), argues for a syncretism used to reveal rather than to disguise the polyvalent powers of the Iwa.
18. Formally, this altar reiterates the Petwo signature color red; syncopates shiny with matte, encrusted with layered (tied and wrapped) surfaces; and breaks the bottles' aggressive vertical thrusts with the paktè kongos' softer curves. These visual rhythms are echoed by the repetition of lwa. There are two bottles for Ogou Badagris (as St. George) and one for Ogou Feray (as St. Jacques), two representations of St. Expedite that indicate magical work in progress (an inverted picture of the saint hangs beneath the altar), and a bust of Ezili Dantò mirrored in a chromolithograph embedded on a sequined bottle, magnified by the cloth Ezili Dantò nestled against it. Materialized metonymy makes seemingly incongruous elements legible. The ceramic kewpie doll may represent a malevolent baka controlled by vengeful Petwo lwa; yet its whiteness connects it to the white candles studding the altar, which both “heat up” Petwo power and control it through their cooling, calming color properties. The photograph of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide suggests his affiliation with Petwo lwa as national, even millennial warriors, as well as with “working” spirits like St. Expedite. If just reading a photo of the altar forces the viewer to recompose Vodou theology, one can imagine the impact of such an altar “in action”—that is, used as a devotional and participatory focus, nourished by offerings, manipulated according to the needs of those who tend it and seek the power it incorporates.

19. Another of the book's strengths is its emphasis on individual artists of the sacred. Randall Morris's article on Georges Liautaud for instance, situates the late ironworker/oungan in his earthly home of Croix-des-Bouquets, searching for scrap metal, receiving great respect from his neighbors, being protected by his Baptist daughter; at the same time, Morris sketches Liautaud's spiritual biography . . . his collaborations with Ogou Feray, his devotion to Lasirèn and Bawon Samdi, his desire to explain the mystery of possession through visual representation. An interchapter on Hector Hippolyte, perhaps the Haitian painter best known in the international art market, re-places his work within Vodou visual traditions. Two articles (and an interchapter) explore sequined arts: descriptions of family workshops, sewing techniques, and design response to trade embargos—as well as descriptions of master flagmakers like Antoine Oleyant, Yves Telemak, and Eviland Lalanne—allow the sparkling flags, garments, and libation bottles to speak of the communal work and individual talent that produced them.

20. A prominent craftsman in Sacred Arts is Pierrot Barra. Donald Cosantino seems to have opened the gates for Barra to enter an artworld larger than his workshop in Port-au-Prince, as Cosantino’s illustrated monograph on the artist and his wife, Vodou Things, illustrates. Barra defamiliarizes Vodou representation in astonishing, even disturbing ways; his esoteric assemblages update and destabilize the process of visual syncretism. For instance, his votive board for Bawon Samdi’s close associate Bawon Kriminel, which both “heat up” Petwo power and control it through their warming, calming color properties. The photograph of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide suggests his affiliation with Petwo lwa as national, even millennial warriors, as well as with “working” spirits like St. Expedite. If just reading a photo of the altar forces the viewer to recompose Vodou theology, one can imagine the impact of such an altar “in action”—that is, used as a devotional and participatory focus, nourished by offerings, manipulated according to the needs of those who tend it and seek the power it incorporates.

21. The strangeness of Barra’s art also makes one question convenient characterizations of popular “visual piety” as opposed to elite aesthetic judgments. According to David Morgan (27-39), folk response to religious imagery values predictability and transparency—that is, a religious artwork clearly reveals a comforting, recognizable spiritual truth. In contrast, elite valuations are based on a Kantian notion of disinterestedness, on intellectual contemplation of the idea of representation itself. But Cosentino reports that Haitian ‘folk’ confronting Barra’s assemblages for the first time
were delighted and intrigued, recognizing the represented lwa but also reveling in the innovative, surprising modes of representation. This difference suggests that Western traditions of writing about sacred art depend on monotheistic assumptions (God is eternal and unchanging, as is his revealed word) as well as on Platonic notions of mimesis; a polytheistic religion unmediated by Classical Idealism utilizes different assumptions about the nature of the divine and thus gives rise to different responses to divine representations on both folk and elite levels. Unusual representation like Barra's appeals to common taste because it reveals the gods' transformative, creative powers. Similarly, an aesthetic philosophy derived from a polytheism in which the spirit and earthly worlds can meet in the human body must place no non-Kantian "interestedness" as a crucial criterion of value.

22. Vodou Things may not add enough to the Barra material in Sacred Arts to justify its price, but it does bring to the forefront problematic issues involved in being "discovered"--and in doing the discovering. Cosentino's musings about whether his enthusiasm for Barra's work may contribute to a diminution of the artist's creative vision as he copes with the "strain" of increased demand (Vodou Things 36) reinscribe distance, however self-reflexive, between researcher and research subject. Such distance contracts when researchers foreground their own entrance into a previously alien cultural world. Anna Wexler's study of a Haitian flagmaker in Sacred Possessions exhibits this tendency, which has a long history in Caribbean religious studies [14]. Describing her initial meetings with the artist-oungan Clotaire Bazile, she writes: "I also wanted to put this distance between us, to step back from evidence of Clotaire's power as a healer; I was reluctant to find out more about the concrete purposes of the objects he had made because I was afraid to fear the man before me more" ("Artistry" 84). Confronting this fear involved exercising racist stereotypes of Vodou and self-doubts about the identity politics involved in her research choices.

23. Although, like Barra, Bazile receives artistic inspiration from lwa who visit him in his dreams, he also sees his flags as articulations of an aesthetic tradition with clear social implications. He calls his work "classical" (73), connecting design elements such as geometric borders and scattered-field sequencing with flags made fifty years ago; 'keeping the line straight' is the technical standard he strives to uphold in his craft because it pleases the gods and characterizes the ideal relationships between the human and the divine. Both criteria of value--continuity of ritual expression, and proper orientation--regulate the ceremonies over which he presides as oungan, during which he does not permit modernizations of singing and dancing. Bazile's artistic work, therefore, shows how the material culture of Vodou can embody a philosophy of art, a history of practice, and an ethical theology.

24. Flags also demonstrate a theory of syncretism. For instance, a flag by another "classical" religious artist, Eviland Lalanne, uses Ezili's traditional vèvè as its organizing pattern. The heart connotes Western notions of romantic love as well as the Sacred Heart of Jesus; the "M" surmounting the heart stems from Masonic imagery but is now read as a sign for "Maitresse," Ezili's honorific (colonial?) title, although to some it speaks of Ezili's connection with the Virgin Mary. The border design quotes French regimental flags and Dahomean court flags, the Haitian flag in the upper right-hand corner glossing both contributory flag traditions. The flag testifies to the impossibility of fixed origins, of a single historical narrative, of an exclusive genealogy. It translates Ezili's legendary promiscuity into a visual dismantling of the very notion of originary Genesis. As Edouard Glissant has explained, creolized people "do not 'need' the idea of Genesis, because they do not need the myth of pure lineage" (141). Or, as Lalanne and Bazile's flags attest, such a myth is both historically ridiculous and theologically incorrect.

25. With the exceptions of Wexler's piece, a photo essay on Santería ritual in contemporary Cuba, and an article about the kombi-as-woman in First-world film and Caribbean writing, Sacred Possessions does not focus on religious representation per se. But other articles in this pleasantly eclectic book suggest ways to understand the cultural complex of art, religion, and history. Eugenio Matibag's "Ife and Interpretation," for instance, posits that Santería divination practice constitutes a full, transcultural epistemology that structures many Afro-Hispanic discourses (e.g. literature, medicine, prophecy, therapeutics, historical narrative). Jose Piedra, reexamining the signifying monkey through Afro-Cuban religious beliefs and literary works, argues that the Yoruba religio-aesthetic concept of Ashe (divine power) can be expressed as "applied reason" (131), thus connecting logics of signification with material practice. A group of articles dealing with Caribbean literary works also articulate the importance of religion as a way of knowing the world. As Ivette Romero-Cesario writes of Miriam Warner-Vieyra's Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit, the heroine views the religious artifacts in a quimboiseur's hut as "a tangle of signs she is incapable of deciphering [that] represents a history that she has only just begun to learn about" ("Sorcerers" 257).

26. In general, Sacred Possessions explores systems of reciprocity grounded in religious hermeneutics, systems that, according to Joan Dayan, redefine the very notion of reciprocity in ambiguous, perhaps contingent ways ("Vodoun" 24-25). Aspects of Vodou such as the plurality of lwa, the créolité of their representations, the materiality of divine desire, the generosity of human service, the tripartite nature of human identity, and the phenomenon of possession stand in contrast to a monotheistic "absolute relation" of the I to the eternal Thou that, although mutual, remains grounded in vastly unequal polarity between individual humans and divine selfhood (e.g. Buber 75-80). [15]

27. In Dayan's Haiti, History, and the Gods Vodou reciprocity takes on national and international explanatory power. Haitian belief systems, Dayan claims, are less a product of African survivals than of the colonial past and the history that past keeps generating. Not only is Dessalines, the fierce revolutionary leader-become-lwa, a case in point; so also is Ezili, whose charades of love reenact
and mock the deformations of plantocratic sexuality. This provocative, important book views Vodou as a philosophy that thinks through history and ritually reenacts it, refiguring the violent excesses of chattel slavery in powerful scenes of domination and seduction. Dayan is particularly attentive to how Haiti and Vodou shaped Western historical constructions (e.g. of France, in Part I, and of the United States, in Part III; Part II focuses on ‘fictional fictions’ of Haiti, most notably the novels of Marie Chauvet, which historicize the Haitian people through attending to the presence of the gods).

28. *Haiti, History, and the Gods* is not expressly concerned with sacred art, although it has a number of illustrations, but it is crucially concerned with representation--representation as the intellectually disciplined actualization of the divine, as the deliberate reconstruction of shattered historical identity.

To conceive the image of the god in oneself is to be possessed. It is a deed of the most serious conception. Thought realizes itself in the imaging of the gods. . . . [To] be seized by the god, is thus to destroy the cunning imperial dichotomy of master and slave, or colonizer and colonized (72).

Mobilizing Hegel against Hegelianism, Dayan asserts that the subaltern do indeed speak. Rites and representations, folk practice and elite art form a "broken but obstinate communion between the living and the dead" (263).

29. Suzanne Preston Bleier’s *African Vodou* provides a complementary perspective. Focusing on the magical amulets and statues known as bocio in the Fon language, Bleier locates their aggressive power in historical rage against slavery. Bleier reminds us that the Fon were notorious slave raiders before, during, and after the Western slave-trading period; thus neighboring peoples, and vulnerable Fon groups as well, lived for centuries under the threat of capture and captivity, terror and pain. Formal properties of bocio--tying and binding, additive elements like bone, amputated limbs, inversion of outside and inside--represent, cathect, and displace these fears. Since Fon lands were the original home of many Haitian slaves, the ‘psychological iconography’ of bocio was transposed into Vodou representation. One can make obvious connections with Haitian traditions, such as the chains and skulls adorning Bawon Samdi’s cross, the bound and inverted objects used in secret society rites (see, for instance, the illustrations on pages 220 and 318 in *Sacred Arts*), and the appellation je-wouj (red eyes) used to identify the wrathful aspects of many lwa.

30. Bleier devotes only a few pages to Vodou in the New World, so a detailed examination of her book is outside the scope of this review. Yet the methodological flexibility that combines Dahomean and Western theoretics with extensive field work and historical research, the book’s attention to the psychodynamics and class divisions of artistic practice, and its splendid and plentiful illustrations recommend it to any student of Afro-Caribbean religious art. Like *Africa’s Ogun*, *African Vodou* bears a title that unfortunately suggests a universalized "African" religious tradition, but both books are carefully attentive to historical and geographical particulars. From these particulars, they argue for a composite West African sacred aesthetic that forms a "cultural system"[16] fluid and coherent enough to spread throughout the Black Atlantic.

31. That Ogun has been at the vanguard of this system is not surprising. As *Africa’s Ogun* explains, the deity is shared by major West African cultural groups; presiding over the metallurgy necessary to hunting, warfare, and technology, he is the engineer of culture--indeed, as Sandra Barnes and Paula Ben-Amos claim, he is the orisha of civilization ("Ogun" 55-57). Yet civilization, African and European, is redefined by violence and colonial degradation. Thus contemporary Cuban-American ‘shrines’ to Ogu hold together miniature tools and weapons with the chains of slavery, suggesting his role as re-forger of a brutally contested culture; in Haiti, according to Leslie Desmangles, Ogu is a figure of the suffering nation herself. Throughout the Americas, then, Ogu in his various aspects represents furious cultural resistance. Embodying a countertheology to the complicitous forms of colonial Christianity imposed on displaced Africans, he provides an answer to the question implicit in Schopenhauer’s critique of "enlightened" Judeo-Christian pantheism:

> It must obviously be a very ill-advised God who knew no better amusement than to transform himself into a world such as this: into a hungry world, in order there to endure misery, suffering, and death, without measure or end, in the shape of countless millions of living, but anxious and tormented beings, who only maintain themselves for a while by mutually devouring each other: e.g., in the shape of six million negro slaves, who daily on the average receive sixty million blows of the whip on their bare bodies. . . . (192)

Perhaps such a god is well-advised after all, if multiple transformations involve creating a host of anthropomorphic spirits intimately connected to human pain as well as to human aspiration. Vodou is a practical religion, concerned with what Alejo Carpentier called ‘The Kingdom of This World.’ [17] It does not let its gods off the hook. Responsible for evil as well as for good, the lwa exhibit a radical ambiguity that accounts for, yet resists, the terrors of history.

32. Western literary and cultural criticism always risks appropriating the subversive, resistant agency of colonized and post-colonial
Americas has already performed such interrogations. But—as Emmanuel Jean's odd detail of the open and the closed books suggests—the religious art of the Afro-embodiments. interrogating Western logocentrism, an avenue marked not by words but by divinely transposed images and Marx's general recognition of religion's causative ambiguity ('fundamentalism') among the 'folk.' shaped these fields, often leading to dismissing or ignoring religious agency (with the huge exception of Islamic and gender specific local conditions. Investigating imbrications of the religious and the political is a logical way for religion to join class, race, worship's political implications, however, would be welcome. None of the books reviewed here pays much attention to Santería (or impossible, as Israel, Islam in Afghanistan, or Christianity in Northern Ireland. the painting warns against romanticizing non-Western religions and their arts. They are as implicated in realpolitik as is Judaism in India, and Christianity in Northern Ireland.

Vodou's status as a national religion--clandestine or semi-official, à la Duvalier's cynical noirisme--makes depoliticization impossible, as Sacred Arts, Sacred Possessions, and Haiti, History, and the Gods attest. More exploration of Diasporan Orisha worship's political implications, however, would be welcome. None of the books reviewed here pays much attention to Santería (or Palo, Abakúa, and Candomblé) as political praxis or as changing organizational structures—e.g., cabildos and afoxés—reacting to specific local conditions. Investigating imbrications of the religious and the political is a logical way for religion to join class, race, and gender as crucial analytical categories in postcolonial and cultural studies. Marxian assumptions have helped shaped these fields, often leading to dismissing or ignoring religious agency (with the huge exception of Islamic 'fundamentalism') among the 'folk.' Reconsidering material cultures of the sacred not only can sharpen Marx's general recognition of religion's causative ambiguity but also can open another avenue for interrogating Western logocentrism, an avenue marked not by words but by divinely transposed images and embodiments.

But—as Emmanuel Jean's odd detail of the open and the closed books suggests—the religious art of the Afro-Americas has already performed such interrogations.

Notes

1. As I will briefly discuss later, orthography and terminology proper to African Diaspora religions are contested terrain. Because there is little scholarly agreement, particularly in the case of English-language studies of Santería, I've used the most common spellings, names, and words in hopes of maximizing reader recognition. Vodou studies seem to have settled on a standard of modified Haitian Creole, which I've attempted to follow. Alternate spellings are given in the glossary. In this article, the first main-text appearance of a word, name, or term specific to these religions is hyperlinked to the glossary; if a word occurs only in the notes, it will be hyperlinked from there. Words occurring solely in illustration captions are not hyperlinked but are included in the glossary. Also, with the exception of the book covers, all illustrated objects are from a private collection, and the images cannot be used without permission. Back

2. The debate on African/European religious syncretism includes those who see it as fusion, as forced accommodation, as hiding, as deception, and as a 'signifying' practice. Since the process of syncretism unfolds differently throughout the African Diaspora, depending on localized histories, attention might be better spent on analyzing it on a 'case-by-case' basis. Joseph Murphy's Working the Spirit, however, gives a thoughtful taxonomy for identifying common features of syncretic religious practices in the African Diaspora.

For a careful overview of this debate, see Philip Scher's excellent "Unveiling the Orisha," one of the new articles in the second edition of Africa's Ogun. Scher is particularly attuned to the political implications of syncretism. Another accessible discussion occurs in Leslie Desmangles' The Faces of the Gods (7-11); restating Roger Bastide's position, Desmangles prefers the term "symbiosis" (which he defines as juxtaposition without blending) to syncretism. Following Bastide, he divides this concept into "symbiosis by ecology" (environmental adaptation) and "symbiosis by identity" (mythic and symbolic similarity). Desmangles' insistence on the mosaic (rather than, for instance, the "callalou") nature of religious symbiosis allies him with those who search for an "authentic" African past (see, for instance, many of the articles collected in Holloway).

As Scher notes, Afro-Caribbean religions have not limited their incorporation of foreign religious imagery and ritual to Christianity. For a detailed examination of such multifaceted ecumenicism, see James Houk's Spirit, Blood, and Drums; Houk examines how Trinidadian Orisha worship has incorporated Hindu elements and "Kabbalah," which appears to be a variety of Kardecian spiritualism. Back

3. "La Créalité est l'agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel, des éléments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques, et levantins, que le joug de l'Histoire a réunis sur le même sol. Pendant trois siècles, les îles et les pans de continent que ce phénomène a affectés, ont été de véritables forgeries d'une humanité nouvelle, celles où langues, races, religions, coutumes, manières d'être de toutes les faces du monde, se trouvèrent brutalement déterritorialisées, transplantées dans un
4. Issued in conjunction with the Sacred Arts exhibit is Rhythms of Rapture: Sacred Music of Haitian Vodou (Smithsonian/Folkways 40464). Many recordings of Afro-Cuban music are available, such as Sacred Rhythms of Cuban Santería (Smithsonian/Folkways 40419) and Santería-Cubana: Tambores Bata de Abaoso (FE-105 1987).

It is more difficult for a non-practitioner to access the other sensory fields involved in New World Africanist ritual, particularly because most Western researchers downplay blood sacrifice or ignore it altogether. A central feature in worship, healing, and thaumaturgic ceremonies, blood sacrifice also bathes religious objects in agglutinative second skins, altering their appearance and making manifest their power. I recommend Henning Christoph and Hans Obraländer’s somewhat sensationalist Voodoo as an antidote to the anti-specticism so often encountered in more scholarly writing. Composed of large-format color photographs Christoph took in Benin accompanied by Obraländer’s brief textual narrative, Voodoo does not treat American versions of African religion and thus falls outside the scope of this review, but many of the practices illustrated have clear corollaries in the Afro-Americas. The back cover, reproduced here, gives a good indication of the type of images found in the book: it shows fresh goat’s blood being added to the bocio figures’ organic patina.

5. Quite literally: many internet sites provide useful introductions to Afro-Caribbean religion, among which are Orisha Net, Religious Tolerance Santería Site, Puerta de entrada. Inquice Web: Kongo-Derived Religions, Ijo Orunmila, Africans Online [Palo], Ile Ase Dana Dana [Candomblé], Vodoun Culture, Voodoo Server, Voodoo Information Pages, Vodou by Mambo Racine Sans Bout, Temple of Yehwe (Peristyle de Mariani), Caribbean Religion Center, and Caribbean Religions Project.

6. This idea holds continuing fascination for science fiction writers, however; see, for example, William Gibson’s Count Zero.

7. Scholars of Haitian Vodou are more careful to distinguish between its traditions. Although there is general consensus on what characterizes the cool, helpful Rada family of lwa from their fiery, militant Petwo cousins, researchers do not agree about which lwa belong where (a problem exacerabated by the hundreds of lwa—sometimes separate spirits, sometimes aspects of a major lwa—and by vestiges of many apparently tribal-specific religious rituals such as Ibo, Kongo, and Boumba, now largely assimilated into the Rada and Petwo ‘supernations’). Reading Western scholars’ attempts at scientific taxonomy resembles falling into the “Chinese” animal classification system posited by Borges, in which categories include “belonging to the Emperor,” “mermaids,” “fantastic beasts,” “those drawn with a fine brush,” “suckling pigs,” and “those that look like specks from a distance.”

Neither do scholars agree on the lwa’s origins. Suzanne Preston Bleier’s extensive research in Dahomey (represented in Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodoub by the chapter “Vodun: West African Roots of Vodu” and set forth much more fully in her book African Vodou) emphasizes the Fon roots of the Rada spirits; other writers show their Yoruba ancestry. Robert Farris Thompson has long argued for the Kongo basis of Petwo practices and iconology (see “The Kingdom Beneath the Sea,” Sacred Arts, and his earlier Flash of the Spirit, whereas Joan Dayan sees Petwo Gods as specifically Haitian, “born” in the decades surrounding the Haitian Revolution. Maya Dener gives Petwo gods an Amerindian genealogy, conclusions reached through an inventive etymology reminiscent of Milo Rigaud’s linguistic fancies linking Vodou terminology to traditions ranging from Gnosticism to Theosophy.

8. These traditions are certainly mentioned in Santería Aesthetics but their unique religio-aesthetic features are not explained. Lam is an extremely problematic painter in this respect. Although his grandmother was a Santería priestess, Lam himself was not an initiate—and his interest in African-based religious imagery began in Europe, with the influence of Picasso and his circle. Evidently, the great Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera, a close friend of Lam’s, “named” many of his paintings, including the ones with specifically Palo titles (e.g. “Mayombe, God of the Crossroads”). Lam himself evidenced an almost touristic delight in religious exoticism; visiting Haiti with European companions, he noted that Vodou demonstrated “a non-intellectual beauty, skin-deep” (qtd. Fletcher 172).

9. According to recent contributors’ notes in African Arts, Judith Bettleheim will soon publish a book centered on Palo representational practice, a book that promises to help make discussion and understanding of “Santería Aesthetics” more precise.

10. Seabrook’s notorious book has certainly been instrumental in disseminating a primitivist, exotic picture of Vodou, but one only needs to read other “popular” treatments of Vodou from the early 20th century (e.g. Stephen Bonsal’s The American Mediterranean, John H. Craig’s Cannibal Cousins, or Edna Taff’s A Puritan in Voodoo-Land) to see the quantum leap in transcultural sensibility evidenced in Seabrook’s observations. For example, Seabrook writes that “Voodoo in Haiti is a profound and vitally alive religion . . . primarily and basically a form of worship . . . its magic, its sorcery [being] only a
11. In general, little has been written about the aesthetics of Haitian altars. *Sacred Arts* does discuss distinctive formal elements of Bizango representations (e.g., bound objects, physical inversion) and includes an interview with Mama Lola, a Haitian-born *manbo* based in Brooklyn, about her home altars; the Spring, 1996 issue of *African Arts* (a complement to the *Sacred Arts* exhibit; the journal is also based at UCLA's Fowler Museum) contains some short articles on altars as well. But possession-performance (the term is Karen McCarthy Brown's), dance, and song (e.g. Courlander) have dominated scholarship about Haitian ritual; Robert Farris Thompson's wonderful book on African and Afro-Caribbean altars, *Face of the Gods*, does not address Haitian altars extensively, concentrating its New World investigations instead on Santería, Candomblé, and Ndjuka/Saamaka (Suriname) altars. One reason may be that in Vodou, the altar is not the primary meetingplace for gods and devotees; in *ounfò*, altars occupy space separate from the central *peristil*, where the Iwa descend the poto mitan and enter human bodies.  

12. Michel Laguerre has characterized secret societies as protectors of peasant communities tasked with meting out social sanctions to those whose greed and selfishness threaten others. Their clandestine nature stems not from their own criminality but from their roots in Revolutionary period Maroon bands, groups of ex-slaves who waged guerrilla warfare against the French and who attempted to protect Vodou society. See also Willy Apollon's "Vodou: The Crisis of Possession" in this issue of *Jouvert*.  

13. One thinks not only of the Monroe Doctrine in general but also of the long U. S. military occupation in the early part of the century (and the much more recent armed intervention) in particular. Other aspects include the North American tourist industry (until it dried up after the Duvaliers' fall), the use of cheap Haitian labor for outsourced manufacturing, the Duvalierist-backed use of Haiti as a drug trans-shipment point, the trade in Haitian blood, and the dumping of surplus food (at the expense of Haitian market prices). See Amy Wilentz for these issues and other aspects of what Haitians call "the American plan"; see Paul Farmer for the blood trade and the 'Haitianization' of AIDS; see Hans Schmidt for the U. S. occupation.  


15. Vodou belief divides human being into the *kò kadav* (physical body), the *gwo bon anj* (ego-soul, a double of the physical body), and the *ti bon anj* (spiritual soul with superego functions, connected to the Iwa). "Possession" (in Haiti and elsewhere, explained by the metaphor of the god "mounting" a human "horse") entails a "crisis" in which a god occupies a human body in order to achieve various purposes (giving advice, dancing, extracting promises, resolving disputes); gods themselves resemble multiple personalities, different aspects expressing different emotions and fulfilling different functions. Thus the notion of the sovereign Cartesian subject, whether expressed in philosophical, theological, or psychoanalytic terms, is not sufficient to describe personal identity in Haiti. See also Apollon.  

16. The term is Clifford Geertz's. His chapter on "Art as a Cultural System" posits an epistemology based on the cultivation of emotion rather than reason, which reminds one of Alan Watts's call for revaluing religion from an aesthetic as well as from an intellectual standpoint (158).  

17. Carpentier's historical/magical realist novel, dealing with the Haitian Revolution and the reign of Henri Christophe, ends with a beautiful description of Vodou counter-eschatology (similar to that of the African-based religions in Carpentier's native Cuba): "In the Kingdom of Heaven there is no grandeur to be won, inasmuch as there all is an established hierarchy, the unknown is revealed, existence is infinite, there is no possibility of sacrifice, all is rest and joy. For this reason, bowed down by suffering and duties, beautiful in the midst of his misery, capable of loving in the midst of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatness, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of This World" (185).  

18. For instance, Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin warn that "[w]hen reading for textual resistance becomes entirely dependent on theoretical disentanglement of contradiction or ambivalence . . . then the actual locus of subversive agency is necessarily wrenched away from colonized or post-colonial subjects and restuated within the textual work of the institutionalized western literary critic" ("Introduction", xviii).  

19. In Jean's painting, the raft has been launched by a community of serviteurs who are themselves in various stages of transformation into chickens. The only people retaining human physiognomy are the man in the chair (middle left), who is growing a beak and sports chicken feet, and the man imprisoned in the transparent cube connected to Agwe's raft, who seems dead. Distinctly non-Rada elements include Bawon Samdi's black cross next to the seated man, who therefore must be a *bòkò* rather than a ougan, the black candles on Agwe's boat, and the enslaved--zombified?--figures in the upper right.  

20. Frantz Fanon is typical in this regard. Despite the widespread admiration for Revolutionary Haiti throughout the French Antilles, and widespread knowledge of Vodou's part in the Revolution, Fanon scorned what he saw as disabling--and ultimately disposable--Afro-Caribbean superstition. "After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantasms, at long last, the native, gun in hand . . . does not hesitate to pour scorn upon the zombies of his ancestors, the horses with two heads, the dead who rise again" (58).
Glossary

Abakuá: Afro-Cuban religious tradition stemming from the Cross River (Cameroons, Nigeria) region and from *Kongo practices. Also known as Näiguismo. Non-adherents associate this tradition with malevolent magic, thievery, and renegade malfeasance. Back

Afoxé: Brazilian religious association, often associated with a particular *orixa or cultural movement. Back

Agwe/Agoue: *Iwa of the sea, often portrayed as a ship's captain, to whom offerings are sent adrift on a small raft; Agwe also takes charge of dead people's final journey. In Haiti he is syncretized with St. Ulrich and is often represented by a boat. Back

Ashe/Aché/Ase/Axe: *Yoruban word for divine power, life force. Back

Babaluaye: *Yoruban god of pestilential sickness, syncretized in Cuba with St. Lazarus; his colors are yellow, purple, and black, and his common attributes are crutches and dogs.

Baka: in Haiti, a dangerous spirit, often represented as a small animal or a dwarf and marked with red eyes, that can do the work of sorcery. Back

Bawon Samdi/Baron Samedi/Baron: head of the Gede/Guédé family of spirits, associated with death and sexuality. This dual domain may explain why he is also in charge of the transmission of religious tradition. Syncretized with St. Gerard, his attributes include old-fashioned undertaker's clothes, sunglasses, cigars, and black crosses. He dwells in cemeteries and is evoked in secret society ceremonies; his close associates include Bawon Kriminal, Bawon Cimitiye, and Bawon LaKwa. Francois Duvalier deliberately adopted the attributes of Bawon Samdi in order to present himself as a living (?) icon of *Vodou power. Back

Bizango: *Vodou 'secret society' associated with the most dangerous *Petwo *Iwa; many believe that secret societies like Bizango use sorcery (e.g. *zombification) to achieve social justice in the manner of West African secret societies (e.g. the Poro society, or the Efik Leopard society). The name may derive from the Senegambian Bissango peoples. Back

Bloco Afro: Brazilian cultural organization promoting ethnic identity and solidarity. Back

Bocio: *Fon carvings and amulets used for protective and magical purposes, often deliberately "ugly" and threatening. Back

Bôkô/Bokor: "Vodou practitioner specializing in supernatural matters; magician or sorcerer said to work with the "left hand" (for destructive purposes), as opposed to the "oungan, who works with the "right hand." Back

Cabildo: Afro-Cuban religious-cultural association, often connected with a specific African ethnicity. Cabildos were originally organized by the Roman Catholic Church in hopes of Christianizing enslaved and freed Blacks; ironically, cabildos were instrumental in keeping *Orisha worship alive. Back

Candomblé: common name for Afro-Brazilian religious practice; the term often encompasses other African-based religions such as Macumba, Umbanda, and Quimbanda. Back

Danbala/Danballe/Damballah: *Fon spirit of creation, represented in Haiti by a snake and syncretized with St. Patrick and with Moses. His colors are white and green, and in his *Rada manifestation is often paired with his consort Ayida Wèdo. He may take the form of the *Kongo spirit Simbi when he is invoked in *Petwo rituals. Back

Dechoukaj: Creole for "uprooting," name given for the period of reprisals, following the Duvaliers' downfall, against those considered their henchmen. Many of the targets were *oungans and *bôkôs, as the Duvalier regimes recruited members of the *Tonton Makout from the ranks of Vodou leaders. The dechoukaj bears unfortunate similarities to the many "anti-superstition campaigns" launched by the government and the Roman Catholic Church in the 19th and 20th centuries, during which *Vodou practitioners were persecuted and ritual implements were destroyed. Back

Dessalines: Creole *Iwa allied with *Ogou and other martial-political spirits, from Jean-Jacques Dessalines (c. 1758-1806), revolutionary leader and first President of Haiti, characterized both as a martyred liberator and a bloodthirsty butcher. Back

Eshu/Esu/Exu/Eleggùa/Elegbara: *Yoruban trickster-messenger god; spirit of the crossroads, syncretized in Cuba with St. Nino de Atocha, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Michael the Archangel, St. Benito de Palermo; his colors are red and black. In Haiti, his name is Legba/Papa Legba. In his *Rada form, he can be syncretized with St. Peter; in his *Petro form as Legba Kafou (carrefour=crossroads), he can be syncretized with St. Gerard. In both traditions, he is the first spirit to be invoked in any religious rite. Back

Ezili/Ezilì/Eruzlië: *Vodou name for the goddess of love and motherhood. In her *Rada manifestation as Ezili Freda she is a beautiful mixed-race coquette, syncretized with the jewel-bedecked Mater Dolorosa and often using pink and light blues; in her *Petwo manifestation as Ezili Dantò she is a dark, scarified figure, fierce protectorless of women and children, syncretized with the Mater Salvatoris (the Black Madonna) and often using red and blue. Her maritime aspect is *Lasièrèn. See also *Oshun. Back

Fon: cultural/language group residing in Dahomey (now Benin), Togo, and Western Nigeria, point of origin for many Haitian slaves; Fon
religious practices and terminology are an important part of Haitian *vodou (see also *Kongo).

**Gwo bon anj:** in Haiti, the part of the soul that mirrors or shadows the physical body (Creole for "big good angel").

**Ifá:** refers both to the Yoruba deity Orunmila (Cuban Orula/Orunla) and to his system of divination. Ifá divination consists of throwing palm nuts in a divining tray or casting a divining chain; both methods reveal a series of up to 256 patterns, each of which has its own narratives, sacrifices, and *Orisha domains.

**Kò kadav:** in Haiti, the physical body (Creole for 'lifeless body').

**Kongo:** cultural/language group residing in West Central Africa (e.g. Gabon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola), point of origin for many Haitian slaves (and, in the 19th-century, Cuban slaves); Kongo religious practices are an important part of Haitian *vodou (see also *Fon) and Cuban *Palo Mayombe. In Haiti, the word Kongo is often used to describe a particularly dangerous family of *Iwa (now often assumed into the *Petwo family).

**Lasirèn/La Sirene:** the mermaid *Iwa usually associated with the *Ezili family; in her *Petwo aspect she lures people to a watery death, and in her *Rada aspect she can bring luck. Her consort is *Agwe. She is often syncretized with St. Martha.

**Lucumi:** ancient name for "Yoruba peoples and/or "Yoruba word meaning "my friend," used as self-descriptor by Afro-Cubans who worship the *Orishas.

**Lwa/loa:** *Vodou term for spirits, gods, mysteries. Culturally ironic homophone for French "loi."

**Manbo/Mambo/Mamalwa/Mama Loa:** *Vodou priestess. See also *oungan.

**Marasa/Marassa:** *Vodou name for the divine twins; their common attributes are conjoined offering pots. As the Marasa twa, they signify abundance. They are syncretized most frequently with Sts. Cosmos and Damien but also with St. Clare, St. Nicholas of Bari, and the martyred Egyptian children "Faith, Hope, and Charity." The Haitian version of the Ibeji *orisha, the marasa are affiliated with the cult of twins found throughout West Africa.

**Movimento Negro:** Black consciousness movement in Brazil.

**Noirisme:** François Duvalier's sloganeering ideology, a cynical politicization of Négritude; to gain popular support, Duvalier promoted Black (as opposed to mulatto, or metropolitan) culture, including Vodou, as the authentic expression of Haitian identity.

**Obatala:** *Orisha of creative wisdom, syncretized in Cuba with La Virgen de las Mercedes; his color is white and his most common attribute is the fly whisk.

**Obeah:** Anglophone Caribbean term for African-based religious practices. In Jamaica, Obeah is often considered a form of dangerous sorcery, in contrast with the African-based practices gathered under the term Myal, which are connected with healing.

**Ogun/Oggún/Ogu/Ogu:** "Yoruba and *Fon god of war and metal. In Cuba he is syncretized with St. Peter and St. Santiago (St. James the Elder); his colors are green and black, and his common attributes are iron implements. In Haiti, he is most frequently syncretized with St. Jacques Majeur (St. James the Elder), but some of his manifestations are connected with other warrior saints like St. Michael and St. George; his most common color is red, signifying his explosive power.

**Orisha/Osaya/Oritcha/Orixá:** *Yoruban word for divine being, used to identify the gods worshipped in the Afro-Cuban religious tradition popularly known as *Santeria, in the Afro-Brazilian religious tradition popularly known as *Candomblé, and elsewhere in the Afro-Americas.

**Ounfò/hounfo/hounfort/hunfort:** *Vodou temple/sancutary/compound.

**Oungan/houngan/hungan/gangan:** *Vodou priest (male). See also *oungan.

**Palo Mayombe/Palo Monte:** Afro-Cuban religious tradition drawing from *Kongo sources, often associated with sorcery.

**Pakèt Kongo:** magical and/or protective bundle, often vaguely anthropomorphic in shape, a Haitian creolization of *Kongo and *Fon magical objects. When identified as a wanga, it is connected with malevolent sorcery.

**Petwo/Petro:** family of *Iwa regarded as hot, fiery, and potentially dangerous (c/w *Rada). Some scholars and *vodou practitioners connect these spirits with *Kongo religious traditions, whereas others see them primarily as Haitian responses to the traumas of slavery, revolution, and the country's difficult postcolonial history. Many *Iwa have both *Petwo and *Rada manifestations (e.g. *Ezuli, *Ogun).
**Peristil/peristyle:** central ritual area of a *ounfò.

**Poto mitan/poteau mitan:** post representing the road traveled by the *lwa as they move between the spiritual and earthly realms, the ritual axis of a *ounfò.

**Quimboiseur:** sorcerer (see *bòkò), in Guadeloupe's Afro-Caribbean religion called Quimbois.

**Rada:** family of *lwa regarded as cool and beneficent (c/w *Petwo). Rada spirits trace their origins to *Fon and related West African traditions, although many Rada *lwa have *Petwo manifestations as well (e.g. *Ezuli, *Ogun).

**Regla de Ocha:** The rule or order of Ocha (Hispanic creolization of *Orisha), another name for *Santería or *Lucumi.

**Saint Expedite:** *Vodou* *lwa who seems to have no African or national counterpart; neither is he now included in the Roman Catholic calendar. In Haiti he is seen as a powerful sorcerer, working under the auspices of *Bawon Samdi. Saint Expedite can lead "the dead" on expeditions to harm or kill human victims.

**Santería:** "the way of the saints," common name of Afro-Cuban religion that uses iconology pertaining to Roman Catholic saints to identify *Yoruban gods in a New World setting. See also *Lucumi, *Orisha worship, and *Regla de Ocha.

**Santero/a:** initiate of *Santería empowered to perform various ritual functions.

**Shango/Sango/Chango/Xango:** *Yoruban god of thunder and lightning (originally connected with the royal house of Oyo), syncretized in Cuba with Santa Barbara; his colors are red and white, and his most recognizable attribute is the double-sided axe. In Haiti, he often operates in concert with Ogou and can be syncretized with the young St. John the Baptist. "Shango" is the popular name for *Orisha worship in Trinidad.

**Ti bon anj:** in Haiti, the part of the soul linked with the conscience and with the *lwa (Creole for "little good angel").

**Tonton Makout:** Popular name for François Duvalier's personal secret police, who often terrorized Haitian citizens. The name means "Uncle Knapsack" and refers ambiguously to the kindly lwa of agriculture, Kouzin Zaka (who always carries a knapsack), and the folktale bogeyman who will steal children by stuffing them in his bag. See also *dechoukaj.

**Vèvè:** *Vodou* ground drawings enscripting and invoking the *lwa, traced in cornmeal, ash, or--in *Petwo rites--gunpowder. In Cuban and Brazilian traditions, such ritual signatures are called *pontos riscados or firmas.

**Vodou/Vodun/Vodoun/Voodoo:** common term for African-based religious practices in Haiti. In the *Fon language, Vodu means "divine spirit."

**Yoruba:** name for a large culture/language group of peoples living primarily in what is now Nigeria; this is the group from which a great many 19th-century Cuban-bound and Brazil-bound slaves came. Yoruban gods and practices are the foundation of *Santería.

**Zombi/zonbi/zombie:** in Haiti, the *zonbi astral* is a part of the soul that is stolen and made to work. The infamous physical zonbi is a reanimated corpse, disinterred by a *bòkò who has captured the dead person's soul. Scientifically, zombification may be an effect of a poison and antidote sequence; metaphorically, zombification represents a return to slavery and thus the worst possible fate; socially, zombification is an extreme form of social justice, believed to be delivered by secret societies such as *Bizango; transculturally, zombification has 'stood for' the occult savagery with which the West has identified Haiti.

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**Works Cited**


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